

*Amish Greenhouse Mystery*

Book 3

*THE*  
ROBIN'S  
GREETING

WANDA &  
BRUNSTETTER

SHILOH RUN  PRESS

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# Dedication

To my Pennsylvania friends, Diane and Phil,  
who are avid bird-watchers.

*I will say of the LORD,  
He is my refuge and my fortress:  
my God; in him will I trust.*

PSALM 91:2

# Chapter 1

*Strasburg, Pennsylvania*

*Belinda. . . Belinda. . . Belinda. . .*

She opened her eyes, still heavy with sleep, sure that the voice she'd heard was her beloved husband, Vernon, calling out to her. But that couldn't be. He'd been gone nearly two years—killed in a tragic accident that had also taken the lives of her son Abe and son-in-law, Toby. The voice Belinda heard must have been a dream, or just the howling November wind outside her bedroom window.

Belinda lay there, with the quilt on her bed pulled up to her chin. The lovely covering with the Wedding Ring pattern had been made by her mother and given to Belinda and Vernon the day they'd gotten married. To her, it was a priceless treasure.

Belinda remained still as she reminisced about days gone by. While there'd been some tough times over the years, nothing she had faced compared to the agony of losing three family members in the same day. Her struggles had increased with the responsibility of running the greenhouse without Vernon's help. Belinda didn't know what she would have done without the help of her daughters and teenage son. They'd needed the greenhouse for financial support, and even more they'd needed each other for emotional support.

Now that Amy was married to Jared, and Sylvia was in a relationship with Dennis, things had changed once again. Belinda was okay with all of that. What she wasn't okay with was the senseless vandalism on her property, most recently the barn. Seeing the building her husband built go up in flames had pierced her heart like a dagger. No one knew how the fire had started. It may have been arson, but if someone had been smoking in or near the barn, the fire could have been an accident.

Unable to resume her sleep, Belinda fluffed her pillows and sat up in bed. How grateful she was for all the help they'd received a few weeks ago when they built a replacement barn. English and Amish friends, neighbors, and family members came together and gave of their time. Now Belinda and her family were ready to begin again, with the hope and prayer that things would settle down and there'd be no more vandalism or tragedy. Given all the needless attacks they'd experienced, Belinda felt certain someone wanted to put them out of business, and perhaps do enough harmful things so Belinda would become discouraged and move somewhere else.

She swiped her tongue across her parched lips and swallowed. At one time, Belinda had believed that her youngest son might have been responsible for the vandalism that had occurred in and around the greenhouse. After his father and brother died, Henry had let it be known that he did not want to take over the beekeeping job Abe used to do. Nor did Henry wish to help in the greenhouse. But he'd assured Belinda that he was not responsible for any of the destruction to their property. She had no reason to doubt him. Henry had proved himself many times with all the help he'd done around here. If the greenhouse folded, Henry would have as much to lose as Belinda and her daughters, since it was the sole means of their livelihood.

Belinda's eldest son, Ezekiel, a minister who lived in Clymer, New York, had offered to give up his bee-raising supply business and move back to Strasburg to help in the greenhouse. But Belinda insisted that he and his family stay put in the community that had become their home.

Bringing her thoughts to a halt, she turned on the battery-operated light resting on the nightstand beside her bed and looked at the alarm clock. It was almost 5:00 a.m. She turned off the alarm, pulled the covers back, and climbed out of bed. It was time to begin another day.



When Belinda entered the kitchen, she found her eldest daughter in front of the stove. The light from the gas lamp hanging on a ceiling hook illuminated the room, and except for the whistle of the wind outside, all was quiet.

“*Guder mariye*, Sylvia.” Belinda placed a hand on her daughter’s shoulder. “You’re up early this morning.”

“Good morning, Mom.” Sylvia turned the propane gas burner on under the tea kettle. “The howling wind woke me, and I couldn’t get back to sleep.”

Belinda nodded. “Same here.” She moved across the room and lifted the dark green shade that covered the kitchen window. It would be another hour or so before the light of day replaced the darkness in their yard.

Once the water heated, Sylvia made a small pot of tea. “Why don’t we get out our favorite teacups and sit until it’s time to fix breakfast?” she suggested.

“Good idea. A cup of warm tea is what I need right now.” Belinda got out the cups and joined Sylvia at the table. A few minutes later, she poured tea for both of them. It was nice to have some uninterrupted time with her daughter. With Belinda running the greenhouse, and Sylvia taking care of her two children, they didn’t get many moments alone.

“It’s hard to believe November is here already,” Sylvia commented. “Seems like just yesterday when Amy and Jared got married.”

Belinda smiled. “Thanksgiving will be here in a few weeks, and next thing we know, it’ll be Christmas.”

“*Jab*. Too bad Ezekiel and his family won’t be coming down for Christmas like they did last year.”

“But we’re all planning to go to their place to celebrate the holiday this year, and that will be nice.”

Sylvia picked up her spoon and swirled the amber liquid in her cup. “I had hoped they would come here instead.”

“How come? I figured you and the *kinner* would enjoy getting out of Strasburg for a few days and seeing where your brother lives.”

Sylvia drank some tea and blotted her lips with a napkin. “At first I wanted to go, but now that I’m seeing Dennis regularly, I’ll feel bad about leaving him to celebrate the holiday alone.”

“I would think he’d want to spend Christmas with his mother and siblings.”

“I’m sure he would enjoy that, but if Dennis leaves the area for the holiday, he will have to get someone to watch his dog, not to mention

the horses he's recently bought for breeding purposes."

Belinda tipped her head. "So what are you saying, Daughter—that you would like to stay here so you can spend the holiday with Dennis and cook him Christmas dinner?"

Sylvia smiled wistfully. "If the children and I went to New York with you, I wouldn't enjoy myself knowing Dennis was all by himself."

Belinda stared into her cup of tea, evaluating her daughter's last statement. She couldn't blame Sylvia for wanting to be with Dennis, especially since they were courting. She had a hunch that it wouldn't be long before Dennis asked Sylvia to marry him. Things would surely be different around here, if and when that event occurred. Sylvia, along with her daughter, Rachel, and son, Allen, had been living with Belinda since the tragic accident that took her husband's life. It was hard to think of how things would be if they moved out of the house to begin a new life with Dennis Weaver.

"Would you mind if the children and I don't go with you to Ezekiel's for Christmas?"

Sylvia's question pushed Belinda's thoughts aside. "If you feel you should stay here to spend Christmas with Dennis, it's fine with me. I'm sure Ezekiel and Michelle will be disappointed, but they'll also understand." The words didn't come easy for Belinda, but it was the correct thing to say. She had no right to interfere in Sylvia and Dennis's relationship. If Belinda were in her daughter's place, she'd no doubt make the same choice.

"*Danki*, Mom, for understanding." Sylvia took another sip of tea.

The two women spent the next hour talking about other things. When a ray of sun shone through the kitchen window, Belinda got up. "Guess we ought to get busy and fix breakfast before the kinner wake up." She glanced toward the hallway door. "I'm surprised Henry isn't up already and outside doing his morning chores."

"He came in pretty late last night, after spending time with some of his friends. Maybe he forgot to set the alarm and overslept."

"That could be." Belinda glanced at the clock on the far wall. "I would call up the stairs to see if he's up, but I don't want to wake your children."

"If you like, I'll go upstairs and knock on his door. It's about time to get Rachel and Allen up anyway."

“That might be a good idea,” Belinda said. “He needs to get the chores done so we can eat breakfast and get the greenhouse open on time.”

After Sylvia left the room, Belinda cleared the table and put their cups in the sink. As she glanced out the window, she was taken by surprise when a male robin flew out of a tree in the yard and bumped the kitchen window. Believing it was just a fluke, and that the bird would return to the tree, Belinda merely shrugged and turned on the water. She’d no more than filled each cup when the robin was back again. This time he bumped the window a little harder.

Belinda shook her head. “What in the world?” She assumed with cooler weather setting in, most of the robins in their yard would have moved on to warmer territory by now.

As Belinda stood watching, the robin kept hitting the window, then returning to the tree.

She shook her head. “What a silly *voggel*.”

“What bird are you talking about?” Henry asked when he sauntered into the room.

“That one.” Belinda pointed to the robin as it made another pass at the window. “The crazy thing acts like it wants to get into our house.”

“He probably sees his reflection in the window and thinks it’s another bird.” Henry moved closer to the window and looked out.

“Well, I can think of a better way to be greeted this morning than watching that poor bird beat himself up.” Belinda rolled her eyes. “Wouldn’t you think with the colder weather we’ve been having that Mr. Robin would have moved on to a warmer climate by now?”

Henry shook his head. “Not necessarily, Mom. Robins can withstand very cold temperatures. It’s not that unusual to see some of ’em in the wintertime, although they survive off a different kind of food than the worms and seeds they eat during the warmer months,” he added.

Belinda stared at Henry with her mouth slightly open. “I had no idea you knew that much about robins. How’d you gain such wisdom?”

With a single raised eyebrow, he cocked his head. “Do I have to remind you that I’ve been bird-watching for some time, not to mention reading up in that bird book of mine. I can tell you a lot more about robins if you’re interested.”

“Maybe another time.” Belinda pointed to Henry’s hat and jacket,

hanging on a wall peg near the back door. “Right now you need to get out to the barn to do your chores, and I need to get breakfast ready so we can eat when you come back in.”

“Jah. I’ll go right now.” Henry slipped into his jacket and slapped the straw hat on his head. Once the weather got colder, he’d no doubt wear his knitted stocking cap instead.

Henry had no more than gone out the door when the robin smacked against the window again.

Belinda reached up and pulled the shade down. If the crazy bird was determined to keep that up, at least she didn’t have to watch it.



After Sylvia got Rachel in her high chair and Allen on a booster seat, she joined Belinda and Henry at the kitchen table. Belinda took hold of her grandson’s hand as they all bowed their heads for silent prayer.

*Heavenly Father, she prayed, please guide and direct our lives today. We ask that You would provide for our needs and help us to set a good example for others. Bless this food and bless all who are seated at my table. In Jesus’ name I ask it. Amen.*

Once Sylvia and Henry raised their heads and opened their eyes, Belinda forked a pancake from the platter in front of her and put it on Allen’s plate. After passing the platter on to Henry, she poured a small amount of maple syrup over Allen’s pancake.

The young boy looked over at her and grinned. “*Gut pannekuche.*”

“Jah,” she replied, “The pancakes are good.”

“Think I’ll have some *hunnich* on mine instead of *sirrop*.” Henry passed the bottle of syrup to Sylvia and reached for the jar of honey. “Since I work so hard at beekeeping, I deserve the fruits of my labor.”

Belinda couldn’t argue with that. In spite of the fact that beekeeping was not her son’s favorite thing to do, he’d been expected to take over the job after his older brother was killed. He still complained about it at times, but not as much as he had at first.

As they ate their meal, the conversation centered mostly around the sale they would be having at the greenhouse next week. In addition to fall plants and flowers, many other things they sold in the greenhouse,

like honey, jam, solar lights, and several outdoor decorative items, would be on sale. Belinda hoped they would do well and make enough to put some money away for the winter months when the greenhouse would be closed.

They were getting close to finishing their meal when a knock sounded on the back door. Belinda went to answer it. Monroe Esh stood on the porch, holding a bakery box.

"I brought you some glazed *faasnachtkuche*." He grinned and held the box out to her. "Figured you might like them for breakfast."

"It was kind of you to think of us, but we're already in the middle of eating." Belinda paused, unable to maintain eye contact with this attractive fifty-two-year-old Amish man. When they had been teenagers, Monroe had been interested in Belinda. She'd been flattered by his attention but chose Vernon instead. Monroe had moved away from Strasburg and returned to the area several months ago. He had been coming around ever since, offering to help out if needed. He clearly wanted to renew a relationship with Belinda, but she was unsure of her feelings for him and not nearly ready to make any kind of commitment.

Belinda took the offered doughnuts. "Danki. If you haven't eaten this morning, why don't you come in and have some pancakes with us? Or you could eat one of your doughnuts."

Monroe offered her a wide smile. "Don't mind if I do."

Belinda led the way to the kitchen, and Monroe kept in step with her. When they entered the room, he walked up to the table and greeted Sylvia and Henry.

Sylvia said hello, but Henry just sat with his arms folded. This was not the first time Belinda's son had given Monroe the cold shoulder. He clearly did not care for the man.

"Please, take a seat, and I'll get you a plate." Belinda set the box of doughnuts on the table, and then gestured to an empty chair.

"Sure thing." He hung up his jacket and hat on the wall peg next to Henry's.

Monroe bowed his head for a few seconds, then opened his eyes and forked three pancakes onto his plate and covered them with plenty of syrup. After his first bite, he grinned at Belinda. "These are sure tasty. You're a good cook, Belinda."

"I can't take all the credit," she responded. "Sylvia mixed the batter.

I'm only responsible for making sure the pancakes cooked all the way through and didn't get too brown."

"Well, all that being said, they're delicious." He smacked his lips.

When Belinda glanced at Henry, she couldn't miss his look of disapproval. *What was I supposed to do?* she asked herself. *I couldn't take the box of doughnuts from Monroe and shut the door in his face. I'm not trying to encourage this man, but I won't be unkind to him either. Henry needs to get over his irritation whenever Monroe comes around. I may have to remind him that the man was very helpful during our barn raising. That ought to count for something.*