

The
**DIVINE
PROVERB**
of
STREUSEL

A NOVEL

**SARA
BRUNSVOLD**

“*The Divine Proverb of Streusel* is a sweetly satisfying novel with layers of heartbreak and healing, forgiveness and family, homey wisdom . . . and recipes! You’ll want to slow down and savor this one.”

Julie Klassen, bestselling author of *The Sisters of Sea View*

“Sara Brunsvold’s *The Divine Proverb of Streusel* is a lovely novel filled with faith, love, and honesty. With its sweet details, memorable characters, and much-loved recipes, readers are sure to savor each page.”

Shelley Shepard Gray, *New York Times* and *USA Today*
bestselling author of *Her Heart’s Desire*

“Sara Brunsvold’s latest novel is an absolute feast for the reader’s heart. Not only does it provide recipes to try in the kitchen, but it also lays out the ingredients for rediscovering your heritage and reconciling the most broken relationships. With relatable characters facing the all-too-common recklessness found in families throughout generations, this story feels less like a novel and more like sitting at a beloved grandmother’s table with a slice of strawberry rhubarb pie. *The Divine Proverb of Streusel* is a superb delight.”

Janine Rosche, bestselling author of *With Every Memory*

“In *The Divine Proverb of Streusel*, Sara Brunsvold pens a tale richly flavored with the wisdom of generations past that will leave you hungry for simple times and simple truths. Brunsvold gently folds in life lessons discovered in both the strengths and weaknesses in the recipe of one’s lineage, leaving your heart full of goodness and grace as you turn the final page.”

Amanda Cox, Christy Award–winning author
of *The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery*
and *He Should Have Told the Bees*

Praise for *The Extraordinary Deaths of Mrs. Kip*

“This heartfelt portrait of a life simply but generously lived is testament to the deep significance of individual influence and a legacy of goodness.”

Booklist

“An uplifting debut. Inspirational fans will want to snap this up.”

Publishers Weekly

“A story that pulls at the heartstrings and captivates readers from the very beginning!”

Write-Read-Life

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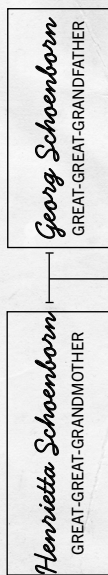
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For Dad.

What was sown years ago continues to multiply.

NIKKI WERNER'S
Family Tree



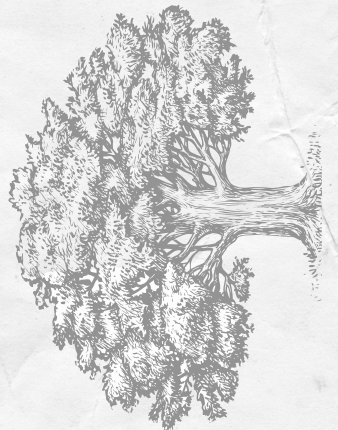
Lena (Schoenborn) Baumann
GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Otto Baumann
GREAT-GRANDFATHER

Emma (Baumann) Straub
GREAT-AUNT

Ann (Baumann) Werner
GRANDMOTHER

Henry Werner
GRANDFATHER



Wesley Werner
PATERNAL UNCLE

Christopher Werner
FATHER

Lydia (Ellis) Werner
MOTHER

Hannah (Werner) Shaw
SISTER

Nikki Werner

❁ One ❁

The message left little reason to believe Nikki Werner still held significance in her dad's life. After four months of the little girl inside her heart crying for her dad to come back, four months of wondering if he could hear those cries, she had received her answer. It was loud, clear, and immortalized on social media.

She reread the text from Hannah. The words had not changed.

Thought you should know.

The picture underneath had not changed either. A screenshot of a post. Their dad in a light gray suit, boutonniere pinned to the lapel, standing next to a white-clad woman neither of his grown daughters had ever met.

She replied to her sister.

It's like he doesn't care.

Did he? About any of them? At all?

Outside her classroom window, a gray-bellied cloud swelled in all directions, inflating like a balloon against the steel-blue morning sky. An unwelcome blemish invading a tranquil sea. It billowed and rolled, blown by the same invisible wind that churned the treetops. The world advanced at a dizzying pace, no thought to the weary or brokenhearted.

Four long months had passed since her dad had packed a bag and walked away from her mom—from all three of them. They were hollowed of everything they thought they knew of him, of family, of love. How much more would they have to unlearn?

Billow and roll.

The classroom door whined on its hinges. Tracy Brown stepped through and thrust two paper coffee cups above her head. “Raise your praise, Miss Werner, it’s the last day of school! Woo!” She’d donned those canvas sandals middle-aged women like her loved so much and a “Salvy for Perez-ident” T-shirt. Both spoke to her summer dreams of no dress code and plenty of Kansas City Royals baseball games.

Nikki roused a smile in response, but there was no point hiding anything from Tracy. A high school calculus teacher for seventeen years, Tracy spotted consternation in the younger set the way a hawk spied a mouse.

Predictably, Tracy’s expression mellowed. She lowered her arms. “That’s not the face a teacher should be making five hours from final bell. What happened? Is it Jacob’s mom again about his grade?”

Nikki shook her head then held up her phone.

Tracy padded over. Her mouth dropped as she read. “He got *married*?”

“Apparently.”

“When?”

“According to this post of his new wife, this past Saturday.”

“Oh, sister. I’m so sorry.” Tracy sank into the chair next to Nikki’s desk—the same spot she claimed every Thursday morning before students arrived—for a “Gab and Grace session,” as she called it. The life-giving thirty minutes of prayer and mentoring that had sustained Nikki through her first year at Northwood High.

Nikki gave a shrug. “His choice, right?” A throb pressed against the backs of her eyes.

“Doesn’t make it right, or easy.”

No, it didn't. Nikki chewed her bottom lip and laid her phone facedown.

"Want your latte?" Tracy asked.

"No, I'm not in the mood." Quickly she added, "Hand it over."

With a sideways grin, Tracy slipped the cup into her hand.

The first sip went down smooth, a warm, centering presence reminiscent of those hopeful days of first semester, back when her only prayer request was how to whet her sophomores' appetites for the nation-shaping literature of Faulkner and Ellison and Twain. Back when she was oblivious to her dad's affair.

"Want to talk about it?" Tracy asked.

Nikki thrummed her fingers on the cup sleeve. She shook her head.

"Want to scream about it?"

A small smile tweaked her lips. "Kinda."

"I would too. Think your mom knows about that?" Tracy gestured toward Nikki's phone.

"Not sure."

"Hopefully she doesn't find out through social media."

"She's been off it for a while. We both have. Ever since—" The rest of that sentence tasted too sour.

"Since the truth came out," her friend finished.

Nikki nodded. That day had been the heaviest of her life.

"You can't do anything about his choices," Tracy said. "Only your own. And I suspect this summer is going to be filled with bright and glorious choices for you. Especially with a certain beau." She winked, a clear diversion to other topics. To Isaac.

The throbbing behind Nikki's eyes speared into her chest. It happened every time he came up. Like the pain her mom felt had suddenly transferred to her. "We don't know that Isaac is going to propose."

Tracy peered at her over the rim of her glasses. "Don't we?"

Nikki pulled her cup closer. "It's not a guarantee, anyway."

"Do you want him to?"

"Yes," she replied a little too quickly.

Tracy tilted her head to the side in that tell-me-more posture she had perfected.

“I do love him. And I have thought of us being married. But . . .”

“But it’s a lot on top of a lot?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you told Isaac this?”

Nikki shifted in her seat. “No.”

Tracy reached over and cupped Nikki’s hand. “Probably a conversation to have sooner rather than later. Men are the worst when it comes to mind reading.”

“You’d think they’d evolve past that.”

“You’d think.” Tracy chuckled and glanced at her watch. “Nearly time for the circus to descend. Let’s get you fully caffeinated and reasonably cheerful.” She raised her cup for a toast. “To summer.”

Nikki grinned, tapped her own cup against Tracy’s, swallowed another fortifying drink. But the depths of her soul remained as clouded as the sky.

Billow and roll.



Weeks had passed since his brother had answered any of his calls, but that didn’t stop Wes Werner from dialing Chris’s number again. “A brother is born for a time of adversity,” Proverbs 17 taught, and if what Aunt Emma said she saw on social media was true, his kid brother sank deeper every day. The spiral was evident even from Wes’s vantage point clear on the opposite side of Missouri.

Had Lydia seen the photo? Had the girls?

The divorce was barely a month old.

He placed the phone to his ear and stepped out onto his front porch. The midmorning sun coaxed melodies from the winged singers in the century-old oak tree at the edge of the yard, a source of endless adventure when he and Chris were boys. The gentle slopes of the Werner farm rolled into the distance.

The other end of the line rang. And rang. Ignored.

Voicemail picked up. Again.

Wes filled his lungs and held the air in place as he waited for the beep. He prayed the words would come with at least moderate coherence and grace.

Beep.

“Hey, Chris. Wes. Think about you every day. And your family. Spoke with Aunt Emma. She told me you and, uh, Sheryl? Is that right? That you all moved to Oklahoma and you’re about an hour from her.” He paused. “She also said you may have . . . bigger news. Hoping we can talk. Give me a call.”

As soon as he hit the red End button, more words rushed to his lips, a half minute too late.

I want you to be happy—and whole.

I love you.

My heart is heavy.

Words that would be unheard by anyone other than God. At least until—unless—Chris called him back.



The final bell rang. Nine hundred high schoolers roughhoused and laughed their way to summer freedom. Soon after, Nikki slid into her Malibu. Tracy wanted her to go out for a “celebratory and completely unhealthy amount of spinach dip,” but Nikki declined. The ache in her head begged for a quiet place.

She intended to drive to her apartment, crawl under the covers, and sleep off the day—the semester. Instead, she ended up parked behind her mom’s car in the driveway of the two-story colonial in the heart of Kansas City, Missouri’s northland. The house that had been home for all of Nikki’s twenty-six years. The Werner family hub, and the core from which every branch of her existence stretched.

The FOR SALE sign in the front lawn had donned a new addition: a red rectangle with bold white letters. CONTRACT PENDING.

Her entire Werner life had ebbed away, piece by rotted piece. Nothing left whole. Nothing left untouched.

She stepped into the afternoon sunshine.

The shades of the living room's picture window were open, as if the house grasped at any light it could find to chase away the darkness that had settled over it. One of her earliest memories had happened at that window. She'd been four years old, nose practically touching the pane, waiting for her dad's car to turn into the drive.

She gritted her teeth against the pang and pushed forward, up the front steps. She reached for the handle of the storm door and stopped. The inside door stood open, allowing an unobstructed view into the house. Her mom knelt in the middle of the furniture-less living room. A large cardboard box sat in front of her, a stack of framed pictures on one side and a pile of dish towels on the other. She stared at the picture in her hands. Just stared. Like she tried to believe their family had ever been happy.

Such moments had caught Nikki several times over the last four months too. Moments when she saw a picture or relived a memory and the daunting question rose once more: Would anything from that point forward ever be joyful enough to capture and frame for posterity?

Slowly her mom lifted a dish towel and shrouded the picture. The ripple of grief knew no end.

Nikki drew in a breath, then knocked on the storm door.

The noise startled her mom, whose surprised expression slowly melted to one of confusion. She rose and came to the door. "Nik? What are you doing here?"

What was she doing there? What was it that had made her drive twenty-five minutes out of her way? Was she, too, grasping at any light she could find? Any semblance of the life that had been theirs only months ago?

Her chin began to tremble.

Instantly her mom wrapped her arm around her and pulled her inside. "Come on, baby. Let's have some coffee."