

*Room
to Grow*

LISA HEATON

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and themes are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Published by: Faith Forward Press
Mt. Juliet, TN

Copyright © 2019 Lisa Heaton

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-7320068-7-4

Scripture is taken from the NEW KING JAMES VERSION
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Dedication

To Ms. Vivian.

Thank you for all the years of encouraging me to follow all these crazy dreams of mine. You see in me what I often don't see in myself.

And to Christopher,

one of the sweetest young men I have had the privilege to know. You are a true blessing and hold such a special place in my heart.

Other Titles by Lisa

Unmending the Veil

On 4/19

Beyond 4/20

Deceiver

A Thousand Blessings

NONFICTION:

You. Are. Loved. Live the Love Song

Part One



Chapter One

Distractions clamored all around her, precisely what Sophie had needed when she left the house. She sat in a coffee shop surrounded by a crowd of twenty-somethings, a view that took her back to when her own life was ahead of her rather than half-gone-by. In her khakis and a button-down, she stood out among girls with short boots, leggings, and long, loose-fitting shirts.

The coffee was good, maybe even worth the hit to her self-esteem when reminded of who she would never be again. At almost thirty-nine, Sophie felt every bit of that and more after the past year. Smooth skin and soft chatter surrounded her while she sat looking at want ads for jobs she wasn't qualified for.

“Sophie?”

She looked up to find a tall, dark-haired man smiling at her. It took a moment for his face to register, then she recognized the expression in his soft brown eyes.

“Josh!” she said and nearly knocked over her coffee in an effort to stand up.

He reached for her and gave her a quick hug, then pointed to the seat across from her. “May I sit?”

For a brief moment she just stared, finding only a trace of the Josh she remembered. His face had matured, and the beginnings of tiny lines formed at the corners of his eyes when he smiled. Now broad and muscular, he hardly resembled the lanky teenage boy she once knew.



Chapter Thirty-Four

Josh sat with his mom watching the clock on the wall. They had only been gone a little while, but it felt too long to him. His mom talked as much as she ate.

“Mom, you need to hurry.”

“Go on back up. I’ll be fine.”

“No, I’ll walk you to your car since it’s dark out.”

He hadn’t asked so far but decided it was time. “You called Dad, I guess, told him about Jet?”

“Of course.”

“How did he take it?”

Kim set her sandwich on her plate. “He cried.”

There was a second where Josh tried to process those words. He had never seen his dad cry, not once.

“He cried?”

Tears filled Kim’s eyes. “Yes. He just broke down and started to cry. I never understood anything he said after that.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“How could I? You’ve had a lot to process today.”

“Why would he cry?”

Kim shook her head. “There’s a lot you don’t know about your dad.”

Josh’s phone vibrated.

Chloe: *Hey, I’m heading home. Be back in the morn*

Josh: *U were supposed to stay until I got back*



Chloe: *It's okay. Ur dad's there*

"Dad is with Sophie," Josh said and jumped from his seat.

He bolted from the table and ran toward the exit. All the way to Sophie's room, he just kept thinking of what he would do if his dad had upset her.

Josh entered the room and froze when he found his dad there in the chair next to Sophie's bed. He was holding Jet and smiling.

"Dad, what are you doing here?"

"Holding my grandson."

Josh sat on the bed with Sophie and watched his dad, hardly able to believe this was the same man who was once filled with such anger. His dad cried off and on. At the moment he wasn't crying. He just sat whispering to Jet.

When Josh's mom came into the room and leaned down to kiss his dad's head, the crying began again. Josh looked at Sophie, and she just shrugged.

Jet started to fuss, so Josh said, "I think he needs to be with his mom now."

Bruce nodded and tried to stand.

"Stay there," Josh said. He went and took his son from his dad.

When Josh placed Jet into Sophie's arms, his dad said, "Can we take a walk, son?"

"Sure." Josh looked at Sophie and she gave him a smile and a nod.

"I'll be right back," he said and kissed her cheek. Then he kissed Jet and followed his dad into the hallway.

They walked in silence for a few seconds until Bruce said, "I know what you said about not being around your kids. Sophie said I can hold her half."

Josh grinned. To see his dad hold his only grandson had taken all the old anger and pain away.

"You can hold my half too."

Bruce put his arm around Josh's shoulder. "That's okay, son. I think your half is the one that poops. I'll stick with Sophie's."

That made Josh laugh out loud.

They went as far as the front door and when Josh saw that his dad was about to walk outside, Josh stopped. "I don't want to get too far away in case they need me."

"Just a little farther, son."



They didn't speak again until they climbed into the cab of Bruce's truck. Even once seated and with the doors closed, they remained quiet for a few seconds more.

"I was five when he was born."

"Who?" Josh said.

"My little brother, Frankie. He was special like your boy."

"I didn't know you had a brother."

Bruce began to cry and wipe his eyes.

"He was the sweetest kid," he smiled and turned to Josh. "Funny and happy. His tongue stuck out most all the time. He would get a kick out of it when I would say he better watch out or a fly would land on it."

Josh watched his dad open his console and pull out a napkin to wipe his nose.

"He thought I hung the moon." Bruce paused and his eyes narrowed. "I wasn't like other big brothers who didn't want his kid brother tagging along. I took Frankie everywhere I went. We fished and skipped rocks. All summer long I would take him fishing early every morning. He would sit with his pole eating egg salad." Bruce nodded. "Man, did that kid love egg salad."

"Never had a taste for it myself," Bruce said.

"I don't know that I've ever had it."

"I'll have your mama make you some like Frankie liked it – with pickle relish on white bread."

"I'm willing to try it."

Josh couldn't remember a sweeter moment with his dad. This wasn't a man he knew at all.

"Frankie wasn't afraid to try anything. When I played ball with the boys from the neighborhood, we would let Frankie hit and run the bases. He was so slow we would all just take a little break while he huffed and puffed to make it to home plate." He sighed. "Everybody loved that kid."

"What happened to him?"

"My sophomore year at college I got the call. Frankie had pneumonia. He died before I could even get home." Bruce broke into sobs. "I never got to say goodbye."



Josh reached for his dad's arm but didn't say anything. He was too caught off-guard by the emotion of the moment to react.

"I've thought about it all day, all the way here," Bruce said. "That's why I've been so angry. Why would God take the sweetest kid and leave me? Why did I have to let him go?"

Tears stung Josh's eyes. "I don't know, Dad. I guess we never really get answers to those questions here."

"I don't know that I ever expected an answer. And I sure didn't expect to get Frankie back this way." Bruce smiled. "Not my Frankie but yours."

"I wish I would have known this all along, Dad. I wish I knew you better."

"I plan to be around for you to get to know me if you'll allow it."

"Of course I will. Nothing would make me happier."

"I plan to move back just as soon as we can find a place here."

"I'll help you move."

"Your granddad will come with us. I guess you know you better watch that girl of yours around him."

"I'll keep an eye on him."

There was a moment when they just sat looking at one another. While he never thought it would be possible, especially in one brief encounter, Josh found healing by watching his dad's healing.

Bruce leaned over the console and pulled Josh into his embrace. "I'm sorry, more than I can ever say."

"Me too, Dad. I'm sorry I let you down."

"No, son. I'm sorry I didn't let you live your own life. I promise I won't be like that with Little Frankie."



Sophie let out a soft sigh of sheer joy. She was afraid if she didn't, she might just spill over happiness and flood the bed.

Her baby was back in her arms after time away for testing. There were concerns over his heart but none that would require surgery in the near future. A case worker had come in to speak with them about other issues they may face, but in Jet's case, he appeared to be genuinely healthy and would be



able to go home in a couple of days.

They had all slept off and on for the past few hours. Rather than using the fold-out bed for new dads, Josh had crawled into bed with her and Jet. So now, they all three lay there in one single bed.

Josh had told her about his Uncle Frankie after his parents had left for the hotel. Since then, she couldn't get the story off her mind or forget how Bruce had cried as he had held his grandson. That was a story of redemption over fifty years in the making.

"Soph," Josh whispered, "I told you he would have cool hair like me."

Without his hat, they discovered, Jet had a natural dark-haired mohawk.

"You did tell me." She rubbed her hand over Jet's stocking cap.

"So I've been thinking. He's already cool enough without a name like Jet."

"He doesn't look like a Jet," she said.

"Not at all, but he sure does look like a Frankie."

"Exactly like a Frankie."

Tears glistened in Josh's eyes. "I've never seen anything like it, how my dad was with Frankie."

"It's what he needed."

"I told you something else; a couple of times I've said God had something special for us to do together. Now just look at Frankie and how he's impacted my dad. He changed my dad's world."

"I see that."

"I'll paint over the name when we get home if you're sure you're okay with Frankie."

"I love it. It's perfect for him. I wanted him to be a junior anyway."

"Yeah, now I know where my middle name came from," he said. "I never knew there was a story behind it."

"This may be the beginning of you learning a lot about your dad and what makes him tick."

"You're probably right." He looked down at Frankie. "I won't mess this up," Josh said. "We'll give him room to grow into who he is, at his own pace with no expectations."

"I agree."

"But we'll challenge him and make sure he lives up to his potential."



Sophie felt tears well up in her eyes. “You’ll be the best dad. I can’t wait to see all that’s ahead for us.”

“I can’t wait either.” He traced his finger along Frankie’s cheek. “He’s enough for me. I don’t want to try for any more.”

“You may change your mind. Look at how you feel about him now.”

“If I do, we can adopt. I just know I don’t want you to do this again. This was hard on you, and it’ll only get more dangerous as you get older.” He hesitated, then said, “I’ll go get things taken care of.”

“I will,” Sophie said. “If we want more later, you could still be the father.”

He shook his head, his expression definite. “If it’s not half you, then I don’t want it to be half me.”

Sophie nodded, knowing she would never change his mind.

Frankie began to squirm and make little grunting noises, so Sophie hoped to work with him again on nursing. So far he had latched on and seemed to be getting the hang of it even with his low muscle tone. Because of his good effort, they had every reason to believe she would be able to nurse him.

Josh helped Sophie get Frankie in position, and he watched as his son rooted around.

“He’s a miracle,” Josh said. “Everything about him is a miracle.”

“This is what can happen when you allow your world to expand,” she said.

Josh moved his head closer to Sophie’s. “All these years I would never let anyone in but you. Maybe that’s what scared me about having a kid, the fact that I would have to let someone else in. Now, with him, my heart’s more than doubled in size. I love this boy in a way I never knew I could. I can hardly believe I didn’t want this.”

“It was the same with Chloe. I didn’t expect love like that.” She smiled and watched her lazy boy sleep rather than nurse. “And now, it’s like a whole new explosion of love with Frankie.”

“You know, Soph, I only figured it out today. All these months, it was never about me loving you less like I thought I needed to. It was as simple as me loving God more.”

She smiled at that, thankful for a man who loved her so much that he thought he had to work on loving her less.



“How can I not love Him more after today?” Josh said. “Funny how all these years I missed the obvious.”

“What?”

“It’s one of the most monumental things I took away from my earliest time with you, significant enough that I would name my business after it. I’ve always seen it as growing my mind and future and opportunities, but what I really needed was to allow my heart room to grow, especially to grow beyond loving you.

“It’s more than with Frankie.” His eyes held such relief when he said, “I let my dad back in today. I’ve kept him shut out since he threatened you all those years ago.”

Sophie reached up and touched his cheek. “It’s hard to believe that words spoken all those years ago have followed us this far. I’m still in awe of how God has brought this all to be. Thank you, Josh, for always believing we are something special.”

“Thank you, Soph, for giving me a chance to prove it.”



Connect with Lisa

As an author and speaker, Lisa has a fresh voice in the genre of women's Christian fiction. Because she didn't grow up as an active believer, Lisa's journey to her current life of faith was one filled with bumps and bruises, a fact that allows her genuine empathy toward broken believers and the lost. More in the line of secular fiction, her characters are in process and deeply flawed, individuals most readers can identify with. Lisa doesn't shy away from the tough subjects but rather creatively explores elements of the human condition and all the junk that comes along with life and faith.

CONNECT WITH LISA:

Fiction Site: lisabeatonbooks.com

Facebook: [facebook.com/lisabeatonbooks/](https://www.facebook.com/lisabeatonbooks/)

Twitter: [@LisaHeatonBooks](https://twitter.com/LisaHeatonBooks)

Instagram: [@lisabeatonbooks](https://www.instagram.com/lisabeatonbooks)

I would love to hear from you.

– Lisa

