

ABRAHAM'S SOUL



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CHAPTER 1



*A*braham Miller sat in his favorite brown leather chair, sipping his coffee and staring out the window of his suburban Indianapolis home. As he glanced around the room at the mess, he sighed. He knew the time had come for him to seriously consider hiring a housekeeper. He'd been putting it off, dreading the day another woman would set foot in Lynnette's house. Her home had been her castle, and she had always insisted on keeping the house and cooking the meals herself, even though Abe could have well afforded household help.

It had been almost a year since her untimely death. At thirty-two, Lynnette Miller had been a beautiful, vibrant pillar of the community. Abe had met her a few years before, and it had been an instant attraction for both of them. They'd married six months into the relationship and were looking forward to starting a small family together. Ever the gracious hostess at dinner parties, a compliment to his company at social events, the perfect wife and life partner, Lynnette enjoyed volunteer work and keeping a spotless house. She was a gourmet cook, and his shirts never saw a dry cleaning establishment once she had taken over.

What a shock it had been when she had seen her gynecologist

for a routine checkup and to discuss a possible pregnancy to learn that she had been stricken with a rare form of cancer and only had months to live. Abe had been absolutely devastated. He could have lived without the family they'd discussed, but to lose his precious Lynnette was not something he'd wanted to think about so early into the union. He loved her completely and had waited until his thirties to take a wife, searching for the perfect woman to share his life and his business with. He'd found all that and more in Lynnette Snow. Now, at thirty-six, he was alone again, a widower with a large suburban house to maintain. He had attempted to keep things picked up, ate his meals out, and once again took his clothes to the dry cleaners, but he knew he couldn't continue to do it all and run his multi-million dollar software business. His partner, Louis, had given him a lot of slack over the past several months, but it was time to step back up to the plate. Lynnette would be appalled if she could see the house right now.

Sighing deeply as he stood up and walked to the kitchen, he rinsed his cup and placed it into the dishwasher before heading out the door to the garage. It was time to make the drive into the office. Located in downtown Indy, it was a thirty-minute commute for Abe, and he used the time to go over in his head the presentation for the meeting he and Louis would be attending that afternoon.

Abe was not a stranger to hard work. He'd grown up in the small community of Cannelburg, in southern Indiana and had worked long hours on the family farm. He attended the local school with the rest of his siblings and when he was in high school, he began working at the local feed mill to earn extra cash. The day he graduated high school was also the day he turned eighteen. He had packed a bag, taken every bit of money he'd been able to save from his job and walked away. He never looked back. Abe wanted more out of life and he knew if he stayed there, he would marry a local girl, be given acreage on the family farm and would continue in the life of his ancestors. His family was not happy with his decision, and Abe had never returned to the small town. He'd worked his

way through college, where he met Louis Johnson. He and Louis formed a strong friendship and upon graduation, had opened a small software business together, with the help of Louis's father. The business had thrived and was now a successful company, doing business all over the world. Louis's father's faith in the two young men had paid off well. When Abe and Lynnette married, none of his family was present. He hadn't seen or talked to them in years, except for phone conversations here and there with his older brother, so he hadn't felt it necessary to include them in his new life. He had moved on. He and Lynnette attended a local non-denominational Christian church, and Abraham had all but forgotten his roots in the small area in the southern part of the state.

If his wife had ever wondered about her new in-laws, she never asked. She had accepted his explanation that he had left home when he graduated high school and had never looked back. She assumed there had been a reason for his departure and never pressured him for more information than he was willing to give her.

He took his exit and drove the short distance to the parking garage, where he parked his car every day. Once inside the building, he boarded the elevator and got out at the sixth floor, the way he had done nearly every day for the past several years. He spoke to the reception staff, grabbed another cup of coffee, took the mail from his secretary and made his way to Louis's office.

"Good morning," he said as he walked in after knocking lightly on his partner's door.

"Come on in, just practicing my putting. Golf season is almost here, you know," Louis said as he held a putter in his hand.

"You look just like one of the executives on television. You know that, don't you?" Abraham asked as he took a seat in the chair directly across from Louis's desk.

"You'd do well to get back out there on the course, my friend. You can't stay holed up in that house of yours all summer long." Louis put down the putter and took a seat behind his desk.

"If I don't find a housekeeper, I'll be in that house cleaning from sunup to sundown."

"Really, Abe, you can be so dull. Why on earth would you, of all people, need to clean your own house?"

"I just haven't been able to turn it over to...a woman...you know, that house was Lynnette's pride and joy."

"I know, buddy, but you have to rejoin the land of the living. You may never find another woman like Lynnette, but I don't think it's meant for you to live your life alone," his friend replied kindly.

"Does Ana know of anyone? A cleaning woman, cook, I mean," Abe replied, making sure to clarify his meaning.

"I will ask her. There is a young Mennonite gal who's been filling in for our regular housekeeper for a few months. Jenny will be coming back to work and I assume the girl will return to her family down south. Jenny had recommended her. Name is Sarah Elizabeth Graber, good worker and great cook, I might add."

Abe flinched at the name. Should he hire a Mennonite girl? After all these years away, would it be right? "Do you think she would be interested in a full-time position, here in the city?" he asked, not letting his apprehension show. Louis knew of his past, but Abe had always conveniently left out the part that his family was of the Mennonite faith. Abe hadn't embraced it and saw no reason to share that information with anyone. It was in his past and that was where it needed to stay.

"Let me talk to Ana tonight. She absolutely loves the girl, so I'm sure I can get her to say something to her."

"She's very young?" he asked.

"I'd say in her early twenties," Louis replied. "Now, enough about that, are you ready for the meeting this afternoon?"

I believe I am. Let's go over my presentation one last time. I worked on it again last night. These new clients would be a feather in our cap, and I don't want to blow it."

"You're right about that. If we can secure this group and main-

tain a good working relationship with them, it will mean work for Mijo Software for many years to come."

The two men pored over Abe's work for the next several hours. When it was time to break for lunch, they decided to get out of the office and walk to the diner down the street before returning to the office for their two o'clock meeting with the men from the large medical group. The group had hospitals and clinics all over the country and they were extremely interested in purchasing their new software from Louis and Abe. The group was expanding and had decided it was high time to upgrade their current system.

After placing their order, Louis looked at his partner across the table and asked in a serious tone, "How are you really, my friend? I know it's been tough losing Lynnette the way you did, so early into your marriage."

Abe looked down before answering. Finally he took a sip of iced tea and said, "I won't sugar coat it and say it's been getting any easier as time goes on. I miss her laughter, her beautiful face and all that she was. I can never hope to find anyone like her again. I waited a long time for someone like her, and I can't understand how God could take her from me. I guess I've kind of lost all faith about now."

"I hate to hear that. You know that God never closes a door without opening a window. There will be another love for you, my friend. You have to make peace with her passing and with God before that can happen, though."

"I don't know that I'll ever be able to do that, Louis."

"Have you been back to church since her memorial?" his friend asked quietly.

"No, I haven't, and I'm not planning to go back."

"Too many memories?" his partner asked.

"That and the fact I might just go off on God if I were to set foot in the place."

"Pray for peace, my friend."

"I know you and Ana are very religious folks, your whole family

is," Abe began. "I grew up in a family that was very devout. When I left home, I turned my back on that life. I was content to attend church with Lynnette, but now, it has no meaning for me."

"You're a good man, Abraham Miller. You need to find your way back to God in order to move on with your life. Ah, here's our lunch. I won't say anything else on the matter, for now."

The two men ate in silence, each one lost in his own thoughts. When they returned to the office, they had just enough time to freshen up and make sure the conference room was ready for their guests.

Layla had done a wonderful job getting things ready. She had worked for the two men since they had opened their doors and was very good at taking care of all the little details for them. She had a tray of cookies, fresh coffee brewing, and bottles of ice-cold water on the table.

"Oh, hi, guys," she said when they walked in. She'd known them since college, so there were no formalities between the three of them.

"Great job as always, Layla," Louis said with a smile.

"I see you've even placed a copy of my proposal at each of our guest's spots. Thank you so much," Abe added.

"I'll get out of your way, and my fingers and toes will be crossed that you land this account. Buzz me at my desk if you need anything," the woman said as she exited the room.

"What would we do without her?" Louis asked when she'd gone.

"I hope we never have to find out. I was afraid when she decided to get married, she would leave."

"She knows a good thing, I don't think she'll be leaving Mijo anytime soon," Louis replied.

Layla was the office manager and did a good job of taking care of the things the men had no time for. It had been a sound decision to include her from the ground up. She had proven many times over that she could be trusted and was a capable part of the team.

In return, when the business began to take off, Layla had been

amply rewarded with a hefty salary and benefits package in return for the many hours she had put in to help the business get off the ground.

Soon their prospective clients arrived and it was up to Abe to sell them on their product. After much discussion, many questions, and a demonstration of the software, the deal was sealed. The men signed the contracts and in just a few weeks, Harland Medical would begin implementing the new software into their many facilities across the country.

"One more thing," one of the men from Harland said.

"Yes, what's that?" Louis asked as he stood up.

"I want one of you to come to Minneapolis to help with the implementation. That's where our home office is, as you know. I realize you probably have employees who do that for you, but I want personal, hands-on attention. I am very impressed with the two of you."

Louis and Abe exchanged glances. Finally, Abe spoke, "You know, I'm kind of at loose ends these days, with nothing holding me here. Let me take care of some personal issues, and I'll give you a call to let you know when I can fly out."

"Excellent," the man replied. "I'll be waiting to hear from you."

After handshakes were exchanged and the men from Harland had gone, Louis looked at his friend. "You really want to do that?" he asked.

"Why not, it'll give me a change of scenery," Abe replied with a shrug. "Now, I'll need to speak to your lovely wife about that housekeeper."

"I'll talk with Ana and possibly Sarah Elizabeth this evening."

"I've got several things to wrap up before I can go. If they want me in two weeks, I'd better get busy. Can you handle everything on this end by yourself?" Abe asked.

"If I can't, I'll get Layla to help. She knows this company inside and out. I just hope our other clients don't get wind of this and expect this kind of attention."

"I don't think we have to be concerned about that. Harland is a far bigger company than any of our other clients. We'll just leave it at that."

Layla entered the room. "So, I see the meeting was a success. The group from Harland stopped at my office to thank me for my help, and they seemed very impressed, especially with Abe."

"Yes, Abe here has agreed to fly out to Minneapolis in two weeks to oversee the initial implementation of the Mijo software. That means you'll be helping me with things on this end, Layla," Louis told her.

"When you land an account like Harland, you have to expect to make some concessions. I'll do whatever I can to make this transaction go smoothly."

"Right on again, how does she do it?" Louis asked. "She's right; we should do everything we can for Harland."

"That little college gal from Muncie has come a long way," Abe said with a chuckle.

"The two of you are just as crazy as you were back then. Now, get out of here so I can clear up this mess," Layla replied.