

*a  
Sister's  
Hope*

WANDA &  
BRUNSTETTER



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*Be of good courage,  
and he shall strengthen your heart,  
all ye that hope in the LORD.*

PSALM 31:24



## Chapter 1

**A***r-ou-ou! Ar-ou-ou!* Piercing howls roused Martha Hostettler from her sleep, and she rolled over in bed.

*Ar-ou-ou! Ar-ou-ou!*

There it was again. That couldn't be Polly. The beagle had a high-pitched howl, not deep and penetrating. Polly's mate, Beau, must be making that awful noise.

Martha turned on the flashlight she kept on the nightstand and pointed the light at her battery-operated clock. It was three o'clock. None of Martha's dogs ever barked or howled during the night unless something was amiss. Could Heidi have had her pups? The sheltie wasn't due for another week or so. Maybe Beau had sensed what was going on and wanted to let Martha know.

She shook her head, trying to clear away the cobwebs of sleep. *That's ridiculous. Beau might be able to sense that Heidi's having a problem, but I doubt he's smart enough to let me know. Something else must have disturbed the dog.*

Martha thought of the day she'd found her sheltie Fritz tied to a tree. One of his legs had also been tied up, and a bowl of water had been placed just out of his reach. Another time, Martha had found one of her puppies in the yard with its neck broken. She had wondered if whoever had been vandalizing her family's property and attacking them in other ways could have been responsible for the puppy's death.

A tremor shot through her body. What if someone was in the

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barn right now? What if they planned to hurt one of her dogs?

She pushed the covers aside and jumped out of bed. Dashing across the room, she slipped into her bathrobe, stepped into her sneakers, grabbed the flashlight, and rushed out of her room.

When Martha stepped outside, she shivered as a chilly breeze rustled the leaves. Martha hurried across the yard. As she approached the barn, she tipped her head and listened. Beau had stopped howling. The dog could have been spooked by one of the horses on the other side of the barn. She was probably worried for nothing.

Holding the flashlight with one hand and grasping the handle of the door with the other, Martha stepped into the barn. *Clunk! Splat!* Something cool and wet hit the top of her head. The sticky liquid dripped down her face and oozed onto her neck.

Martha aimed the flashlight at the front of her robe and groaned. She was covered in white paint! She flashed a beam of light upward and gasped. A bucket connected to a piece of rope had been suspended above the barn door. Someone had deliberately set this up! Was it a prank by some unruly kids? *Or could this be another attack?*

She reached for a cardboard box on a nearby shelf and fumbled around until she located a clean rag. She blotted the paint from her face the best she could. The ammonia smell identified the paint as latex. At least it would clean up with soap and warm water.

Martha hurried to her dog kennels in the back of the barn. Relief swept over her when she saw that all of the dogs—Polly, Beau, Fritz, and Heidi—were okay. And Heidi still hadn't delivered her pups.

When Martha reached through the wire fencing and patted Beau on the head, he looked up at her and whined.

"Go back to sleep, boy. Everything's fine."

But it wasn't fine. Someone had sneaked into their barn and rigged up the bucket. How long ago had it been done? Could they still be in the barn?

Martha swept the barn with her flashlight but saw no one. Satisfied that nothing else seemed to have been disturbed, she hurried outside. Glancing down, she noticed an empty pack of cigarettes on the ground.

Rustling sounded in the distance. She aimed her flashlight toward the field of dried corn behind their house. A man was running through the fields. She sucked in her breath. It was hard to tell much from this distance in the dark, but it looked like he wore a straw hat, the kind Amish men used.

Martha shuddered. *If I tell Dad about seeing the man, he'll think it was Luke.* For some time, her father had suspected Luke of attacking their family, but she was convinced Luke was innocent. At least, she hoped he was.

Martha hurried to the house and headed straight for the shower. She needed to get the paint washed off. She needed time to think.

When she stepped out of the bathroom a short time later and saw a man standing in the hallway, her breath caught. "Dad! What are you doing here? I . . . I didn't think anyone else was up."

"The sound of the shower running woke me." He frowned and pointed to her clothes lying on the floor outside the bathroom. "I've heard of folks sleepwalking during the night, but I never knew anyone who liked to paint in their sleep."

"I wasn't. I—"

"What's going on?" Mom asked as she joined them in front of the bathroom door.

Martha quickly explained what had happened in the barn.

"Ach!" Mom gasped. "Was this another attack?"

"I . . . I don't know," Martha stammered. "It's hard to say."

Dad looked over at Martha, his brows furrowing. "Did you see anyone?"

"I . . . uh. . . thought I saw someone running across the field, but I didn't get a good enough look to tell who it was."

Ruth showed up on the scene, rubbing her eyes and yawning. "It's the middle of the night. What's everyone doing out of bed?"

Martha recounted her story again and ended by saying, "I'm sorry I woke everyone."

"We needed to know what happened." Mom slipped her arm around Martha's waist. "It's not safe for you to go to the barn during the night."

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“I just wanted to check on my *hund*. Besides, it’s not right that we can’t feel safe on our own property.” Martha looked at Dad. “Will you let the sheriff know about this?”

“What’s the point? Sheriff Osborn hasn’t done a thing to prevent any of the attacks from happening. It’s not likely he’ll start now.” Dad shrugged. “What’s done is done. Notifying the sheriff won’t change a thing.”



As Luke Friesen headed down the road in his open buggy, the pungent smell of horseflesh filled his senses. Despite the fact that he owned a pickup truck he kept hidden in the woods because his folks wouldn’t approve of it, Luke preferred horse and buggy transportation. He’d only bought the pickup because some of his Amish friends, who were also going through their running-around years, owned a vehicle. Luke figured it was expected of him. Besides, having the truck gave him the freedom to travel wherever he wanted. And it gave him an in with Rod and Tim, the English fellows he’d been hanging around for a time. Luke’s folks didn’t approve of his rowdy English friends, and they’d been after him to settle down and join the Amish church for some time. But he wasn’t ready. Some things he wanted to do, he couldn’t do as a member of the church. Besides, there was no point in joining the church when he wasn’t ready to get married. He would consider it if and when he found the right woman.

A vision of Martha Hostettler flashed across Luke’s mind. She was spunky and daring—the complete opposite of her sister, Ruth, who never liked to take chances and had seemed so subdued during the time they’d been courting. Under the right circumstances, Luke might consider courting Martha.

Luke gritted his teeth as he thought about the way Martha’s father, Roman, had fired him for being late to work a few years ago, and how, after the Hostettlers had come under attack, Roman had pointed a finger at Luke. Even though Luke had denied having anything to do with the attacks, Roman had given him the cold shoulder ever since. If the man had any idea Luke was interested in his youngest daughter,

Luke was sure he and Martha would both be in trouble.

*At least I have a job working for John Peterson. Guess that's something to be grateful for.* Luke snapped the reins to get the horse moving faster. *If I'm not careful, I'll end up being late for work because I'm allowing my horse to plod along while I think about someone I can't have.*

The buggy jolted and leaned to the right. "Whoa! Steady, boy." He pulled back on the reins and grimaced when he saw his left buggy wheel roll onto the opposite side of the road. Good thing there were no cars going by at the moment.

Luke guided the horse and buggy to the shoulder of the road, jumped down, and sprinted over to the buggy wheel. "Great," he muttered. "Now I will be late for work."

Luke lugged the wheel over to his buggy and spent the next several minutes looking for the nut that had come off. When he couldn't find it, he reached into his toolbox in the back of the buggy and took out another nut. He'd just squatted down in front of the buggy to set the wheel in place, when Sheriff Osborn's car pulled up behind him.

"Looks like you lost a wheel," the sheriff said as he sauntered over to Luke.

"That's what happened, all right." Luke grimaced. "It's gonna make me late for work."

"Need any help?"

"Sure, I'd appreciate that." Luke's nose twitched as Sheriff Osborn knelt on the ground next to the buggy wheel. The sheriff's clothes reeked of cigarette smoke, which made Luke think the man was either a heavy smoker or had recently been around someone who smoked.

"Are you still working for John Peterson?" the sheriff asked as he helped Luke lift the wheel and set it in place.

Luke nodded. "Sure am."

"Do you like working for John better than you did Roman?"

"John's a good boss—always patient and fair with me," Luke said without really answering the sheriff's question. "Of course I don't know how he'll react to me being late today."

"I'm sure he'll understand when you tell him what happened with your buggy wheel."

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"I appreciate your help," Luke said once the wheel had been securely fastened.

Sheriff Osborn reached into his pocket, pulled out a pack of gum, and popped a piece into his mouth. "No problem. Glad I came along when I did. If you'd had to fix the wheel yourself, you'd be even later for work." He turned toward his car. "Guess I'd better get back to the business at hand. I got a report that there have been too many cars going over the speed limit on this stretch of road, so I figured I'd better nip it in the bud."

Luke shuffled his feet a few times, trying to think of the best way to say what was on his mind.

"You're looking kind of thoughtful there," Sheriff Osborn said as he chomped on his wad of gum. "Have you got something on your mind?"

"I . . .uh. . .was wondering if you've had any leads on who's behind the attacks against the Hostettlers."

"Nope, sure don't. As far as I know, there haven't been any more attacks at their place in some time." The sheriff stuck another piece of gum in his mouth. "I might have caught the culprit responsible for the attacks if Roman had let me know about them sooner." He kicked a pebble with the toe of his boot. "From what I understand, it's not against the Amish religion to notify the police, so I can't figure out why Roman kept quiet about most of those attacks."

Luke shrugged. "I guess he figured it was best to turn the other cheek and not involve the law unless it became absolutely necessary."

"You're probably right." The sheriff turned toward his car again. "I'd better be on my way and let you get to work. Wouldn't want to see you lose your job on my account." He waved as he climbed into his car.

Luke checked the wheel over once more for good measure, gave his horse a quick pat, and stepped into his buggy.

When he arrived at John's shop, he found John sitting behind his desk, talking on the phone. Figuring it best not to disturb him, Luke hurried to the back room to put away his lunch box. When he returned, John was off the phone.

"Sorry for being late," Luke apologized. "One of my buggy wheels fell off, and I had to stop and fix it."

"Of course you did." John smiled. "Your being late's not a problem. Some things happen that we can't control."

Luke wiped the sweat from his forehead as he drew in a quick breath. "I appreciate your understanding. I was afraid you might fire me the way Roman did when I worked for him."

A deep wrinkle formed above John's slightly crooked nose. "No one should be punished for something that isn't his fault."

Luke nodded. Working for John was sure easier than working for Roman had been. Nothing had ever seemed to be good enough for that man. Every time Luke had an idea about how something should be done, Roman had vetoed it.

"What would you like me to do this morning?" Luke asked as he moved toward John's desk.

John motioned to several cabinet doors stacked against the wall. "You can begin sanding those while I go over to Keim Lumber to pick up some supplies." He stood. "I shouldn't be gone long. If any customers show up, go ahead and write up the orders."

Luke nodded. It felt good to have John's trust. Roman never trusted him. He grimaced. *Why do I keep comparing John to Roman, and why can't I stop thinking about how things used to be when I worked for Roman?*

When John left the shop, Luke began working on the doors. John's beagle, Flo, who'd been lying on an old rug near John's desk, ambled over to Luke with a pathetic whine.

He bent down, and the dog licked his hand. "You don't miss John already, do you, girl? Are you craving some attention?"

The dog responded with a low whimper then flopped on the floor a few feet from where Luke stood.

As Luke plucked a piece of sandpaper, he thought about Martha and wondered how her dog business was doing. She'd sold Flo to John because the dog was barren, and she'd used the money to buy another dog she hoped to use for breeding purposes.

Luke wished he felt free to stop by the Hostettlers' to see Martha, but he knew if Roman saw him talking to her, he wouldn't like it.

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Luke and Roman would probably end up having words. He thought too highly of Martha to cause trouble between her and her dad. Luke figured it was best if he stayed away from the Hostettler place. Besides, there were other things he needed to do today.