

THE  
Treasure  
Hunt

REBECCA MARTIN



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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

## THE TREASURE HUNT

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## A Word from the Author

Although the characters are imaginary, this story is based on actual happenings. A number of the Amish families who moved to North Dakota in 1894 really did move again. In 1910 they moved to Colorado. The drought, fire, hailstorm, Mother's earache, Father's injured hand, Ben's journey to Ordway to find work, and his wife's trip to follow him actually happened as well. The gold rush, of course, is a historical fact, and Pikes Peak, that lofty mountain, is there for all to see.

## Threshing Day

Three o'clock in the morning was certainly a strange time to be awake. In all her ten years of life, Lydia Yoder couldn't recall ever being awake at that time, but she couldn't help it because everybody else in the house was up too!

Nineteen-year-old Jake had started it. Lydia heard him scurrying past her bedroom door to the window at the end of the hall. Soon she heard more hurried footsteps as twelve-year-old Joe followed his brother to the window.

Before Lydia managed to get up, she heard the strange noises that had awakened her brothers. *Clang! Boom!* They were coming from the barnyard. *That must be the metal door of the steam tractor opening and closing as Hal adds more wood to the fire*, Lydia thought.

Seventeen-year-old Lisbet poked Lydia in the ribs. "Let's go to the window and watch!" The girls pattered across the

chilly wooden floor and stared out toward the barn. There in the moonlight stood the steam tractor looking like a fire-breathing monster as clouds of smoke billowed from its stack. Every now and then, its “mouth” opened, and they could see orange flames as Hal, the fireman, fed it more wood.

“Poor fireman,” whispered Lisbet. “He has to be up so early to make sure there’s lots of steam when they want to start threshing. I wonder what time it is, anyway.”

Just then they heard the deep-throated chiming of the clock in the kitchen below them. *Bong... bong... bong.* “Three o’clock!” Lydia whispered. She needn’t have bothered to be quiet, though, because everyone seemed to be awake. Sounds were coming from the bedroom next door. Apparently even twenty-three-year-old Polly was excited enough about the threshing rig to leave her bed and watch the fireman.

Lisbet said knowingly, “Polly likes threshing time.”

“You mean because Sam Peachy comes west to help with the threshing?” Lydia asked.

“Naturally.”

Sam and Polly had become friends last year at threshing time. During the winter and most of the summer, Sam lived back East in Indiana, but come September he, along with dozens of other young men from the East, arrived to help with the threshing in North Dakota.

“I wonder when Polly and Sam will get married,”

said Lisbet. “Wouldn’t that be exciting to have another wedding?”

Lydia nodded. Ben, their oldest brother, got married four years ago, and Lydia could still remember the wedding day, even though she’d been only six years old. Weddings were big events!

“We should get back to bed and sleep some more,” said Lisbet with a shiver. “We have to rise early, you know.”

“But not this early.” Lydia giggled as she climbed back under the warm blanket.

“Probably at five thirty or whenever the whistle blows,” Lisbet replied sleepily.

With so much excitement going on, Lydia found it hard to get back to sleep. Last night at dusk, Mr. Tim Forbes had come chugging in on the steam tractor, sitting high up on the seat like a king on his throne. Behind the tractor rumbled the mammoth separator, its long pipes swaying like a dragon’s tail. What deep ruts the great steel lugs of the tractor’s wheels made as it maneuvered into position! Precisely between two high stacks of sheaves, the separator was parked and ready to start threshing at the break of dawn.

Suddenly the sound of the steam whistle ripped through the darkness like an unearthly scream. Lydia flipped back the blanket and hopped out of bed in one motion. *I wonder if I slept since three o’clock. Maybe. It does seem like a long time ago since I stood shivering at the window to watch the fireman stoke the engine.*

Rustling into her dress and dashing down the stairs, Lydia managed to beat all her brothers and sisters to the kitchen. By the smells wafting from the big cookstove, Lydia guessed that Mother had been up for quite a while already. Bacon sizzled, coffee bubbled, and the eggs and potatoes were frying in the pan.

“How many plates do we need this morning?” Lydia asked Mother on her way to the pine cabinet Father had made to hold the china.

“Well, there’s us. That’s seven. And I think another seven men slept in the barn.”

In the flickering light from the kerosene lamp, Lydia counted out fourteen plates. Carefully she arranged them around the long pine table that Father had also made. Lydia thought it was a very nice table, but Polly always said it wasn’t as nice as the table they’d left behind in Indiana when they moved to North Dakota fifteen years ago. “That table,” Polly would say, “was as smooth as a mirror.”

Polly, Lisbet, and Lydia all helped Mother carry the food to the table. Outside on the porch they could hear the men washing up for breakfast. Lydia hung back shyly as the strangers came in and took their places at the table. Mr. Forbes, Hal the fireman, and the five young Amish men from Indiana sat down. None of them was Sam Peachy. Lydia knew that because she remembered that Sam had red hair like the color of a glowing chestnut, which was very different from Polly’s red hair.

Steam rose from the plates of food and nearly hid the shadowy faces arranged around the table. It seemed strange to be eating breakfast so early that a lamp was needed. Usually one of the girls would milk the cow and the boys would feed the cattle before breakfast, but not today. The moment the sun came up, the threshers wanted to be done eating and ready to work.

Hal couldn't stay at the table very long. He wolfed down his food and then dashed out again to tend the fire. Nobody took time to talk. Lydia could almost feel the tension in the air. The men were like coiled springs ready to leap into action.

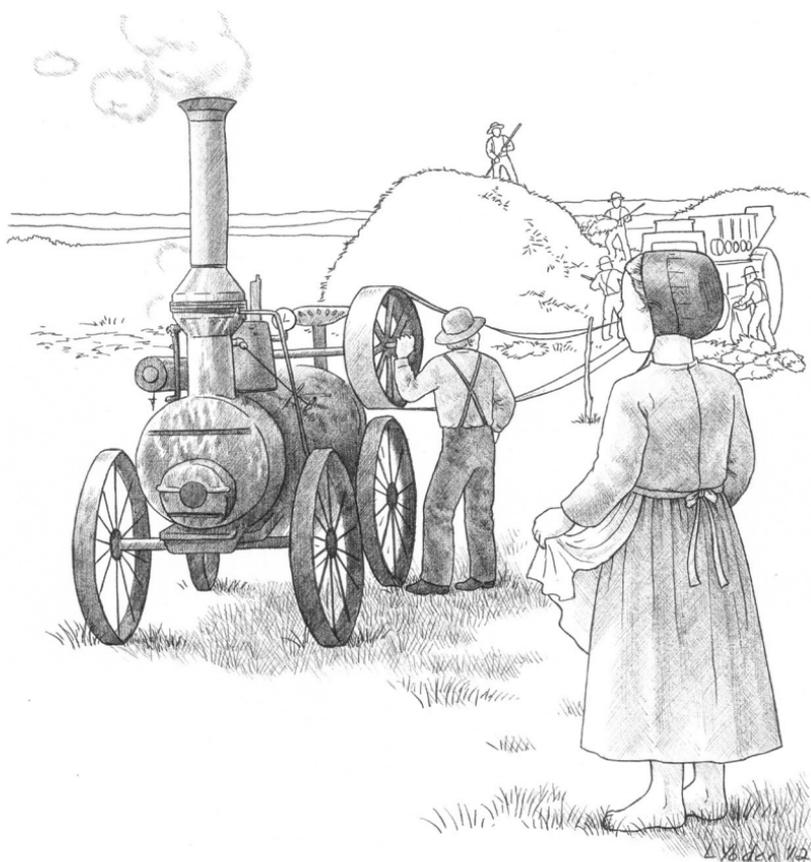
After breakfast Lydia simply could not stay inside to wash dishes. The sun was coming up, and she wanted to be outside watching the excitement! Mother let her go, providing she would help with the housework later on.

More young men arrived from the neighboring farms where they had spent the night, and soon everyone was in position and ready to start.

"Awww-RIGHT!" yelled Mr. Forbes. That was the signal to begin. The great long belt from the engine to the separator began to turn slowly and then faster and faster. The steam engine puffed harder. The white canvas of the carriers revolved, gathering speed until the separator's *chug-chug* settled into a steady roar.

From high up on the stacks, men threw sheaves of wheat down onto the platform. Here the band cutters worked

frantically to remove the twine from the sheaves and pass them on to the feeders. How fast the feeders worked! Their arms flashed back and forth as their forks fed a steady stream of grain onto the carriers. Finally the fearful looking teeth of the separator gobbled up the sheaves.



*Lydia watched the men feed the hungry machine.*

Soon the yellow straw blew from the pipes at the back. Some men stayed busy stacking the straw. When the stack was big enough, it was dragged away by a large rake-like apparatus, which was pulled by horses. At the side of the machine, still more men flew into action, bagging the stream of golden grain into the white cotton sacks Father had brought from the elevator. Two men were kept busy carrying the filled bags into the granary of the barn, where they would be stored until Father had time to haul them to the elevator.

At midmorning neighbors began arriving with their teams and wagons. Those two tall stacks of sheaves would soon be whittled down to nothing. As far as the eye could see, out in the fields stood thousands of stocks waiting to be brought in and threshed. How swiftly the men worked at piling the wagons high with sheaves! One after the other, the loaded wagons rolled in from the fields. The threshing machine must not be allowed a single idle minute, except at dinnertime when the men stopped to eat.

Mother and the girls had lots of work to do to prepare dinner. Lydia peeled potatoes until she thought her fingers would drop off. Great pots of potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables were set to boil on top of the stove. They had boiled the ham yesterday, and now they sliced it into thick slabs and piled it onto platters. For dessert they dished up bowls and bowls of stewed dried fruit. In the oven were pans of sweet rice pudding chock full of raisins—a special

treat to be served with thick clotted cream from the cool cellar.

At noon Hal blew the whistle. "Is everything ready?" Polly asked nervously, scurrying back and forth from the stove to the long plank tables in the yard. Basins of water stood on the lawn for the men to use to wash up. They threw their hats in a heap and began splashing their faces with the cool water. Most of them were black with dust!

When everyone was seated, silence descended on the group. They bowed their heads to ask the blessing. How quiet it seemed after all the noise of the forenoon! Then spoons clattered on the plates, and the food began to disappear. The women kept busy refilling platters and bowls.

"Will there be any rice pudding left for us?" Lydia whispered to Lisbet as she watched the threshers heap their plates.

"Oh, surely a little bit," Lisbet assured her, "but I'd forgotten how much threshers can eat."

"The men work hard," Polly reminded her sisters.

And so did the women. No sooner had they finished clearing away the noon meal than it was time to start preparing supper!

## Pikes Peak Stories

After two days it was over. All of Father's many acres of wheat had been threshed, and Mr. Forbes moved on with his big steam tractor and separator—on to the next farm and the next and the next. North Dakota in 1909 was full of wheat farms.

Of course the workers from back East did not go home as soon as the Yoders' wheat was done. They stayed to help on all the other farms as well. Sam Peachy would be in the area for at least two months.

He came to the Yoders' house for supper that first Saturday evening. Lydia was so fascinated by his gleaming mop of chestnut hair that she almost forgot to eat. Lydia wished she had hair like that—or like Jake's or Polly's. It was funny, though, because Polly wished she had straw-blond hair like Lydia's.

Sam Peachy was a restless, talkative young man. He asked lots of questions and told lots of stories. On this Saturday evening, he was full of stories about a trip he had recently taken. “Before I came up here this summer, I traveled to Pikes Peak Country,” he began as soon as his bowl was filled with soup.

“Pikes Peak Country? Where’s that?” Jake asked.

Sam grinned at him. “Ever heard of Colorado?”

Before Jake could reply, Joe piped up. “That’s where they had a gold rush. We learned about it at school. Somebody found gold in a stream, and thousands of people rushed to Colorado to get rich.”

Father gave him an amused smile. “When was that?” The whole family knew how much Joe liked history. People kept telling him that he should teach school someday. He was so good at storing knowledge in his head.

“The gold rush started in the 1850s,” Joe replied promptly.

“And did the gold seekers all get rich?” Father asked.

Joe shrugged. “Some did, but when the gold ran out, they left. Then not too long ago in 1892, I think, there was another gold strike in Colorado.”

As if he had heard enough stories about the gold rush, Sam said, “The Amish who are interested in Colorado are thinking of a different kind of gold—wheat. You can buy land there for about eighteen dollars an acre. With prices like that, it should be possible to make money at wheat farming.”

Father's eyebrows rose. "Do you mean to say there are Amish people buying land in Colorado?"

"Yes. Don't you get the *Sugarcreek Budget*?" Sam asked. "You don't? Well, you could read about it in there. In August a land agency placed a big ad telling about the new Amish settlement in eastern Colorado. You can get a free train ticket to go see the area—providing you buy land." Sam's green eyes glowed as he talked.

Lydia glanced at Polly. The expression on her face was hard to figure out. *Is she excited about Colorado too? If she marries Sam, and if he moves to Colorado...* Suddenly a burning question filled Lydia's mind. She didn't often speak when visitors were present, but she simply couldn't wait. She had to know. She blurted out, "How far away is Colorado?"

Everyone looked at Lydia as if surprised that a little girl had spoken up. Lydia felt her face grow hot and wished she could disappear under the table.

"Colorado," Sam answered slowly, "is about two days and two nights by train from here. I know because I came directly from there to here."

"So it must be three or four hundred miles," Father said after briefly calculating the distance. "That's about the same as from here to Indiana."

Lydia let out a small sigh, small enough so nobody would hear. *Three hundred miles! That sounds like a long,*

*long way. Is Polly going to live three hundred miles from home when she gets married?*

Sam, of course, had no idea what Lydia was thinking. He was saying, "And remember, your train ticket is free. I've paid for mine, but if I buy land, I'll get the money refunded."

Jake sat up straight, his eyes shining. "Are you going to buy land?"

But before Sam could answer, Joe asked just as eagerly, "Is it near the place where they found gold?"

Chuckling, Father held up his hands. "Whoa there. Hold your horses."

Sam laughed too. "Have you heard the name of the town where the Amish are buying? It's Wild Horse."

Now everyone had to laugh, including Polly. Father had more questions about Colorado and asked, "Has this land ever been tilled?"

Sam shook his head. "It's virgin prairie. Tall grass as far as the eye can see."

"That sounds just like North Dakota when we came here," Father commented with a glance at Mother.

"So the settlers in Colorado can build sod houses," Mother said. "Sod houses are nice. They're cool in summer."

Lydia knew what a sod house was like. The Kanagys still had one that they used for storage, and Polly often told stories about the early days in North Dakota when nearly everyone lived in houses made of sod.

Sam cleaned up the last bit of his apple pie. “If I bought land in Colorado, I would go down there and build me a wooden house. No need to live like savages.”

“What do the Amish intend to plant?” Father asked.

Sam pushed back his chair. “Mostly wheat, I think. The topsoil is deep—three or four feet—and it’s sandy.”

“Hmmm, sounds like sugar beet country. Sugar beets thrive in sandy soil.”

“Then Ben should move to Colorado!” said Joe. “He’s always trying to raise sugar beets, but every fall the frost comes too early. In Colorado he’d have a longer growing season.”

“And he could afford to buy land too,” Jake said. “Eighteen dollars an acre doesn’t sound like much. Up here land is sky-high at eighty dollars an acre.”

Ben and his wife and children lived in a small house on the corner of the Yoder property. Lydia knew that Ben wanted to buy a farm of his own, but he couldn’t afford it. And besides, there were no farms for sale nearby.

Joe turned to Father and said, “We should tell Ben about Colorado, shouldn’t we?”

Father gave him a slow, wise smile. “Let’s not get too excited, son.”

It was Mother who finally asked, “Why do you call this area Pikes Peak Country?”

Sam’s eyes gleamed some more. “Where the Amish are

buying is less than a hundred miles from the Rocky Mountains. There's one especially high peak called Pikes Peak. It's over fourteen thousand feet high, and you can see it clearly from sixty miles away! I saw this little rhyme in the *Sugarcreek Budget*:

Now if a home you wish to seek,  
Come where you can view old Pikes Peak.  
The land where plains and mountains meet,  
And our farmers grow macaroni wheat.

Lydia was glad when the meal was over. All this talk about strange, faraway lands gave her an uneasy feeling. She did not like to think of people moving hundreds of miles away.



Soon it was Sunday, the best day of the week. The Yoder family walked a mile and a half down the road to church, which was being held at John Swartzentruber's home. As far back as Lydia could remember, there had been two church districts, the north district and the south district with ministers for each one. But Polly still remembered the days when there were no ministers at all here in North Dakota and the only time they had church was when a visiting minister came from the East.

As the Yoder family neared the Swartzentruber farm, Lydia quickened her steps. There in front of the house were Mary and Susanna Swartzentruber, welcoming everyone with big smiles.

*What would I ever do without Mary and Susanna?* Lydia asked herself as she ran to greet them. *It would be terrible to move away from such good friends.*

Imagine Lydia's surprise when even the minister, in his sermon that morning, spoke of a little girl who moved far away from home! Preacher Josiah told the story of the little slave girl who helped save the great Captain Naaman's life. "There are not many stories in the Bible that tell about a little girl," said Josiah, "but in this story, we read about a 'little maid.' Can you imagine how terrible it must have been for this little Hebrew maid when the Syrian soldiers broke into her home in Israel and carried her away as a captive to a strange land?

"But this little maid did not lose her faith in God. Oh no. There was no doubt in her mind that God could heal Naaman's leprosy through His prophet Elisha. You see, this little maid was the slave of Naaman's wife, and that is why she knew about the great captain's illness. So one day she summoned her courage and told her mistress about the prophet."

Josiah went on to tell the rest of the story about how the prophet commanded Naaman to wash in the Jordan River and how the captain felt it was beneath his dignity to do so.

But Lydia's mind stayed with that little maid of Israel who was torn from her parents and made a slave in a strange land. How wonderful that because of this little girl's faith a great captain was healed of leprosy!