

*On Her
Own*

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER

BRIDES OF WEBSTER COUNTY



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DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my friends Holly Stoolfire, Sandy Fisher,
and Marge Schaper, who were on their own for a time
and learned to rely on God for their strength and support.

*Two are better than one;
because they have a good reward for their labour.
For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow:
but woe to him that is alone when he falleth;
for he hath not another to help him up.*

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

Chapter 1

Cradling the precious infant she had given birth to a short time ago, Barbara Zook lay exhausted, her head resting on the damp pillow.

“We have four sons now, David,” she murmured into the stillness of her room. “I wish you were here to see our *boppli*. I’m planning to name him after you.” Unbidden tears sprang to Barbara’s eyes as she struggled against the memory of what had happened almost eight months ago. If she lived to be one hundred, she would never forget the unsuspecting moment when her world fell apart.

Barbara squeezed her eyes shut as her mind drove her unwillingly back to that Saturday afternoon when she’d been happy and secure in her marriage—when she’d been full of hope for the future.



Barbara sat in the wicker rocking chair on the front porch, watching her three young boys play in the yard and waiting for her husband's return. It was their tenth wedding anniversary, and David had taken their horse and buggy to Seymour to pick up her gift. He'd said it was something Barbara both wanted and needed.

She patted her stomach and drew in a deep breath as the rocking chair creaked beneath her weight. "When David gets home, I'll give him my gift—the news that I'm pregnant again," she whispered. Barbara had known for a couple of weeks that she was carrying David's child, but she had wanted it to be a surprise. She was sure her husband would be happy about having another baby, and she was hopeful that this time it would be a girl.

She planned to share her good news the moment David arrived. He had been gone several hours, and she couldn't imagine what could be keeping him.

Barbara's stomach rumbled as she noticed that the sun had begun to drop behind the thick pine trees on the other side of the field. It was almost time to start supper. She had just decided to head for the kitchen when the sheriff's car rumbled up the driveway.

She stood and leaned against the porch railing while Sheriff Anderson and his deputy got out of the vehicle and strode toward her.

Barbara shuddered. Something was wrong. She could feel it in every fiber of her being. "M—may I help you, Sheriff?" she

asked as the two men stepped onto the porch. Her voice cracked, and she swallowed a couple of times.

“Mrs. Zook,” the sheriff said, moving closer to her, “I’m sorry to be telling you this, but there’s been an accident.”

“An accident?”

He nodded. “It happened about a mile out of Seymour.”

Barbara’s heart thudded in her chest. “Is it. . .David?”

“I’m afraid so. We were called to the scene by one of your English neighbors who’d been heading down Highway C and witnessed the accident. He identified your husband’s body.”

My husband’s body? The words echoed in Barbara’s mind. *It’s not true. It can’t be. David’s alive. Today is our anniversary. He’ll be home soon with the surprise he promised me. David’s always been so dependable. He won’t let me down.*

“I’m sorry,” Deputy Harris said, “but a logging truck pulled out of a side road and hit your husband’s buggy. The stove that was tied on the back flew forward and hit David in the head, killing him instantly.”

The porch swayed in an eerie sort of way, and Barbara gripped the railing until her fingers turned numb. *David’s dead. He bought me a stove. David can’t be dead. Today’s our anniversary.*



The wail of an infant’s cries pushed Barbara’s thoughts to the back of her mind, and her eyes snapped open. Her nose burned with unshed tears as she focused on the joy of having a new baby in her arms. Little David needed her. So did Zachary, Joseph, and Aaron.

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"I'll do whatever I need to in order to provide for my boys," she murmured.

A knock sounded at the bedroom door, and Barbara called, "Come in."

The door creaked open, and David's mother, Mavis, stuck her head through the opening. "How are you doing? Are you ready for some company?"

Barbara glanced down at her son, who was now enjoying the first taste of his mother's milk. She nodded at her dark-haired mother-in-law. "You're welcome to come say hello to your new grandson, David."

Mavis entered the room and closed the door. "Alice told me it was a boy and you'd named him David." She moved closer to the bed and sniffed deeply, her brown eyes filling with tears. "My son would be real pleased to know he had a child named after him."

Barbara swallowed around the fiery lump in her throat. "David never knew I was pregnant. He died before I could share our surprise." She stared down at her infant son. "It breaks my heart to know this tiny fellow will never know his *daed*."

Mavis reached out to touch the baby's downy, dark head. "If I could do something to help, I surely would."

"You already have, Mavis. You and Jeremiah have helped us aplenty, same as my folks."

Mavis nodded. "Your *mamm* has been real good about watching your *kinner* so you could keep working in the harness shop, and your *daed*'s been willing to help there despite the arthritis in his hands."

"That's true." Barbara thought about how determined her

husband had been to open his own business here in Webster County, Missouri. Because of it, they had made enough money to put food on the table and pay the bills. The truth was Barbara actually enjoyed working in the shop. To her, the smell of leather was a sweet perfume. These days she found the aroma even more comforting because it reminded her of David.

“This is a day of beginnings for David Zook Jr., and it’s a day of endings for our friend Dan Hilty.”

Mavis’s statement jolted Barbara to the core. “Has something happened to Dan?”

Her mother-in-law nodded soberly. “You didn’t know?”

Barbara shook her head.

“I thought Alice might have told you.”

“Mom didn’t say anything. What happened to Dan?”

Mavis took a seat on the chair next to the bed. “He died of a heart attack early this morning.”

“Ach! How terrible. My heart goes out to Margaret and the rest of the Hilty family.” Barbara felt the pain of Dan’s widow as if it were her own. It seemed as if she were living David’s death all over again. Giving birth to her husband’s namesake was bitter-sweet, and hearing of someone else’s loss was a reminder of her own suffering.

“Death comes to all,” Mavis said in a hushed tone. “It was Dan’s time to go.”

Barbara had heard the bishop and others in their Amish community say the same thing when someone passed away. Some said that if the person hadn’t died one way, he or she would have died another. “When your time’s up, it’s up,” someone had told Barbara on the day of David’s funeral. She wasn’t sure she

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could accept that concept. Accidents happened, true enough, but they were brought on because someone was careless or in the wrong place at the wrong time. If David hadn't gone to town the morning of their anniversary, she felt sure he would be alive today.

Barbara saw no point, however, in telling David's mother how she felt about these things. She'd probably end up arguing with her. "When is the funeral?" she asked instead.

"In a few days. As soon as Dan's brother, Paul, gets here." Mavis patted Barbara's shoulder. "You'll not be expected to go since you've just given birth and need rest."

Barbara nodded. Rest. Yes, that's what she needed. She closed her eyes as the desire for sleep overtook her. "Tell my boys they can see their little *bruder* soon. After Davey and I have ourselves a little nap."

When Barbara heard a familiar *creak*, she knew Mavis had risen from the chair. The last thing she remembered was hearing the bedroom door click shut.



Alice Raber sat at the table where her three grandsons were drawing on tablets. "Your mamm just gave birth to a boppli," she said. "You have a new little *bruder*."

"What'd Mama name him?" Aaron, who was almost nine, asked as he looked up from his drawing.

"David."

"That was Papa's name," said Joseph, who would soon be turning six.

Alice nodded. "That's right. Your mamm wanted to name the baby after your daed."

"Nobody will ever take Papa's place," Aaron mumbled.

She touched his shoulder. "Of course not. Your mamm just thought it would be nice to give your little bruder your daed's name so you could remember him."

Aaron grunted. "I'll always remember Papa, no matter what. Me and him used to go fishin' together, and he promised to give me his harness business some day."

"When can we see our little bruder?" Joseph asked.

"After your mamm and the boppli have had a chance to rest awhile."

"Are they tired?"

Aaron punched Joseph's shoulder. "You ask too many questions, you know that?"

"Do not."

"*Jah*, you do."

"Let's not quarrel," Alice said as she reached over and scooped Barbara's youngest boy, Zachary, off his chair and into her lap. The little guy had been the baby of the family for three and a half years. She figured he would need some extra attention now that a new baby had come on the scene. Maybe the other boys would, too.

"Are Mama and little David tired?" Joseph asked again.

"*Jah*." Alice patted his arm. "It takes a lot of work for a little one to get born. And it was very tiring for your mamm to do her part so the little one could come into the world."

"How come?"

"Just does." Aaron grunted and nudged Joseph's elbow.

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“Now quit askin’ Grandma so many questions.”

“Who would like some cookies?” Alice hoped a snack might put Aaron in a better mood.

Joseph bobbed his head up and down with an eager expression. “I would.”

Alice placed Zachary back in his chair, then retrieved the cookie jar from the cupboard. She had just set a plate of cookies on the table when Barbara’s mother-in-law entered the room.

“How’s my daughter doing?” Alice asked. “Are she and the boppli sleeping?”

“She was looking pretty drowsy when I left her room. I imagine she’s dozed off by now.” Mavis took a seat at the table.

“I’ll take the boys up to see their bruder as soon as she wakes up.” Alice pushed the plate toward Mavis. “Would you like a cookie?”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

Mavis selected a cookie and was about to take a bite, when Joseph nudged her arm. “Want some milk for dunkin’?”

She glanced over at him and smiled. “Where’s your milk?”

He shrugged. “Grandma didn’t give me none. Figured if she gave you some, she might give me some, too.”

Mavis chuckled, and so did Alice. “I’ll see to it right away.” She looked at Aaron. “Do you want some milk?”

“Jah, okay.”

“I’ll get all three of you some—Mavis, too, if she’d like.”

Mavis nodded. “Jah, sure. Why not?”

After their snack, Alice asked the boys to play in the living room. As soon as the boys left the room, Alice turned to Mavis and said, “I’m worried about Barbara.”

“I thought the birth went okay. Was there a problem I don’t know about?”

Alice shook her head. “The birth went fine. It’s after Barbara is back on her feet that has me worried.”

“What do you mean?”

“She wants to return to work at the harness shop, and I’m not sure she should.”

“That shop was my David’s joy.” Mavis pursed her lips. “It’s my understanding that Barbara likes it, too, so it’s only natural that—”

Alice shook her head. “She might like it, but it’s hard work. Too hard for a woman to be doing all by herself.”

“Samuel helps out. Isn’t that right?”

Mavis nodded. “But his arthritis bothers him more all the time, and I don’t know how much longer he’ll be able to continue helping her.”

“Maybe she can hire someone.”

“Like who? Do you know anyone in these parts who does harness work?”

“No, but—”

“I’m wondering if she should sell the shop and live off the profits until she finds another husband.”

“Another husband?” Mavis flinched. “Ach, David’s not been gone quite a year. How can you even talk of Barbara marrying again?”

Alice sighed. “I’m not suggesting she get married right away. But if the right man comes along, I think she would do well to think about marrying him.” She smiled at Mavis and patted her arm. “David was a fine man, and I’m sure Barbara will always

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carry love for him in her heart. But now she has four sons to raise, and that will be difficult to do alone, even with the help of her family.”

Mavis dabbed the corners of her eyes with a napkin. “I guess we need to be praying about this, jah?”

Alice nodded. “That’s exactly what we need to do.”



Paul Hilty’s hand shook as he left the phone shed outside his cousin Andy’s harness shop, where he worked. He still couldn’t believe the message on the answering machine that Dan, his oldest brother, was dead.

Dazed, Paul meandered back into the shop. “I’ve got to go home. My brother passed away this morning,” he said when he found his cousin working at his desk.

Andy looked up from the pile of invoices lying in front of him. “Which brother?”

“Dan. I went out to the phone shed to make a call and discovered that Pop had left a message on your answering machine. Dan died of a heart attack early this morning.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. He was helping your daed on the farm, isn’t that right?”

Paul nodded. “Him, Monroe, and Elam. Now it’ll just be Pop and my two younger brothers.” He grimaced. “No doubt my daed will be after me to come back to Missouri so I can help him work in the fields.”

“You’ll be leaving Pennsylvania, then?”

“Not if I can help it.” Paul swallowed hard. “I will need to

go back for Dan's funeral, though. I'd like to leave right away if I can get a bus ticket."

"Of course. No problem." Andy grunted. "I'd close the shop and go with you, but I just got in several new orders, and I'd get really behind if we were both gone. Having just hired Dennis Yoder, I can't expect him to take over the shop and know what to do in my absence."

Paul shook his head. "That's okay. You're needed here. I'm sure the folks will understand."

"Please give Dan's widow my condolences."

"I will." Paul turned toward the door.



Faith Hertzler had just stepped onto the back porch to shake one of her braided rugs when she spotted her mother's horse and buggy coming up the driveway.

"*Wie geht's?*" she asked as Mom stepped onto the porch moments later.

"I'm doing all right, but Margaret Hilty's not holding up so well this morning." Mom's face looked flushed.

Faith draped the rug over the porch railing. "What's wrong with Margaret? Is she *grank?*"

"She's not sick physically, but in here she surely is." Mom placed one hand against her chest. "Dan had a heart attack this morning and died."

"Ach! That's *baremlich!*"

Mom nodded, and her blue eyes darkened. "I know it's terrible. Poor Margaret is just beside herself."

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Faith drew in her bottom lip. “I can only imagine. Dan’s always seemed healthy. I guess one never knows when their time will be up, so we should always be prepared.”

“Jah. Always ready to meet our Maker.”

Faith opened the screen door. “Won’t you come in and have a cup of tea?”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Mom’s glasses had slipped to the middle of her nose, and she pushed them back in place before entering the house.

The women took seats at the table, and Faith poured some tea. “Would you like some cookies or a slice of cake? Noah made some lemon sponge cake last night, and we still have a few pieces.”

Mom gave her stomach a couple of pats. “I’d better pass on the cake. It’ll be time for lunch soon, and I don’t want to fill up on sweets.”

Faith blew on her tea, then took a sip. “Will Dan’s brother, Paul, be coming home for the funeral?”

Mom shrugged. “I don’t know, but I expect he will.”

“I’ll try to see Margaret later today. Maybe I’ll take her one of Noah’s baked goods with a verse of scripture attached.”

“That’d be good. Margaret’s going to need all the support she can get in the days ahead.”

The back door flew open, and Noah’s mother, Ida, stepped into the room. “I just talked to Mavis Zook, and she told me that Barbara gave birth to a healthy little *buwe* this morning.”

“Another boy?” Mom asked.

Ida nodded. “She’s already tired enough trying to run the harness shop and deal with three energetic boys. Now she’ll

really have her hands full.”

“I guess I’d better get over to see Barbara soon,” Faith said. “Even though the birth of her son must be a happy time for her, she’s probably feeling a bit sad because David isn’t here.”



The bus ride to Missouri gave Paul plenty of time to think. How was Dan’s widow holding up? What kind of reception would he receive from his family? How long would he be expected to stay after the funeral?

Paul thought about that day four years ago when he’d decided to leave home. He had been farming with his dad and brothers since he’d finished the eighth grade—first when they lived in Pennsylvania, where Paul had been born, and later when Pop moved his family to Missouri. Paul had never enjoyed farming. He’d wanted to learn a trade—preferably harness making. But there was already one harness shop in the area, owned by David Zook. Paul didn’t figure their small community needed another one, and he was sure David wouldn’t hire him, because his wife, Barbara, already worked in the shop.

When Paul’s cousin Andy, who ran a harness shop in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, had invited Paul to come work for him, Paul had jumped at the chance. Paul’s mother had said she could understand why he wanted to leave, although she would miss him terribly, but Paul’s father had shouted at Paul, calling him a *glotzkeppich naar*.

I may be stubborn, but I’m sure no fool, Paul thought as he gripped the armrest of his seat on the bus. *I like my job, and I’m*

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much happier living in Pennsylvania than I was in Missouri.

Guilt stabbed Paul's conscience. He liked his work at Andy's harness shop, but he wasn't really happy. Something was missing, but he couldn't figure out what it was. Andy kept telling Paul he needed to find a good wife and have a passel of kinner. Andy had been married to Sharon for five years, and they had three children already. He often said how much joy he found in being a husband and father.

Paul didn't think he would ever get married. He was thirty years old and had never had a serious relationship with a woman. Truth was, Paul was afraid of marriage, because with marriage usually came children, and since Paul had so little patience with kids, he feared he wouldn't make a good father. He figured his dislike of children went two ways, because most of the kids he'd known had avoided him like he had a case of chicken pox.

Paul's thoughts shifted to his brother's untimely death. Dan's passing was only eight months after David Zook died. Mom had written to Paul about the accident that killed David, leaving his wife to raise their three sons and manage the harness shop on her own.

I wonder how Barbara's getting along. Did she hire someone to help in the shop, or could she have sold David's business by now? If she hasn't sold the place yet, maybe she's looking for someone to buy her out.

Paul stared out the bus window, barely noticing the passing scenery. *Don't get any dumb ideas. You're going back to Pennsylvania as soon as Dan's funeral is over.*