

ROAD TO KINGDOM – **BOOK TWO**

# UNBREAKABLE

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To my dear friend and second mother, Kay  
Curless. You were the embodiment of true  
friendship. I pray God will help me follow your  
incredible example. I love you, beautiful girl.



# CHAPTER 1

*“All I know, Hope, is that you folks in Kingdom need to be careful.”* Flo neatly folded the piece of fabric I’d just purchased, running her thin fingers along the edge to create a sharp crease. “Two nights ago a church near Haddam burned to the ground. Someone is targeting houses of worship in this part of Kansas, and they don’t care about the denomination. They just hate Christians.”

“But Kingdom is so remote. Besides, when anyone new comes around, we know it. There’s only one road into town.” My words sounded reassuring, but the rash of recent attacks left me feeling troubled. Was our small Mennonite town in danger? The idea that someone was harming people because of their love for God was hard for me to understand.

“Just yesterday someone tried to run a car off the road outside of town,” Flo said. “Folks had a Christian bumper sticker. That was all it took to get them into trouble.”

“Was anyone hurt?”

She shrugged. “No. I think they were just being hassled,

but the car was forced off the road. Something like that could do a lot of damage to anyone in a buggy.”

“Well, no one’s bothered us. Except for a few teenagers who drive past our buggies too fast and spook our horses, most people are very respectful.”

Flo sighed. “I know you think Kingdom is special, that you have some kind of unique protection, but whoever is behind these acts of violence has shown nothing but ruthlessness. I’m afraid you’re sitting ducks out there, without a way to get help if you need it.”

She put my purchases into bags and handed them to me. “Please, even if you think I’m being paranoid, speak to your church leaders. Urge them to take precautions.” Flo, usually a rather dour person, gave me a rare smile. “You’re very special to me, Hope. I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

I smiled back, rattled by her words of caution yet appreciative of her concern. Flo and I were as different as night and day, but over the years we’d developed a deep friendship.

“What is your church doing to protect itself?” I asked.

She shook her head, causing the dyed red hair she’d piled on top to tilt to the side. “We don’t take chances. Mixing faith with firearms doesn’t bother us a bit. We’ve also added an armed security guard to watch the building at night when it’s empty.”

“I guess we’ll just have to trust in God’s ability to keep us safe. We don’t believe in using violence for any reason.”

Flo’s right eyebrow shot up. “Not even if you have to defend your lives?”

I stared at her, not quite certain how to answer. “As far as I know,” I said finally, “we’ve never had to face a situation

like that. But our leaders would never bend our beliefs to suit our circumstances.”

“Forgive me for saying this,” Flo said, shaking her head, “but that sounds pretty stubborn.”

“We’re not trying to be stubborn,” I said slowly, “but we are firm in our convictions. Changing our faith isn’t an option.”

“I’m trying to understand,” Flo insisted, “but what if the life of someone you loved was at stake? Would you alter your doctrine to protect them?”

I shook my head and picked up my bags. “All I can do is hope I never have to find out.”

She frowned. “Look, I realize you’re trying to live by your teachings, but I can’t accept the notion that God wants you to stand by and let evil men do whatever they want.” She reached out and grabbed my arm, her eyes bright with worry. “Please don’t blow this off, Hope. The Methodist church on the other side of town was vandalized one night while a young man was inside cleaning the carpet. He was beaten up pretty badly.”

I patted her hand. “All right, Flo. I’ll talk to one of our elders when I return.”

“Do you swear?” Her grip on my arm tightened.

I laughed. “Now you’ve asked me to do something else I can’t do. Mennonites aren’t supposed take oaths.”

Flo’s eyes narrowed as she stared at me. “Following a bunch of rules doesn’t make you any closer to God, Hope. You know that, right?”

“Yes, I do. But at the same time, why should I swear to something when I’ve already told you I will do as you asked? Isn’t my word good enough?”

Her expression relaxed as she thought this over. “Yes, your word is good enough.” She finally let me go. “But next time you come in, I’m going to make sure you followed through.”

She came around the side of the counter, and I put my packages down to give her a hug. “You’re such a blessing to me. Thank you for caring so much.”

Most people would probably think we looked odd. An older woman with bright red hair and overdone makeup hugging a plain Mennonite girl wearing a long dress covered with a white apron and a white prayer cap on her head. But Flo and I had moved beyond seeing our differences.

She let me go and swiped at her eyes with the back of her hand. “You take care of yourself, and I’ll see you next month.”

“I will. Do you think that royal blue fabric I ordered will be in by then?”

She snapped her fingers. “Well, for pity’s sake, I forgot all about that. It came in yesterday. You wait here a minute, and I’ll fetch it.”

I smiled. “Thank you. My friend Lizzie and her new husband are fixing up a house they bought on the edge of town. I want to present them with a quilt before they’re completely moved in.”

Flo chuckled. “Well, if anyone can put it together quickly, it’s you. You’re the fastest quilter I’ve ever known.”

“I suppose it’s a good talent to possess, since I run a quilt shop.” We laughed, and Flo went into her back room to get the material. She’d just left when I heard the bell over the front door ring.

I turned around and stared at the young woman who’d walked into the store. She was beautiful, with long blond



hair that fell softly over her shoulders. She wore jeans and a white cotton blouse with stitching around the neck. Bright red toenails peeked out from her sandals. The color on her toes matched her long fingernails. A little makeup accented her thick, dark lashes and large blue eyes. I'd seen beautiful women before, but there was something about this girl that caught my attention. I couldn't put my finger on exactly what it was.

I glanced down at my ordinary dress and my hands with short, unadorned nails. Quilting and sewing forced me to keep my fingernails trimmed, and none of the women in my church ever painted their nails. For just a moment, I found myself wondering what it would feel like to be the attractive girl who seemed so happy and carefree.

The fleeting thought left me feeling confused. I grabbed my packages and hurried toward the door. As I passed the young woman, we locked eyes. Hers widened with surprise as she took in my dress and prayer covering. For a brief second I felt a flush of embarrassment, but it quickly turned to remorse. I wasn't ashamed of God, nor was I ashamed of my Mennonite heritage. I made sure my packages were secure and nearly ran from the store.

As the door closed behind me, I looked back and saw the girl watching me. At the same time I saw my reflection in the glass door. A girl from the world and a girl from a small Mennonite town both stared back at me. The reason for my overreaction became clear. We could have been twins. The look on her face told me she'd seen the same thing.

I turned and walked quickly toward my buggy. Daisy, my horse, waited patiently outside, tied to a post near the door.

I put my sacks in the storage box under the buggy seat and then unhitched her. “You are such a good girl,” I said, rubbing her velvety muzzle with my hand. She whinnied softly, and I climbed up into the carriage. “It’s time to go home, Daisy.” I wanted to glance back toward the store to see if the blond woman was still watching me, but instead I kept my eyes focused on my beloved horse. Lightly flicking the reins, we headed into the street.

As Daisy and I turned toward Kingdom, the odd reaction I’d had to the woman in the store dissipated quickly. I had no interest in living a different life. Although several of my friends had left Kingdom at one time or another, I’d never had the urge. I’d been born and raised in the small town, and I loved it. Papa and Mama settled there not long before she became pregnant with me. Then Mama died after a severe asthma attack when I was only seven, and Papa had become both mother and father to me. I loved him with my whole heart. He would spend the rest of his life in Kingdom, and unless God told me to leave, I would do the same.

I loosened my hold on the reins and relaxed back into the seat. I could nod off to sleep and Daisy would deliver us safely home without any direction from me. We’d been making this monthly trip for a long time, and I was confident she knew the way as well as I did.

The main road toward Kingdom was never very busy. The few vehicles that used the road stayed pretty close to Washington, and after a few miles away from the city, I might not see any cars or trucks at all before taking the turnoff to our town. Most of the traffic I dealt with was in Washington itself. Although a lot of the people who lived there were ac-

customed to their Mennonite neighbors, some liked to drive slowly by us, gawking and sometimes even taking pictures.

I took a deep breath, filling myself with the sweetness of spring air and deep, rich earth. The wheat in the field was tall enough to wave in the gentle wind, and I was struck once again by the beauty of Kansas.

From the other direction, I saw a buggy coming my way. As it approached, I recognized John Lapp, one of the elders who'd left our church over a disagreement with our pastor and some of the other elders. Kingdom was moving away from a works-based culture. Our pastor taught lessons about the importance of grace and reminded us that Christ had set us free from works of the law. This didn't sit well with some of our members, John Lapp being one of the most vocal opponents.

I nodded to him as he drove past, and he returned my gesture with a barely discernible tip of his head. John's wife, Frances, had been ill for quite some time, and John was constantly driving to Washington for medicines and supplies she needed.

As Daisy's hooves clip-clopped down the dirt road that led home, the buggy swaying gently in time with her gait, I thought back to my conversation with Flo. I couldn't help but wonder who could be behind these vicious attacks. Perhaps I should take her warning seriously, but this kind of hate was beyond my experience. Kingdom was a special place, safe and protected from the outside world. The idea that we were in danger seemed extremely unlikely. However, since I'd told Flo I'd mention something to our leaders about the situation, I began to rehearse exactly what I would say.

Suddenly, the roar of an engine shook me from my contemplation. I automatically pulled Daisy as far to the edge of the road as I could. Glancing in my side mirror, I saw a bright red truck barreling down the dirt road, a wave of dust behind it. Only seconds before it reached us, I realized with horror that it was aimed straight for the back of my buggy. Not knowing what else to do, I pulled tightly on the reins, guiding Daisy into the ditch.

The truck roared past us, spraying us with gravel. The buggy teetered for a moment and then began to tip over on its side. Before it fell, I was able to jump into the ditch, landing hard on my hands and knees. Daisy staggered under the weight of the stricken buggy.

I forced myself to my feet even though my right arm hurt and my knee burned where it had been badly scraped. I stumbled over as quickly as I could to unhook Daisy from her harness, pushing against the weight of the buggy so she wouldn't topple. Breaking a leg could put her life in jeopardy, and I had no intention of losing her. I cried out as I struggled to release her from her restraints, holding tightly on to the reins. Fear caused her to fight me. She whinnied and tried to rear up, and I held on for dear life while trying to calm her. Once I finally got the harness off and she was freed from the buggy, she began to quiet down.

I took the reins and started to lead her back up to the road. Over her soft, frightened nickering I heard the sound of an idling engine.

Surely the driver of the pickup was coming back to help me, regretting his carelessness. Thankfully, his lack of judgment hadn't cost us more than a damaged buggy, a nervous horse,

and a few cuts and scrapes. I hoped he was aware that the situation could have been much worse and that he would be more careful when approaching any other buggies he might encounter on this road.

Although it was difficult to make anything out through all the dust, I could see the red truck had turned around and was parked about fifty yards down the road with its motor racing. As Daisy and I strained to make it up the incline, I waved at him. I hoped he would help me get the buggy out of the ditch and back to Kingdom. One wheel had come completely off, and the axle was bent. There was no way I could drive it home.

It wasn't until he put his vehicle into gear again and stepped on the accelerator that I became aware that he wasn't concerned about my condition. This man had another interest entirely. Whoever was driving that truck was purposely trying to scare me!

I pulled hard on the reins and attempted to lead a terrified and confused Daisy as far back into the ditch as possible before the truck reached us. I prayed as loudly as I could, calling on God for help. The truck's engine seemed to grow louder. Was he already upon us? I turned quickly to look and saw another truck racing down the road, coming from the other direction. It was headed straight for the red truck. A few feet before they would have collided, the red truck slowed to a stop and the blue truck slammed on its brakes. Then it sat in front of the other vehicle as if trying to provoke a confrontation. The driver of the red truck gunned his motor several times, challenging his adversary to respond. I watched this frightening encounter, unable to do anything

to protect myself and Daisy. There was nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide.

Finally, the driver of the red truck threw it into reverse and, with engine whining, sped down the road backwards. Then it spun around and drove away, leaving a huge trail of dust and gravel in its wake. The blue truck waited a few moments and then began to back up slowly toward Daisy and me. I trembled with fear, putting my hand to my chest as my heart pounded wildly. Was this driver a threat as well? Flo's warning about a car being forced off the road near Washington rang loudly in my head.

The only thing I could think of to protect myself was to kneel down in the ditch, put my hands over my head, and plead for God's intervention. It was a desperate prayer borne out of terror. I held Daisy's reins tightly in my trembling hands, wondering if I should let her go. Perhaps she could run away to safety. She whinnied and stomped as the sound of the truck's engine grew closer. Then everything became quiet. Afraid to look up, I simply waited with my eyes closed.

A man's voice cut through the silence. "Hope, are you all right?"

I raised my head and found myself staring into Jonathon Wiese's bright blue eyes. Jonathon, a fairly new resident of Kingdom, wasn't trying to hurt me. He'd just rescued me. His face was pinched with concern.

"Oh, Jonathon. That . . . that truck . . ."

"Was out to get you." He held out his hand and I stood up, almost losing my balance. He reached out to catch me. "Hold on tight," he said as he lifted me out of the ditch and

onto the road. He took the reins from my hands and led Daisy up, talking gently to her, trying to calm her rattled nerves.

“You . . . you may have just saved my life,” I said, attempting to catch my breath. “I was so frightened.” Without any warning, I suddenly felt dizzy and cried out. Jonathon grabbed me before I fell. Then he picked me up in his arms and carried me toward his truck. I laid my head against his muscular chest, feeling safe and protected. He held me as if I weighed almost nothing.

“You stay here and rest,” he said as he gently put me onto his passenger seat. “I’m going back to get Daisy.”

Jonathon was a young man who had moved to our community with his family almost a year ago. He’d immediately started sharing his ideas about reforming Kingdom Mennonite Church. His opinions excited me as much as they upset my father. Right now, that argument didn’t seem the least bit important. I was just grateful God had sent him to help me.

Realizing that something felt amiss, I put my hand on the top of my head and discovered that I’d not only lost my prayer covering, most of my hair had been tugged out of its bun. Since my hair is usually anchored in place by a ribbon and several pins, it takes a lot to pull it out of place. I tried to gather my disheveled locks back together, but it was useless. My ribbon was gone, and the few pins I had left weren’t enough to hold my long hair. Not knowing what else to do, I yanked out the rest of the remaining pins and stuck them in my pocket. Then I ran my hands through my hair to make it less unkempt. Having Jonathon see me like this made me want to cry.

A few minutes later, Jonathon stuck his head inside the cab. His eyes widened as he gazed at me.

“I . . . I’m sorry,” I said, trying to push the thick tresses back from my face. “My hair must have gotten snagged on a branch or something. My prayer covering is gone . . . and my ribbon . . .”

Jonathon reached over and took my hand. I winced in pain. “Oh, Hope. I’m so sorry. You’ve been injured.”

I shook my head, trying not to cry. “I’m fine, really. I was just so scared.” Compassion shone in his eyes. “I’m sorry you have to see me like this.” I touched my hair with my other hand. “I must look just . . . awful.”

Jonathon didn’t say anything for a moment, and I realized with surprise that he was blushing. “Hope, you look like an angel. You’re so beautiful. . . .” He cleared his throat and the red in his cheeks deepened. “I’m sorry. I have no right to say something like that.”

I wiped my eyes with my apron, which probably wasn’t a good idea since it was torn and dirty. I wanted to act like a proper Mennonite lady, but something inside me jumped for joy to know that he thought I was beautiful. Of course, acknowledging his compliment wasn’t appropriate, so I quickly changed the subject.

“Is . . . is Daisy all right?”

“She’s fine, but your carriage is in bad shape. There’s no way you’ll be able to drive it back to town. I’m afraid we’ll have to leave both the buggy and Daisy here for a while because my truck is full of lumber. I can’t carry anything.”

The idea of deserting Daisy filled me with despair. What if the man in the red truck returned? What would happen to her? Even if he didn’t come back, she was frightened. I couldn’t just drive away and leave her alone. The tears I’d



been fighting reappeared, and I shook my head. “No. I’ll ride her home.”

Jonathon looked at me with concern. “I don’t think that’s a good idea. You seem pretty shaken.”

He was right, but I had no choice. Daisy was my friend and she needed me. I dabbed at my eyes again and forced myself to laugh lightly. “I’m sorry. I was a little rattled at first, but I’m calm now. Daisy and I will be fine.” I climbed out of the truck and stood in the road, trying to put on a brave face. Unfortunately, the dust stirred up by the dueling trucks was still swirling in the air. A spasm of coughing hit me. The warmth of the afternoon added to my discomfort.

“Are you okay?” he asked as he patted me on the back.

All I could do was hold up my hand to signal I was fine. I must not have been clear enough because Jonathon continued slapping me lightly. Finally I caught my breath.

“I really should be getting back,” I said in a raspy voice. “Papa is probably wondering where I am.”

He stopped thumping me. “If you insist on riding Daisy home, I’m going to follow behind you.”

I felt myself flush, embarrassed by his attention.

I shook my head. “You don’t need to do that.”

“I don’t want to hear another word about it, Hope. Some of the things I’ve heard in Clay Center chilled me to the bone. Maybe the person driving that truck was just trying to annoy you, but what if it was more than that? What if he was purposely trying to hit you? I won’t leave you on this road alone.”

“All right. I appreciate it.” I put my hand over my eyes, trying to shield them from the sun, which was shining brightly,

nearly blinding me. “My friend in Washington believes everyone in Kingdom needs to be very careful right now. Until this happened, I have to admit I thought her warning didn’t really apply to us. But now . . .”

Jonathon’s expression was grim. “A lot of folks in town are aware of the problem, but like you, I guess we’ve felt it wasn’t a direct threat to us. I have to wonder if what just happened proves we were wrong.” He ran his hand through his thick, dark hair. “If I hadn’t offered to pick up supplies for Noah, I wouldn’t have been here and . . .”

Even though we were standing in the sun, a shiver ran down my spine. Neither one of us needed to finish his thought. We both knew that the results could have been more serious.

“I-I guess we’d better head home.” I started to walk toward Daisy, who was standing nearby.

“Are you sure about this, Sister Kauffman? You still look a little pale.”

I smiled. “I’m afraid you can’t use my skin tone as a way to measure my condition. I’m always pale.”

He chuckled, helping to break a little of the tension. I felt warm at the sound of his laughter. It was deep and genuine. He reached up and pushed a lock of hair from his forehead. I felt my pulse race as he looked at me. The color of his eyes reminded me of the forget-me-nots that grew wild on the side of the road leading into Kingdom.

Jonathon stirred up emotions inside me that were hard to comprehend, especially in light of my engagement to Ebenezer Miller, the young man I planned to marry at the end of June.

“It feels strange for you to call me Sister Kauffman.” I

wondered if he realized he hadn't used the formal greeting until now. "It seems rather decorous for a man who is so opposed to tradition."

He grinned. "I'm not opposed to all traditions, just the ones that don't make sense. Conventions that don't bring us any closer to God."

"And does calling me Sister bring you closer to God?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Point taken, Hope. I'll work on it, but if I slip once in a while, I'll trust you to remind me."

"Don't worry, I will. Jonathon, you mentioned Clay Center. What happened there?"

"A pastor's house was set on fire, and two local churches were bombed."

I gulped. "Did you say *bombed*?"

"Yes, homemade bombs called Molotov cocktails."

"I don't believe I've ever heard the term before. What does it mean?"

"Molotov cocktails are bottles filled with gasoline or some other flammable substance. Then something else, like a piece of cloth, is soaked in the same liquid and stuffed into the bottle. After it's lighted, it's thrown at a target. It explodes just like a bomb."

I shuddered. "What an evil thing to do. Someone could be seriously injured or killed."

"The house and the churches were vacant when they were struck, so it's hard to tell if the bomber was trying to hurt people or just destroy property. But it's obvious someone could have been hurt . . . or worse." The sun shone right in Jonathon's face, and he squinted at me. "That's precisely

why I'm following you home. Until whoever is behind these attacks is caught, I think it might be best if you stay in town. I'll grab a couple of men, and we'll come back for your buggy."

"We have to pray that this was an isolated incident and that Kingdom is still safe. Quite a few of us have been out on this road, and no one has been attacked before today. Maybe it had nothing to do with what's going on in neighboring towns. Perhaps it was a teenager who thought it would be fun to run a Mennonite woman off the road."

Jonathon frowned. "I guess it's possible, but even if that's true, we need to be careful. I think it would be best if our people stay close to home for a while."

I still wasn't convinced it was necessary, but I had to agree that it might be wise to use caution. "I'll certainly heed your advice," I said, trying once again to push my hair back from my face. "But I have to wonder how long we'll have to cower in Kingdom, afraid to leave."

"I don't think it's cowering. We just need to be cautious. You could have been killed, Hope. If anything ever happened to you . . ."

I was so surprised by his words that I swung my eyes downward, afraid my expression would betray my emotions. For some reason my hair suddenly felt like it weighed too much for my head. I wanted desperately to put it back in its bun so I'd feel better. Safer. "What else can we do besides hide? We're taught not to resist violence."

He was quiet for a moment, and I looked up so I could see his face. He was staring at me with an odd expression. "Well, we're instructed not to resist evil with violence, but the Scriptures are clear that we are to resist the enemy. The

question is, how do we do that?” He shook his head. “Some in our community believe we’re not to do anything but pray. I don’t know if I can accept that, and I think there are others who agree with me. In light of what’s happening, it seems prudent to find a way to keep our town safe. When I get back, I’m going to talk to a few people. See if we can come up with a plan to protect our borders.”

Before I had a chance to think it through, I blurted out, “I’ll help you, Jonathon.” I immediately felt foolish. Why had I said that? “I-I mean . . . Well, you probably don’t want women . . .”

His easy laughter embarrassed me. Did he think I was silly? He reached out and briefly touched the side of my face, but then he quickly jerked his hand away as if my cheek were hot to the touch. “I would be honored to include you, but I’d rather you didn’t tell your father. I’m afraid his opposition would make things . . . difficult.”

I tossed my head back. “I’m twenty-six years old. Old enough to make my own decisions. My father doesn’t need to know every single thing I do.”

He looked up at the sun beating down on us. “Let’s talk about this later. Right now we need to get you home.”

I nodded. “All right. Thank you, Jonathon.”

First he got my packages out of the storage box and put them in his truck. Then he led Daisy over to me. He stood next to her, putting his fingers together like a stirrup. I hoisted my skirt up, put my left foot in his hands, and jumped up onto Daisy’s back.

“You sure you can ride her without a saddle?” he asked once I was seated.

“I grew up on horses. Riding bareback is second nature to me.” I didn’t tell him that riding bareback was something I’d done as a child, not as a grown woman.

Daisy was still skittish from our narrow escape, and I could feel her tremble beneath me. I reached down and ran my hand along her neck trying to calm her.

“It’s okay, girl,” I said softly. “Everything’s all right. We’re going home now.” As I talked, she became quieter. When she was ready, I sat up straight, my skirt pulled up and tucked under me. It wasn’t very dignified, but unless I wanted to ride sidesaddle, something I wasn’t used to, it was my only choice. I couldn’t imagine what I looked like, dirty and scraped up, my hair undone, sitting on top of a horse.

“Are you ready?” Jonathon asked, his tone hesitant.

“I’m fine. It might be a good idea to keep some distance between us though. I don’t want the sound of your engine to frighten Daisy. She’s never minded it before, but I’m not sure how she’ll react now.”

Instead of going straight to his truck, he stood there a moment as if he wanted to say something else. Finally, he just shook his head and smiled. “You’re quite a woman, Hope. I’ve never known anyone like you. You seem so quiet and meek, but you have such great inner strength. I wish . . .”

I quickly looked away, fearing we might be headed to a place we shouldn’t go. “We . . . we’d better get going.”

After hesitating a few more seconds, he turned and walked to his truck while I began to urge Daisy forward. She faltered some and then began to walk slowly. Before long, her stride became more confident, her gait steady.

Jonathon’s words echoed through my mind. “*You’re quite*

*a woman, Hope. I've never known anyone like you.*" What did that mean? Could he have feelings for me? All along, I believed there was nothing between us except a silly schoolgirl crush I'd tried hard to ignore. Was I wrong? And what was he going to say after "*I wish . . .*"?

My heart was beating so hard in my chest, I felt slightly faint.