

The  
*Forgiving*  
JAR



The  
*Forgiving*  
JAR

WANDA E.  
BRUNSTETTER

SHILOH RUN  PRESS  
An Imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc.

© 2019 by Wanda E. Brunstetter

Print ISBN 978-1-62416-748-5

eBook Editions:

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-64352-135-0

Kindle and MobiPocket Edition (.prc) 978-1-64352-136-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All German-Dutch words are taken from the *Revised Pennsylvania German Dictionary* found in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, and/or events is purely coincidental.

Cover Design: Buffy Cooper

Cover Photography: Richard Brunstetter III, RBIII Studios

For more information about Wanda E. Brunstetter, please access the author's website at [www.wandabrunstetter.com](http://www.wandabrunstetter.com)

Published by Shiloh Run Press, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1810 Barbour Drive, Uhrichsville, OH 44683, [www.shilohrunpress.com](http://www.shilohrunpress.com)

*Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.*



Printed in the United States of America.

# *Dedication*

To my special Amish friends who live by the scriptures  
and know the meaning of forgiveness.

*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,  
even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

EPHESIANS 4:32



# Prologue

*Strasburg, Pennsylvania*

It was a beautiful clear night, but even as the stars twinkled above, they shone in stark contrast to the mood inside Ezekiel King's truck. As they approached the home of Willis and Mary Ruth Lapp, Michelle Taylor's apprehension grew. She clutched her purse straps so tight the lack of circulation tingled her fingers. Michelle was no stranger to being cast away, but right now she felt more nervous and fearful of rejection than at any other time in her life.

Ezekiel must have sensed Michelle's anxiety, for he let go of the steering wheel with one hand and reached over to touch her arm. "It's gonna be all right. You have nothin' to worry about."

"That's easy for you to say. You're not the one who has to face the Lapps." She released her purse straps and pushed a lock of shoulder-length hair away from her face. "I'd rather have a tooth pulled without anything to deaden the pain than speak to the Lapps in person. I don't know if I can forgive myself, let alone expect them to."

"Don't say that." Ezekiel's tone was reassuring. "I've known the Lapps a long time. You'll soon find out that your worries are for nothing."

As they passed more familiar places, Michelle's fretfulness intensified, even though Ezekiel tried to help her cope. "I really blew it when I didn't come clean with them before. What if they don't want to see me? They might slam the door in my face."

Taking hold of the wheel with both hands again, Ezekiel shook his head. "The Lapps aren't like that. They'll let you in and listen to

whatever you have to say.”

“I don’t expect them to invite me to live with them again. I just want the chance to tell Mary Ruth and Willis how sorry I am for impersonating their granddaughter.” Michelle blew out a puff of air. “I’ve never been more ashamed of myself than doing that to people who have made me feel loved like no one else ever did.”

“I’m sure they will forgive you.”

“I hope you’re right, because if they won’t speak to me, I can’t return to Harrisburg. I quit my job, remember? Maybe I’ll have to catch a bus and head for Ohio after all. If I beg my foster parents in Columbus, they might take me in.” Michelle bit the inside of her cheek and winced. “I deserve whatever I get.”

Ezekiel turned up the Lapps’ driveway. “I don’t think it’ll come to that, but even if things don’t go well, I am not letting you leave.” He turned off the engine and reached for her hand. “We’ll figure out something—together.”

Michelle nodded. She didn’t know what she would do without Ezekiel. If he hadn’t come to Harrisburg to get her, she wouldn’t be here right now. She’d have probably spent the rest of her life moving from town to town, trying to hide from the past. Well, however things ended up, it was time for her to face the music.

# Chapter 1

*One month later*

Glancing in her rearview mirror as she slowed for a stop sign, Sara Murray smiled when she noticed a horse and buggy coming up behind her car. She rolled down her window to listen to the steady rhythm of the hooves engaging the pavement. Sara breathed in the crisp, fresh air. It was good to be back in Amish country, and even better to be heading to her grandparents' house to celebrate Thanksgiving a few days from now.

She still couldn't get over the fact that her mother had been raised in an Amish home, or that she hadn't known anything about it until she'd arrived in Lancaster County earlier this fall. A letter Sara found after Mama's death had revealed her grandparents' names and stated that they lived in Strasburg. Sara had wanted to meet them right away, but due to her part-time job at a dentist's office, plus taking some business classes, she was unable to go to Strasburg until fall.

Another shock had awaited Sara: a young woman had been living with the Lapps for several months, pretending to be her. It was hard not to be bitter about that, but Michelle Taylor had left the first day Sara arrived, so it was behind her now. Sara had spent several weeks getting to know Willis and Mary Ruth Lapp and was glad for this opportunity to spend more time with them.

Last week, the dentist Sara worked for had decided to retire, so she was currently out of a job. She hoped to move out of the duplex she rented from her stepfather in Newark, New Jersey, and move to Strasburg permanently. Perhaps, if her grandparents were willing, she could live with them—at least until she found another

job and could rent a place of her own.

When Sara came upon another horse and buggy, in front of her this time, she waved at the cute little girl peeking out the back of the buggy, then pulled into the oncoming lane to pass. There was something about being in these surroundings that filled her with a sense of tranquility. It almost felt as if she belonged in Strasburg.

*I probably would be living here now if Mama had remained Amish and not run off when she was a teenager.* It grieved Sara to know her mother had given birth to her out of wedlock, and never explained who her biological father was. *If he knew Mama was expecting a baby, why didn't he marry her? Was my father Amish, or could Mama have gotten involved with an English man?* These questions had plagued Sara ever since she'd learned of her heritage. As much as she hated to acknowledge it, the truth was, she might never learn all the facts. In any case, it wouldn't stop her from asking questions in the hope of uncovering the truth. Deep in her heart, Sara believed she had the right to know.



When Sara pulled onto the Lapps' driveway, she felt a sense of lightness in her chest. After staying with her grandparents and enjoying their warm hospitality previously, this seemed like coming home. Of course, things had been a bit strained between them at first—especially before they'd accepted the fact that Sara was truly their granddaughter and the other woman, Michelle, had only pretended to be her.

“What a dirty trick to play on someone as kind and trustworthy as my grandpa and grandma,” Sara muttered. “I don't understand how that young woman could live with herself for taking advantage of two sweet people. I hope she's miserable and is paying for her misdeed.” She tapped the steering wheel with her knuckles. “I'm glad I won't have to deal with Michelle. Who knows what I might say?”

It wasn't like Sara to be vindictive or wish something bad would happen to someone, but reflecting on what her grandparents had

gone through filled her with irrational thoughts.

*Just relax and enjoy spending the holiday with Grandpa and Grandma, she told herself. I will not allow anything or anyone to spoil our first Thanksgiving together.*

Sara pulled her car up near the barn, turned off the engine, and got out. After removing her suitcase from the trunk, she headed for the house.

Sara knocked on the front door and waited. When no one answered, she knocked again, a little harder this time. She'd called and left a message last night, letting them know she would arrive this afternoon. Sara expected they'd be waiting for her arrival, since Grandma had said during their phone conversation a week ago last week that she and Grandpa were looking forward to Sara's visit.

She knocked a third time. When there was still no answer, Sara stepped off the porch and walked around back. Maybe they were doing something outside, despite the chilly day. Seeing no sign of anyone in the backyard, she rapped on the back door. When that failed too, Sara glanced toward the barn. *I wonder if they could be in there.*

Sara entered the barn and was greeted by two collies—one slightly larger than the other. "Hey, Sadie. Hey, Rascal. How are you doing? Are you glad to see me?"

The dogs responded with barking and wagging tails.

Sara giggled and went down on her knees to pet them. She glanced over at the pen where the pigs were kept. Some slept next to the snoring sow, while others rooted through the straw. "My how those piglets have grown." Sara turned and gave the two excited collies her full attention. "Where are your owners?" She stroked one dog's ears, while gently patting the other dog's head. The question was silly, since the dogs couldn't talk, but the words came out before Sara thought about what she was saying.

Rascal nuzzled her hand with his nose. Then his pink tongue came out and slurped Sara's arm. "You two are quite the welcoming committee. Just wish I knew where my grandparents are."

“They went to the grocery store to get some things for our Thanksgiving meal.”

Sara jumped at the sound of a woman’s voice, and a sudden coldness flooded her soul when she saw who had spoken. “Wh—what are you doing here?” she asked as Michelle stepped out of the shadows. “I—I thought you were gone. Have you been hiding here in my grandparents’ barn?”

Michelle shook her head. “Course not. I’ve been living with them for the past month.”

Sara’s mouth gaped open. “What?”

“I came back to apologize for making them believe I was you. And they graciously forgave me. Even invited me to stay until I found a job.”

“Is that so? Well then why were you hiding in the shadows where I couldn’t see you?”

“I didn’t know anyone was here till I heard you talking to the dogs. At first I didn’t realize who you were.” Michelle’s voice lowered. “These days you can’t be too careful.”

“Don’t I know it?” Sara wanted to say more to this person who could not be trusted, but she held her tongue. Her body temperature had gone from chilly to hot. *What were Grandpa and Grandma thinking, inviting this imposter to stay with them? And why didn’t they tell me Michelle was living here?* Sara felt betrayed. She was tempted to return to Newark. But she would stay put until they got home, for she needed some answers. In the meantime, she wouldn’t say another word to the deceitful young woman in the barn. Sara would wait in the car until her grandparents returned.



Sara’s hands shook as she sat in her vehicle, fuming. *How could Grandpa and Grandma have let that devious young woman back into their lives?*

Glancing at the barn, where Michelle had remained, Sara shifted on her seat. *How am I supposed to spend Thanksgiving with them now?* She couldn’t imagine staying in the same house

with Michelle for even one day. This put a damper on her asking Grandpa and Grandma if she could live with them until she found a job. *Maybe if I explain how I feel about Michelle, they'll ask her to leave. After all, she's not part of the family.*

The more Sara stewed about this, the angrier she became. If she had a job to return to and her stepfather, Dean, hadn't found a renter for the duplex, she'd turn around right now and head back to Newark. *Maybe I should go anyway. The duplex won't be rented out until next week, so I'd have a place to stay until then. But if I leave, the little conniver will have the upper hand.*

Sara didn't have long to contemplate things, because the *clip-clop* of a horse's hooves drew her attention to Grandpa and Grandma's arrival. When their horse and buggy pulled up to the hitching rail, she got out of the car.

Her grandparents stepped down from the buggy, and while Grandma headed toward Sara's car, Grandpa waved at Sara before securing the horse. Forcing a smile, Sara gave her grandmother a hug.

"It's so good to see you again," Grandma said with feeling. "We've been looking forward to your visit and hope you can stay with us a bit longer this time."

Sara bit her lip, pondering how best to say what was on her mind.

"Is everything all right, Sara? You look upset."

Sara pointed to the barn. "When I first got here, I went in there, looking for you and Grandpa. I found Michelle Taylor instead."

Grandma nodded. "Why, yes. She's been with us for almost a month now. Didn't I tell you in one of our phone calls?"

"No. I would have remembered if you had." *And I would not be here right now.* Sara shifted from one foot to the other. "Michelle was the last person I expected to see this afternoon."

"She came back with Ezekiel, to apologize in person for what she had done," Grandma explained. "So your grandpa and I decided Michelle could stay here until she's able to find a job."

"You could forgive her, just like that?" Sara snapped her fingers.

Grandma nodded. “The Bible teaches us to forgive.”

Before Sara could comment, Grandpa joined them and gave her a hug. “It’s mighty nice to see you again, Granddaughter. How have you been?”

“Other than losing my job last week, I was okay until I got here and found Michelle in the barn. I had planned to ask if I could stay with you until I find a job and am able to get my own place. But since she’s here, that won’t work out. I should just go back to Newark.” Sara figured she may as well be honest.

Grandma slipped her arm around Sara’s waist. “Now don’t be silly. We’d love to have you stay with us. Since we have more than one guest room, it won’t be a problem to have both you and Michelle living in our home. We’ve been looking forward to having you, and would be very disappointed if you left.”

Sara made a feeble attempt at smiling. “Oh, okay.” While she didn’t want to be in the same house with the imposter, at least she would be here to keep an eye on things and make sure Michelle didn’t do anything else to hurt Grandpa and Grandma Lapp.