

BOOK TWO

THE FRIENDSHIP LETTERS

# Letters *of* Comfort



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WANDA &  
BRUNSTETTER



BARBOUR  
PUBLISHING

© 2023 by Wanda E. Brunstetter

ISBN 978-1-63609-487-8

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-63609-488-5

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Cover model photography: Richard Brunstetter III

Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1810 Barbour Drive, Uhrichsville, OH 44683,  
[www.barbourbooks.com](http://www.barbourbooks.com)

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Printed in the United States of America

# Dedication

To my special friend, Doretta. Thanks for allowing me to use your lovely name for the main character in this book, even though you are not dealing with the same situation as my fictional character.



I will not leave you comfortless:

I will come to you.

JOHN 14:18



# Prologue

*Grabill, Indiana*

Holding a letter she had just received from her friend Eleanor Lapp, Doretta Schwartz leaned against the fence near her father's barn and read:



*Dear Doretta,*

*Vic and I received the invitation to your and William's wedding. Just wanted you to know that we plan to be there. It will be an honor for me to be one of your witnesses, and I can't wait for you to meet our sweet little Rosetta.*

*Things are going well at our home here in Paradise. Vic is still in therapy, but he hasn't had a drink since his first session, and thankfully, he no longer blames himself for his brother's death.*

*I'm keeping busy with things at home and taking care of the baby, of course. I love being a wife and mother, and I'm sure that you will enjoy being a happy wife and good mother someday too.*

*I must close now and get this letter in the mail. I'll see you soon and then we can talk in person. These next few weeks*

*will be busy ones as you and your family prepare for the wedding, but try not to work too hard.*

*With Love & Blessings,*

*Eleanor*



Doretta smiled as she folded her friend's letter and slipped it back in the envelope. She could hardly wait to see Eleanor again and meet her little girl. And even more so, Doretta looked forward to becoming Mrs. William Lengacher, the man she loved and had promised to marry. She felt sure that nothing and no one could ever come between her and William. They were destined to be together as husband and wife.

# Chapter 1

Doretta stood in front of the bathroom mirror, staring at her reflection. In two days, she would be getting married, and those dark circles beneath her eyes needed to go. Hopefully, sleep would come tonight, and she'd wake up tomorrow morning feeling well rested. Yesterday, after helping prepare the room where the meal would be served following the wedding service as well as decorating the wall behind the bride and groom's table, Doretta had been exhausted and should have slept soundly. But with so many thoughts swirling in her head, she'd only gotten a few hours of sleep.

This evening, William would be coming by, and they would set their busyness aside for a few hours. They would take a ride in his open buggy, and when they returned to the house, they'd eat a late supper with Doretta's family. She looked forward to the ride, especially because William had said he wanted to show her something special—a surprise he'd been waiting to tell her about. Doretta couldn't imagine what it was, but she was ever so curious to find out. The anticipation of his surprise, coupled with the excitement she felt whenever they were together, heightened Doretta's senses and caused her pulse to race a bit more than usual. She picked up one of the essential oil roller balls nestled in a basket on the counter and rubbed some on her inner wrists. Putting her nose close to her skin, she inhaled the pleasant lavender aroma. *Aw, that's better. . . I feel calmer already.*

Doretta secured both sides of her head covering with a white hairpin and gave her cheeks a little pinch to add some color. She had never worn makeup, not even during her *rumschpringe*, and she wasn't vain about her appearance. Even so, Doretta's face looked kind of pale this afternoon from her lack of sleep, and she didn't want her intended to think she wasn't feeling well.

Doretta had also been awakened last night from a terrible dream. Her heart pounded even now as she reflected on the dream in which William had called off the wedding with no explanation other than saying they weren't meant to be together. The dream didn't make any sense to her because just the other day, William had told Doretta that he couldn't imagine spending the rest of his life with anyone but her.

"Nor I you," she whispered, giving her cheeks one final pinch before moving away from the mirror. It was time to go out on the porch and wait for her beloved to arrive.

Doretta stepped out of the bathroom, nearly colliding with her ten-year-old sister, Karen.

"What took you so long in there?" the young girl asked. "I thought you were never comin' out."

Doretta tweaked the end of her sister's nose. "You're too *ungeduldich*."

"I'm not impatient, but you're a *schleich*."

She smiled, shaking her head. "I'm going out with William soon, and I wanted to make sure I looked satisfactory, so I had every right to take my time and be a slowpoke."

Karen shrugged her slim shoulders. "William's a nice enough fellow, but I don't see why you'd wanna be his *fraa*."

*What a silly comment.* Doretta's smile widened. "I want to be William's wife because I love him very much and want to spend the rest of my life with him."

Karen wrinkled her freckled nose. "I'm never gettin' married. I'm gonna keep on livin' right here with our *mamm* and *daed* till the day I die."

Doretta didn't bother to tell her little sister that there was a good chance she would outlive their parents. It might have upset the girl to think about the possibility of either one of them passing on. Doretta did not like the idea either, but she wouldn't allow herself to dwell on the topic of death. Mom was fifty-two and Dad had recently turned fifty-four. They were in good health, and barring anything unforeseen, she figured they would both be around for a good many more years. At least she hoped that would be the case, because she would certainly miss them, just as she did her paternal grandparents who had died of cancer only a year apart. Doretta felt thankful that her mother's parents were still alive and lived in the *daadihaus* connected to Uncle Calvin's home over on Hurshtown Road.

A tug on her dress sleeve disrupted Doretta's thoughts. "Aren't you gonna miss Mama, Papa, and our *brieder* after you and William get married and move into that great big house with William's grandpa and grandma? We'll sure miss you."

Doretta couldn't miss the look of sadness in her sister's blue eyes. "Of course I will miss you. But William and I won't be that far away. His grandparents' house is only a few miles from here, so we'll see you all quite often." She leaned down and gave her sister a hug. "Now go ahead and use the bathroom, and please stop fretting. You're too young to worry so much."

Karen gave Doretta a crooked grin. "I wanna hear where William takes you on your date after you get home."

Doretta couldn't help but smile. While her curious sister didn't think she ever wanted to get married, here she was eager to know about Doretta and William's date. "I'm sure Mama and Papa will want you to head to bed by the time William and I finish our late supper with them, but I'll tell you all about it in the morning. Okay?"

"You promise?"

"*Jah*, of course."

"Okay." Karen entered the bathroom and quickly shut the door.

Hearing the *clippity-clop* of a horse's hooves, Doretta stepped into the hallway, where she slipped on her dark-colored jacket and black outer bonnet.

Turning toward the kitchen, where her parents had gone to have a cup of coffee, she cupped her hands around her mouth and hollered, “William’s horse and buggy just came into the yard, so I’m leaving now!”

As Mama called back, “Have a nice time,” Doretta hurried out the front door.

William’s horse, Carmel, so named for its beautiful caramel-colored coat, had been tied to the hitching rail, and William was heading toward her.

Doretta’s breath caught in her throat at the sight of his muscular form, blue eyes, and thick, sandy brown hair. She had to hold herself in check to keep from rushing into his strong arms. Oh, how she wished they were married already and she wouldn’t have to say goodbye to him when their date ended this evening. But she only had to wait a couple of days until their wedding took place. Then they would never have to part until they grew old and the Lord called one of them home to be with Him. Unable to bear the thought, she shook that notion aside and clasped William’s hand as he helped her into the buggy. All she would think about during their date was how fortunate she felt to be engaged to a man who loved her as much as she did him. Doretta looked forward to the days ahead and eventually raising a family with William. Although it would be difficult to give up her teaching position at the Amish schoolhouse, she felt sure that motherhood would be even more rewarding.

*I wonder if our children will have my auburn-colored hair or a light shade of brown like William’s,* Doretta mused as William guided the horse and open buggy out onto the road. *Will we have boys or girls, and how many children will God bless us with?* Doretta had a fondness for children and would miss teaching school. But the direction of her life was taking her down a new path, and Doretta looked forward to seeing what adventures awaited her as Mrs. William Lengacher. Although her job as a schoolteacher had been fulfilling, Doretta had no doubts about the joy and satisfaction she would feel being married to William. As each day had drawn them closer to their wedding, she felt even more certain that God had brought her and William together.

“You’re sure quiet this evening.”

William's comment drove Doretta's musings aside, and she turned to look at him. "Oh, I've just been thinking, is all."

"Were they good thoughts about us and our future?"

She nodded.

"No second thoughts about marrying me?"

Doretta reached over and clasped William's arm. "Of course not. I love you with all my heart, and I can't imagine marrying anyone but you. I promise, William, I will never love any man but you."

He let go of the reins with one hand and took hold of her hand. William's gentle touch felt warm and soothing. "And I promise to only love you. My one regret is that my twin brother hasn't found the girl of his dreams yet. Warren is such a kindhearted man, yet he's never had a steady girlfriend. I'd really like to see him find the right woman and be as happily married as I know we are going to be."

"I'm sure when the correct time presents itself, Warren will find the right woman. Maybe it will be Margaret Wagler. He has gone out with her a few times," she observed. "Maybe their friendship will develop into something more serious."

William's voice lowered a bit. "I'm just sorry it took me so long to propose marriage to you, but I wanted to be sure I could offer you a good life and provide for all of your needs."

"I don't need anything except you," she murmured, snuggling closer to him. "As long as we're together, I'll be happy and content."

He gave her fingers a gentle squeeze. "Same here. If I live to be an old man with gray hair, or no hair at all, and end up walking bent over with the help of a cane, my love for you will never die."

Doretta smiled. She couldn't imagine the tall, handsome man she would be marrying in a couple of days with gray hair or walking with a cane. But that didn't matter because they would grow old together. When William's hair turned gray, hers probably would too. And even if they both became frail or bent over, they would love and cherish each other until the day

one of them died. Even then, Doretta felt certain that the love she felt for William would remain in her heart forever.



“What are you doing out here all by yourself?”

Warren turned his head at the sound of his mother’s voice. He’d been in such deep thought, he hadn’t heard her open the door and step out onto the porch. “Oh, just taking some time to *iwwergedenkt* a few things,” he responded as she took a seat beside him on the wooden bench his grandfather had made a few years ago.

“Mind if I ask what kind of things you needed to think over?”

He gave a noncommittal shrug, hoping she wouldn’t press the issue. Warren had always been on the quiet side when it came to expressing his thoughts—especially when his mother started asking too many questions about things he preferred not to talk about.

“Are you feeling *bedauerlich* because your only sibling will be getting married in a couple of days and you’re still single without a serious *aldi* yet?” She placed her hand on his arm.

Warren shook his head. “I’m not sad about my brother getting married, and with William and I getting started with our new business, I don’t really have time for a steady girlfriend. So that’s not even an issue worth talking about right now, Mom. When, and if, God wants me to have a mate, the right woman will come along.” *And it won’t be one-sided*, he mentally added, *because she’ll love me as much as I love her, and she’ll look at me the way Doretta looks at William.* Warren crossed his arms in front of his chest and drew in a deep breath. *Does my brother realize how lucky he is to have found a woman who loves him so much? Will I ever find that with Margaret. . . or anyone else?*



“Aren’t you going to tell me where we’re going?” Doretta gave William a little nudge with her elbow. “The suspense is making me so *naerfich*, I’m tempted to start biting my *fingerneggel*.”

He chuckled. "Aw, now, don't be nervous, and for goodness' sake, do not bite your fingernails. If my mamm was here right now, she'd say that fingernail biting is a nasty habit."

"Jah." Doretta nodded. "My mother would say the same thing."

They traveled in silence for a while, and as the sun began to drop lower in the sky, Doretta felt herself relax. Although the fall air was a bit nippy, there was no wind, and sitting here so close to William, it wasn't possible to feel cold. In fact, heat flushed her face at the nearness of him. Oh, how she loved this man.

"We're almost there." William snapped the reins, and Carmel picked up speed. "Just a little bit farther and I'll show you my surprise."

Doretta looked to the right and then the left. All she could see were some hardy wildflowers dotting the landscape they were passing by. Nothing unusual out here in the country, and they were still several miles from town. Doretta couldn't imagine what would be along this road that had William so excited, but she remained quiet as his horse and buggy moved on. If they were getting close, surely she would see something more than this soon.

The rumble of an approaching vehicle on the other side of the road caused William's horse to whinny and shake her head. Apparently, Carmel either didn't like the noise or the mare had suddenly become skittish of motorized vehicles. Doretta had never seen his horse act like this before, but she felt confident that William would remain in control. The setting sun was obviously in his face, as it was hers, and he put one hand up as if to shield his eyes from the glare. It was at that moment when William lost control of his horse. The crazed animal reared up and took off running down the road at a pace so fast the scenery became nothing but a blur. William shouted at Carmel, but he couldn't slow her down. The next thing Doretta knew, they were in the other lane, heading straight for the headlights of a pickup truck. Doretta screamed and then braced herself for the impact. They were going to crash, and there was nothing she could do about it. There wasn't even time to utter a prayer.

## Chapter 2

Warren stepped out of his father's barn and slouched against the rustic, wooden building. He remained like that for several minutes, taking in the sights and sounds around him that he hoped, if only for a little while, would take his mind off the deep grief consuming him.

Glancing toward the closest fence surrounding the pasture where the horses grazed, Warren spotted a squirrel running along the top board. A birdfeeder hanging from a wooden post nearby was nearly empty from neglect on the part of Warren's mother. But then, who would expect her to remember to fill the feeders when she needed someone to care for her right now?

*Poor Mom. She can barely get out of bed in the mornings, much less resume her normal duties. It will be some time before she or Dad come to grips with the fact that William is gone. Well, I miss him too,* Warren thought as he breathed in the odor of decaying leaves that had been swept and piled up under a maple tree in the yard nearly two weeks ago. Most of the lawn furniture hadn't been put away yet, and Warren figured he'd probably be the one to do it, although he certainly wasn't in the mood. It made sense to him that the normal priorities had taken a back seat with his folks and even himself. Most days, it didn't seem that much of a priority for him to even brush his teeth or shave his face. He would look into the mirror at himself and see William looking back at him, which made Warren even sadder.

He'd managed to take care of the animals inside the barn day to day, but other chores seemed not to be as important, like cleaning his room or fixing the loose floor boards outside on the front porch.

Besides grieving the loss of his twin brother, Warren had an important decision to make concerning the health food store he and William had purchased before William's tragic death. There was no way Warren could run it alone, so he would either need to sell the new business or hire one or two people to work there with him. If William and Doretta had gotten married as planned, she would have helped out at the store, at least until their first baby came along. Now, due to the injuries she had incurred, there was no possibility of her helping out at the nutrition center anytime in the near future. Besides, once her body had healed so that she could function again, Doretta would most likely return to teaching, which only made sense. Warren really wanted to keep the building he and William had bought and try to make a go of the health food store they'd been so excited about opening, but he wasn't sure he could do it alone. Warren couldn't help worrying about what would happen in the days ahead.

He massaged the back of his neck and closed his eyes. *Lord, I need Your help with so many things right now. Please give my family the comfort we need today and much needed support in the things we must do.*

A fluttery ruffle as a chicken preened in the small enclosure nearby halted Warren's thoughts. He watched as a collection of fluffy hens crossed the chicken run in jerks and stops, digging holes, pecking for bugs, and preening, the way the first hen he'd seen had done.

His gaze went to what was left of the vegetable patch. Most of the produce had been picked in late October, leaving only root vegetables still in the ground. Wilted stalks and limp, discolored leaves were a reminder that the remnants of the once-healthy-looking garden had been left unattended. Warren remembered William helping to plant the carrots, which were his favorite vegetable. The same day, he'd also bought and planted a couple of yellow pear tomato plants, which were Mom's favorites. *Gardening was a hobby of sorts that my twin brother truly enjoyed doing,* Warren thought.

For now, everything seemed void around the place and less exciting. He could still picture the sparkle in his brother's eyes when he'd spoken about looking forward to being the best husband he could for Doretta. *It seemed like everything was going so well for my brother. Until the day of the accident, that is.*

Warren's shoulders drooped as he heaved a sigh and moved slowly away from the barn. With William gone, nothing seemed right anymore. All he felt like doing was crawling into bed and pulling the covers over his head. But he had work to do and a major decision to make.

*I need to pull myself up by the bootstraps and take one day at a time. Mom and Dad are grieving over the loss of William too, and I need to be there for them.*

A vision of Doretta popped into Warren's head, and he stopped walking. Although he hadn't gone to the hospital to see her, since only her close family members had been allowed to visit, he'd prayed for her every day since the accident. He felt sure that by now Doretta had regained consciousness and been told about William's death.

Warren's vision blurred and he shivered not from the cold but rather the sadness he felt for everyone who grieved William's death. He wanted to help Doretta through this ordeal but didn't know if she would allow him to, as the closeness they'd had as children had lessened after Doretta and William became a couple. It wasn't that Warren wouldn't have liked for him and Doretta to have remained close, but he would never have made a move on his brother's girlfriend, nor would he have expected her to reciprocate if he had.

Warren bowed his head and closed his eyes. *Please, Lord, give me the strength and wisdom to make the right decisions about my future, and show me how to help others who have been affected and are hurting because of the tragedy of my brother's death.*



### *Paradise, Pennsylvania*

Eleanor sat in the quiet, dimly lit living room, rocking her precious little girl. Rosetta was such a good baby and hardly fussed at all, unless she was hungry or needed her diaper changed. The baby's silky hair rested against

her cheek, and the soft fragrance from Rosetta's lavender bath soap was a lovely welcome to Eleanor's senses. She felt blessed, although a little guilty for being so happy when her best friend lay in a hospital bed with multiple injuries. Sweet Doretta should have been married by now, not broken, and soon would be grieving for the man she had lost. What a shock it would be when Doretta's mother, Amanda, told her that William had lost his life in the accident they'd been involved in. With the way those two had been thrown out of the mangled buggy, it was a miracle that Doretta had survived. The driver of the vehicle they'd smashed into had suffered only minor injuries, but William's horse had also been killed.

Eleanor thought about the message she'd listened to last evening when she'd gone to the phone shed. Amanda had called, wanting to let Eleanor know that as soon as Doretta became fully awake, she would tell her daughter about William's death as well as explain the extent of her injuries. Amanda had asked Eleanor to pray that God would give her the right words and for Doretta to find comfort in them.

Eleanor drew in a deep breath and released it slowly. *My poor sweet friend. I can only imagine what a shock all of this will be to her when she learns the truth. Doretta was such a big help to me when Vic and I went through the problems caused by his drinking, and now it is my turn to help her. Oh, how I wish I could be there for her right now. I feel guilty for staying here in our cozy home with my precious baby cradled in my arms, when Doretta is lying in a hospital room in Fort Wayne.*

She stroked Rosetta's soft cheek and studied the infant's dark lashes as her eyelids closed in slumber. Eleanor and Vic had taken the baby to Grabill for William's funeral a week ago, but they hadn't been able to go to the hospital to see Doretta because she'd been heavily sedated and they weren't part of Doretta's family.

*Is it too soon to make another trip there?* Eleanor wondered. *Would Vic be able to get time off work again so we could go?* Vic's boss had a lot of indoor work going on, and sometimes Vic worked ten-hour days. Before and after work, much of his free time was taken up by chores. And when Vic wasn't

working, he had counseling sessions at the clinic in Quarryville, where he'd received help for his addiction to alcohol.

*Maybe he wouldn't mind if the baby and I went to Grabill for a few days or so without him,* Eleanor concluded. *I really do feel the need to see Doretta and offer my condolences and words of comfort to her in person.*

She leaned forward and kissed her daughter's forehead. *I'll ask your daadi as soon as he gets home.*



*Fort Wayne, Indiana*

Doretta groaned and squinted against the invading light permeating the room. *But what room am I in?* she wondered. *I'm lying on a bed, but it doesn't feel like my own. There are strange noises and smells I don't recognize. My head and every place on my body hurts, but I don't know why.*

"Oh, thanks be to God—you're fully awake. Can you see and hear me clearly, Doretta?"

"Mama? Is that you?"

"Yes, dear one, I'm right here by your bed."

Doretta blinked a few times as her mother's face, although a bit blurry, came into view. "Wh—where am I? Why do I hurt so much?"

"You're in the hospital. You were in a terrible accident on a road not far from our town."

Doretta felt an uncomfortable tightening within her chest. "Are . . .are you sure?"

"Yes, it happened ten days ago."

*Ten days ago?* "I don't remember. . ." Doretta squeezed her eyes shut, trying to conjure up some memory of the incident her mother spoke about. *What is the last thing I do remember?* Her thoughts seemed frozen as she attempted to search for answers. She tried to sit up, but the stabbing pain in her body made it impossible to move. In addition, an unyielding, cage-like thing held her head in place and kept it from moving to the right or left. What was this strange contraption that held her captive?

“What’s wrong with me, Mama? How bad am I hurt, and what is this uncomfortable thing attached to my upper body?”

“In addition to head trauma, some broken ribs, and a broken arm, you sustained a severe neck break and had to be put into a halo brace to keep your neck and spine from moving while you heal.” Mama’s voice faltered. “Oh, Doretta, my dear daughter, it could have been much worse. You’re lucky to be alive.”

Doretta’s throbbing head felt as though it had been filled with cobwebs, and she could hardly process what her mother had said. *I was in an accident, of which I have no recollection. There are broken bones, and Mama said I have a head and neck injury. No wonder I hurt so much.*

Doretta had seen a man wearing a halo brace once, but she didn’t personally know anyone who had ever been forced to wear one. The one thing she knew for sure was that the metal contraption was very constrictive. She figured she must look quite ugly and couldn’t imagine being able to sit or walk with it on. “H—how long will I have to wear the halo?” she asked.

“The doctor said it will be necessary to keep it on for six to twelve weeks. After it’s removed, your neck muscles will be weak, and you’ll most likely need to wear a soft neck brace for a time.”

Doretta tried to take in her mother’s words. This all seemed so unreal—like a bad dream. Only this was all too real. Doretta would not wake up and discover that she’d only had a nightmare. *How can I deal with this pain?*

“Your doctors and nurses are skilled, and you have many people praying for you.” Mama’s voice had a soothing quality about it. “Your injuries will heal, and after a time, you will get used to wearing the halo. Once you’re released from the hospital, I will be your primary caregiver at home. It may be hard to sit or stand in one position very long, and you will need my help getting into different positions. Due to your multiple injuries, you will need some physical therapy during your recovery. You’ll have to learn how to lift, twist, and bend so that you don’t put too much strain on your neck and back—that’s very important, Doretta.”

Doretta stared at the ceiling, struggling not to cry. There was one more question on her mind that needed to be answered right now. “Where is William?” she asked. “The last thing I remember is waiting for him to pick me up. He said there was a surprise he wanted to show me.”

Mama placed her hand on Doretta’s arm—the good one in which she felt no pain. “William did pick you up. You were riding in his open buggy when the accident occurred.” Mama paused, and Doretta saw tears in her mother’s brown eyes. “It breaks my heart to tell you this, but William died in the crash.”

A knot formed in Doretta’s stomach, and she saw spots before her eyes. “No, it’s not true. William can’t be dead. We’re getting married on the ninth of November.”

Mama clasped Doretta’s hand and gave her fingers a tender squeeze. “Today is November the sixteenth, and William’s funeral was held a week ago.”

Doretta still did not remember the accident, and she tried to shake her head, but the constraint of the rigid halo wouldn’t allow her to do so. “This can’t be, Mama. William cannot be dead.” The pitch of her voice rose higher as she spoke the words. “Oh, Mama, what am I gonna do? How can I go on living without him?”

“You’ll do it one day at a time, and your daed and I will be there to help you, as will the rest of our family and friends.”

Doretta nearly choked on the sob rising in her throat. No one could help her deal with this terrible tragedy. Not even God. He had taken William from her, and nothing would ever be the same.