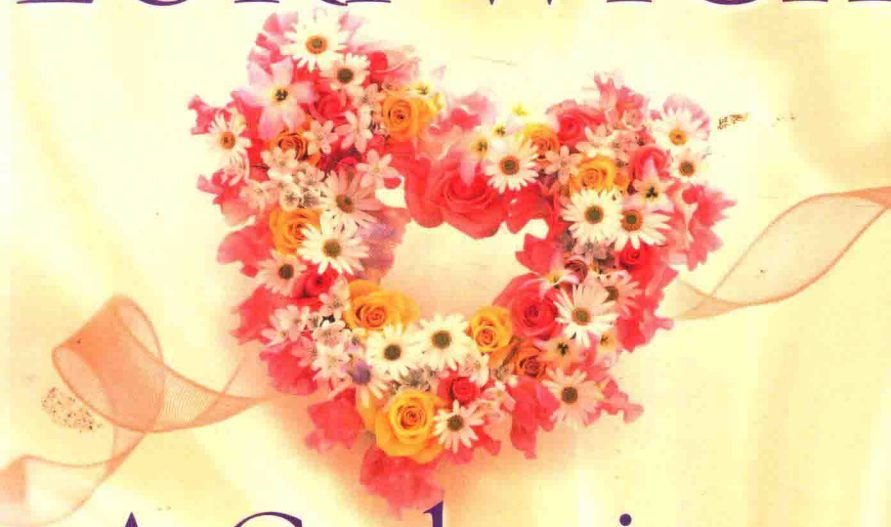


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**LORI WICK**



**A Gathering  
of Hearts**

A TREASURED COLLECTION  
*from her* BESTSELLING NOVELS

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## *A Note from the Author*

**E**ach book is a delightful labor of love, and I feel blessed and privileged to bring the characters and their faith, relationships, and discoveries to life on the page. Every time I finish a novel, it's hard to say goodbye to these people and places. Whether it's shy Cassandra reading to a blind, handsome stranger in England in 1812 or McKay Harrington watching with amusement and fear as Callie nearly starts a fire in her Colorado cabin while making breakfast, I miss writing their stories and the things I learned in the process. Yet they really live on each time a reader picks up a book and gets lost in the tale.

That's why I'm excited to share this gathering of special moments from the hearts of my characters and from their stories. I had great fun reflecting on my old friends in these pages. Whether you're meeting them for the first time or revisiting favorites, I hope that you will be entertained and encouraged by this special collection of memories.

May these stories celebrate the journey of faith, love, gratitude, and joy that you and I experience in our lives.

From my heart to yours,  
*Lori*



Love





# Girl Talk

---

WHERE the WILD ROSE BLOOMS

---

The girls shared a very feminine room as well as a large, soft bed, and as usual, ended the evening with talk about the day.

"Do you love Robert, Eddie?"

"Yes," the older girl said softly. "I think I loved him right away but then thought it must be a crush. Then after we started to write each other, I knew it was real."

"Do you get excited about living in a house that he built for the two of you?"

Eddie only laughed. Her mind hadn't gone that far.

"I'm never going to fall in love," Jackie declared as she got comfortable on the pillow. "I think men are a pain."

"You might change your mind, Jackie," Eddie said gently.

"Never! I'm still amazed that you spoke to that Clay Taggart today. I just hate him."

Eddie smiled as she rolled to turn down the lantern but didn't speak. She was still thinking, *You might change your mind, Jackie.*

*Desire realized is sweet to the soul.*

PROVERBS 13:19

# *A First Kiss and a Second Chance at Love*

---

A SONG FOR SILAS

---

Amy's heart melted within her as his lips touched hers, and Silas felt as though his own heart was going to pound through his coat as she leaned closer and didn't pull away.

One second they were kissing and the next second Amy was gone. Silas stared up at her from his place on the log. She had leapt up and was staring at him with tortured eyes, her hands clenched so tightly together that her knuckles were white. Silas stood and reached for her as he spoke.

"Amy, please—"

"Don't touch me, Silas—just don't touch me."

Standing in front of the log and holding his place, Silas spoke. "Amy, you must know how I feel. You must know that my feelings for you are deep. And you, Amy, what about you? Please don't ask me to believe you don't feel anything for me."

"Of course I feel something for you. We're friends." The words sounded foolish and inane even to her own ears, but Amy couldn't seem to help herself.

Silas looked furious. "Is that what you were just now when you let me kiss you—a friend?"

Amy shrugged helplessly, not even knowing herself why she had allowed the kiss. Silas drug off his cap, and Amy watched him

rake his hand through his hair, his frustration more than evident. Suddenly Amy felt angry and frustrated too.

Taking him completely by surprise, Amy boldly stepped forward and pushed as hard as she could on his chest. Normally he would have hardly noticed the relatively slight pressure she put on him, but he was so surprised by her action that he took a step backward, forgot the log, and fell over it and onto his back.

"What did you do that for?" he bellowed from his undignified sprawl on the ground.

"Because you've ruined everything. We were such good friends, and you've just ruined it," Amy cried in pure frustration.

Silas was off the ground in an instant, knowing his brother Paul had been right. Even as Amy had shouted at him in rage, he had seen the fear written across her face.

Amy retreated as he came toward her, and Silas stalked her until she was backed up against a tree. His expression was fierce but his voice was calm. "Take a good look at me, Amy Nolan, a very good look. I am *not* Thomas Blane. I am *not* going to declare my love for you and then marry someone else."

Silas' look grew extremely tender as they both stood still, his eyes drinking in the woman he loved. He cupped her face within his big hands before he spoke his next words. "I love you, Amy. I love you as I've never loved anyone. You would but need to crook your smallest finger in my direction and I would gladly carry you down this hill to the parsonage and make you my wife today."

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.*

1 JOHN 4:18

# *Afraid to Love*

---

PROMISE ME TOMORROW

---

**Y**ou've fallen quiet, Rusty."  
"Just thinking."  
"About Mr. McCandles?"

"Yes."

"Is your heart being affected in all of this, Rusty?"

"I think it is, Mother. I'm not sure how I feel about that."

"Shall I tell you how I feel?"

"Oh, please do."

"I don't think you should fight this, Rusty, even if it means letting yourself fall in love."

"Oh, Mother."

"Come here, dear." Jackie needed her oldest child closer. "Come so I can see you."

They had been side by side on the davenport, but Rusty moved until Jackie could put an arm around her. Jackie spoke again once she'd pulled Rusty close and cradled her cheek with her free hand.

"Did I frighten you?"

"No, but it's a little shocking when someone so perfectly speaks my thoughts."

"What did I say?"

"That I'm afraid to let myself fall in love with him. It's the truth, Mother."

"Why does it frighten you?"

"Because I'm afraid he won't love me in return. But worse than that, I'm still afraid he might not be a good father. I couldn't stand that."

Jackie pulled Rusty's head down close and rested her cheek on the top of her head. *What do I say, Father? I can't promise her that Mr. McCandles will love her, although I suspect he already does. I can't tell her just to throw caution to the wind; she must think clearly on this. They haven't known each other very long. Help me to be wise and careful with my words. I fell for Clayton so swiftly, but it was years before we had each other. Help me, Lord, and help Rusty to know her heart but never to forget Yours.*

"We are never to worry, Rusty," Jackie said softly. "That's a much easier thing to say than to practice. If you are fretting about your feelings or whether he'll be a good father, you must confess your lack of trust. God has so much better for us than we ever do for ourselves, and His yoke and burden are light. Did that make sense?"

"Perfect sense. Thank you." Rusty paused again. "How would you feel about Mr. McCandles in the family, Mother?"

"If you love him, and you both want to build your relationship and family in Christ, I think it would be wonderful."

Rusty sighed, a huge load lifting from her heart. For some reason she needed her mother's permission; and not just her permission, but her approval with God's standard behind it. She knew if she kept this in mind she could not go wrong.

"You're feeling better already, aren't you?"

"Yes. I needed to hear those words."

Jackie pressed a kiss to her brow. "I'm glad, but I must be honest with you and tell you that your hairpins are putting a hole in my cheek."

Rusty sat up with a surprised laugh. Jackie joined her. By the time the men gained the drawing room, the women were both flushed with giggles.

*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you;  
not as the world gives do I give to you.  
Do not let your heart be troubled,  
nor let it be fearful.*

JOHN 14:27

Faith



