

*Amish Greenhouse Mystery*

*Book 2*

THE  
MOCKINGBIRD'S  
SONG

WANDA &  
BRUNSTETTER

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



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# Dedication

To prayer warriors and encouragers Andy and Linda Barthol.  
Many thanks for all that you do!

*Weeping may endure for a night,  
but joy cometh in the morning.*

PSALM 30:5

A decorative rectangular frame with ornate scrollwork at the corners and midpoints of the top and bottom edges. The text "Chapter 1" is centered within the frame.

# Chapter 1

*Strasburg, Pennsylvania*

With her nose pressed against the cold glass, Sylvia Beiler gazed out the window at the fresh-fallen snow in her mother's backyard. The back of her eyes stung as they followed the outline of objects the light of day cast into the yard.

Sylvia's breathing deepened, and she began to relax as she remembered a previous holiday. She smiled for a moment, thinking about her deceased husband on a night such as this. How wonderful it had been to be with him and the children, sharing the joy the holiday brought them.

*And such special times I had here growing up, before starting my new life with the man I loved. How would things be right now if nothing had happened to our precious loved ones?*

Sylvia shifted her weight when she heard a familiar sound that echoed of bygone days. Laughter and excited conversation drifted from the living room into the kitchen where she stood, but she felt no merriment on this holiday. This was Sylvia's first Christmas without the three men who'd been so special in her life—her beloved husband, devoted father, and caring brother.

It was hard to understand how the rest of her family could be so cheerful today. Didn't they miss Dad, Toby, and Abe? Didn't they care how much Sylvia still grieved? Why weren't they grieving too?

With a weary sigh, Sylvia turned away from the window and sank into a chair at the table. She had offered to get the coffee going and cut the pies for dessert, but all she really wanted to do was go to her bedroom and have a good cry.

Closing her eyes, Sylvia let her mind drift back to that horrible day

eight months ago when Dad, Toby, and Abe had decided to go after ice cream to have with Mom's birthday cake. Dad's horse and buggy had barely left the driveway to pull onto the main road when a truck hit them from behind. All occupants in the buggy, along with the horse, had died, leaving Sylvia without a husband and the job of raising two small children on her own.

She'd been depressed for so long she hardly remembered what it felt like to feel normal and happy. Unable to live in the home she and Toby had shared, Sylvia had moved in with her mother, where her sister, Amy, and brother, Henry, also lived. Each of them had faced challenges since that fateful day, but Amy seemed to be coping better than any of them.

*Probably because she and Jared are back together, Sylvia told herself. She's excited about her wedding next year and seems to enjoy helping Mom in the greenhouse. I can't blame her for that, but today, of all days, my sister should be missing our departed love ones.*

Sylvia's youngest brother still had a chip on his shoulder and had done some rebellious things since the accident. He'd been doing a little better lately, but Henry's rebellious nature and negative attitude had not fully dissipated.

Another thing that bothered Sylvia was Mom's old boyfriend Monroe, and how he'd made a habit of coming by to check on them and asking if there was anything he could do to help out. Monroe had reminded Mom several times that it wasn't good for her and the family to be alone without a man to watch out for them. Monroe always seemed to know when to drop by and would often stay, at Mom's invitation, to eat a meal with the family.

Those times when he waited for Mom to come in from the greenhouse were awkward too. Sylvia always tried to come up with topics of conversation, which had made her feel more uneasy as she wasn't comfortable around people she didn't know well. Each time Mom would come in from work, Monroe seemed eager to please. In Sylvia's opinion, the man was trying to worm his way into their lives. Something about the fellow wasn't right, but she couldn't put her finger on it. As far as she could tell, Monroe seemed to avoid the greenhouse. If anything was to be fixed, it usually pertained to the house or barn. It was obvious to her that Henry wasn't thrilled with the fellow either. He seemed even

more irritable and standoffish whenever Monroe came calling. With more time on her hands during the winter months, Mom's routine was random, and she could come and go freely. Sylvia felt sure that was why they'd seen less of Mom's male friend lately. For now, things were nicer around the Kings' place.

Sylvia felt thankful her mother's greenhouse was closed for the winter and wouldn't reopen until early spring. She'd only worked there for the two weeks Mom had been in Clymer, New York, helping their brother, Ezekiel, and his wife, Michelle, when she'd given birth to a son in July. Those days had been difficult for Sylvia, and it was all she could do to conduct business or talk to customers who'd visited the greenhouse. Leaving her children to be cared for by their friend Mary Ruth had also been hard, even though Sylvia felt they were in capable hands. For now, she'd be able to breathe easy and forget about the greenhouse until spring.

Keeping her eyes closed, Sylvia massaged her forehead and then her cheekbones. *My place is here with Allen and Rachel.* Rachel had turned one last week, and Allen would be three in January. They needed a full-time mother, not a babysitter.

Sylvia's mother seemed okay with the arrangement, but things might be different once Amy and Jared were married. After the newlyweds moved into a place of their own, Amy might not work in the greenhouse anymore—especially when children came along.

Henry also helped in the greenhouse, but not in the same capacity as Amy, who waited on customers, kept things well-stocked, and did the books to make sure they remained in the black. Between their place being vandalized, as well as a new greenhouse springing up in the area, there had been some concern about whether they could survive financially. So far, they were making it, but if more destruction to the greenhouse or other areas on their property occurred, it might set them back too far to recover their losses. Since the greenhouse had closed for the winter, there had been no attacks of vandalism. Sylvia could only hope it would stay that way once the business reopened in early spring.

*I've got to stop thinking about all of this,* she reprimanded herself. *Worrying has never gotten me anywhere.*

"Sylvia, are you all right?"

The soft touch on her shoulder and Mom's gentle voice drew Sylvia's thoughts aside. "Jah, I'm fine. Just thinking is all."

"About Toby?"

Sylvia's head moved slowly up and down. "This is our first Christmas without him, Dad, and Abe. I miss them all so much."

Mom pulled out the chair beside Sylvia and sat. "I miss them too, and the rest of our family does as well."

"With all the merriment going on out there in the other room, it doesn't sound like anyone else is missing our loved ones as much as I am today."

Mom gave Sylvia's shoulder a light pat. "That is certainly not true. Everyone deals with their grief in different ways. Also, with this being Christmas, which should be a most joyous occasion, it's a day to be thankful and celebrate."

Sylvia's throat felt so swollen, it nearly closed up. She couldn't say the words out loud, but truth was she was still angry that God had taken her husband, father, and brother. If their heavenly Father loved the world so much that He sent His only Son to earth to die for everyone's sins, couldn't He have prevented the accident that took their loved ones' lives?

"Don't you think your *kinner*, as well as Ezekiel and Michelle's children, deserve a happy Christmas?" Mom spoke quietly, with her mouth close to Sylvia's ear.

All Sylvia could manage was another slow nod.

"All right then, let's get out the pies and try to be happy for the rest of the day. Everyone has moved into the dining room, and they're waiting for dessert."

Mom rose from her chair, and Sylvia followed suit. For her children's sake, she would put a smile on her face and try to enjoy the rest of the day, even if her heart was not in it.



"Who made the pumpkin pies?" Amy's boyfriend, Jared, asked as they all sat around the dining-room table.

"She did." Amy pointed at Mom, and then she gestured to Sylvia. "My sister and I are responsible for the apple and chocolate cream pies."

Jared smacked his lips. "Since I had a small slice of each one, I can honestly say they're all delicious. Truthfully, though, pumpkin's my favorite."

Amy looked over at him and smiled. "Guess after we're married I'll be making lots of pumpkin pies."

"I look forward to that." Jared grinned back at her, before lifting his coffee mug to his lips.

A stab of envy pierced Sylvia's heart, seeing the happiness on her sister's glowing face. She remembered the joy bubbling in her soul when she'd first realized she had fallen in love with Toby. Their courting days were such happy ones, and being married to him made Sylvia feel complete in every way. She'd been convinced that they were meant to be together and felt sure they would have many years of marital bliss. Sylvia had looked forward to raising a family with Toby and growing old together. How could God have taken her hopes and dreams away?

She looked down at the napkin in her lap and blinked against the tears threatening to spill over. *I've got to quit feeling sorry for myself. It's not doing me or the rest of my family any good. For the sake of everyone at this table, I will try to act cheerful during the remainder of this day.*

Sylvia lifted her head, put a slice of apple pie on her plate, and then passed the chocolate cream pie to Ezekiel. "Here you go, Brother. I know this is one of your favorites."

He gave her a wide grin and nodded. "You bet. Whenever my *fraa* asks what kind of pie I would like, I always pick chocolate cream." Ezekiel's smile grew wider as he looked at his wife.

A tinge of pink spread across Michelle's cheeks. "I do try to keep my husband happy." She poked Ezekiel's stomach. "Especially when it comes to his requests for certain foods."

Ezekiel chuckled. "I'll admit it—I'm spoiled."

Sylvia forced herself to laugh along with most of the people at the table. Her children, as well as Ezekiel and Michelle's daughter, Angela Mary, were focused on eating their pie and wouldn't have understood what was so funny anyhow.

Sylvia glanced at her nephew, Vernon, asleep in the playpen that had been set up across the room. It was hard to believe he was five months old already. The little guy was such a good baby—hardly fussed at all

unless his diapers were wet or he'd become hungry.

*I wonder if Michelle knows how lucky she is to be married to my brother and able to have more children.* Sylvia blotted her lips with the napkin. *Guess I should be grateful for the two kinner I have, because they will never have any more siblings.* The idea of getting married again was so foreign to her that she couldn't wrap her mind around it. No man could ever replace Toby.

Needing to focus on something else, Sylvia's ears perked up when Ezekiel began a conversation with her brother who had recently turned sixteen.

"Say, Henry, I haven't had a chance to ask—how are things going with you these days?"

"Okay, I guess," Henry mumbled around a slice of pumpkin pie.

"Is that crow you showed me when we visited this fall still hanging around the place?"

Henry shook his head. "Haven't seen Charlie since the weather turned cold. Guess he left the area for someplace warmer—probably flew off with a flock of other crows." He tapped his chin. "I have heard of some crows that don't migrate in the winter. Guess my crow wasn't one of 'em though."

*Maybe the bird is dead. Someone could have shot him, or he might have died of old age.* Sylvia didn't voice her thoughts. No point in upsetting her temperamental brother. Although Henry seemed a bit more subdued now that the greenhouse was closed for the winter, leaving him with fewer chores to do, the chip on his shoulder had not fallen off.

"That's too bad," Ezekiel said. "I was hoping for another look at that noisy bird."

Henry shrugged his shoulders. "It don't matter; I've been watchin' other *veggel* that come into our yard, and I look for them whenever I go for long walks."

"Are you birding?" The question came from Michelle.

"Jah. Watching for different birds and writing down what I notice about them has become a new hobby for me."

Mom's brows lifted high. "Really, Son? Why haven't you mentioned this before?"

"I did. Guess you weren't listening."

“Bird-watching is a great hobby,” Jared interjected. “I’d do it myself if I wasn’t so busy with my roofing business and some other projects I’ve been helping my *daed* with.”

Henry didn’t respond as he poured himself another glass of milk. Sylvia figured he was probably upset because Mom hadn’t listened when he’d talked to her about bird-watching before. Sylvia did recall him having mentioned it, and it really was no surprise, what with the interest he’d taken in the crow.

*It’s good that my brother has found something positive to keep him occupied and out of trouble, she thought. Being on the lookout for certain birds, and jotting down information about them is a lot better than Henry hanging out with his friend Seth. From what I can tell, that young man has been a bad influence on my impressionable brother. Henry was not like that when Dad and Abe were alive.*

A knock on the front door pulled Sylvia’s thoughts aside once more.

“Would you like me to see who it is?” Ezekiel looked at Mom.

She gave a quick nod.

Ezekiel rose from his seat and left the room. When he returned a few minutes later, blinking rapidly, he looked at Mom and said, “There’s a clean-shaven Amish man in the living room who says he came to see you. He even has a gift.”

Sylvia clutched her napkin with such force that it tore. *I bet it’s Monroe Esb. I wonder what he’s doing here. I hope Mom doesn’t invite him to join us at the table.*