

SONG OF BLESSING • BOOK 2

A Harvest of Hope

LAURAINÉ
SNELLING



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Lauraine Snelling, *A Harvest of Hope*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2015 by Lauraine Snelling

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Snelling, Lauraine.

A harvest of hope / Lauraine Snelling.
pages ; cm. — (Song of Blessing ; 2)

Summary: “In the early 1900s, Miriam Hastings leaves Chicago after burying her mother and returns to Blessing, North Dakota, to carry on her nursing studies. Despite her continued resistance, Trygve Knutson continues his pursuit of her heart”—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1310-6 (hard cover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7642-1105-8 (softcover) — ISBN 978-0-7642-1311-3 (large print : softcover)

I. Title.

PS3569.N39H37 2015

813'.54—dc23

2014045338

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

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author’s imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Jennifer Parker

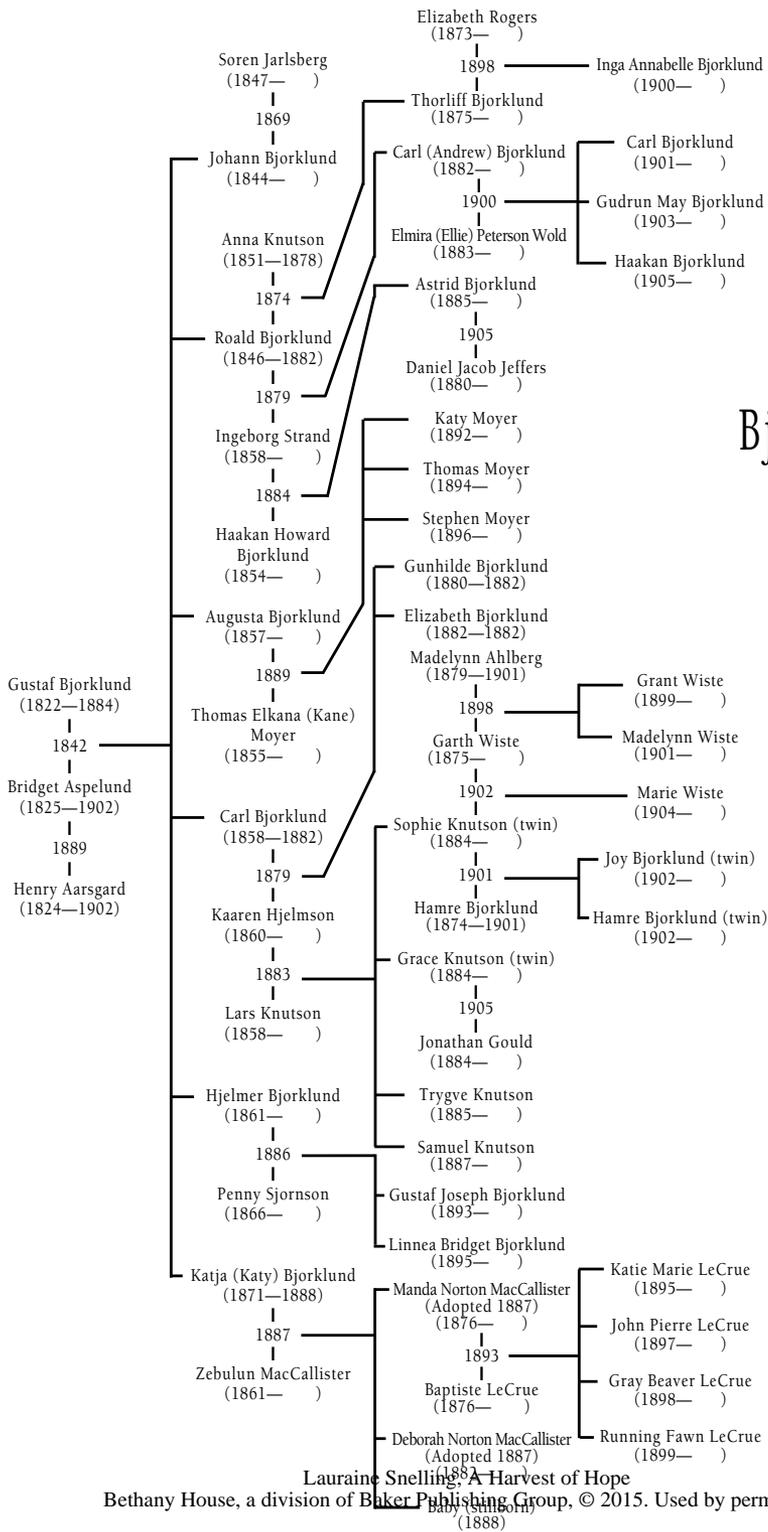
Cover photography by Mike Habermann Photography, LLC

Author is represented by Books & Such Literary Agency.

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Lauraine Snelling, *A Harvest of Hope*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)



Bjorklund Family Tree

Laaurine Snelling - A Harvest of Hope

Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Lauraine Snelling, *A Harvest of Hope*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)



CHAPTER 1

BLESSING, NORTH DAKOTA
MID-SEPTEMBER 1905

*B*e careful, pay attention were the only thoughts to have when sitting down to milk this particular cow. Trygve Knutson had learned that the hard way, and the bucket had been nearly full. “Easy, old girl.” He used the same words with her whenever he had the bad luck to get her. Forehead planted firmly in her flank and milk streaming into the bucket, he fought to keep his mind on what he was doing.

“But I don’t need to go to school.” Manny sounded determined, not that it would do him any good.

“Pay attention to this cow,” Trygve muttered aloud to help him focus.

“Sorry, but all children here go to school until they are graduated from the high school.” Andrew Bjorklund spoke calmly, as if they’d never had this conversation before.

Trygve inhaled the good smells of warm milk and cow, overlaid with grain and the always present taint of fresh manure.

Thoughts of Miriam tried sneaking past his resolve, but he shut that door too. He heard one of the cow's four stomachs rumble. This time he reacted instinctively, even before the shift of her feet, and pulled the bucket away. "That's it. I am putting kickers on you from now on!"

"That was quick," Andrew commended his cousin.

"Does she do this with everyone?" Trygve nestled the bucket back in place and returned to the squeeze-and-pull hand motions that had been part of his life since he was six years old. The reprieve of his years building windmills for his Onkel Hjelmers well-drilling company had been a good thing, but now he knew he was needed at home. Whether milking cows was his favorite job or not.

When he dumped his full bucket into the strainer, he went back and picked up Manny's. Since the boy was still on crutches, due to a badly broken leg, carrying a bucket of milk was not possible. No matter how he tried to do everything.

"You better hustle. We'll finish here. You go get washed up and on the way to the schoolhouse." He motioned the boy toward the door, ignoring the dagger-sharp glare.

Manny swiveled and handed him the half-full bucket, picked up his crutches lying beside him, and maneuvered himself to his feet, an awkward and scary process in its own right, and then stumped out the door.

Half smiling, Trygve watched the boy head for the house. "I remember when I was that age. I argued I didn't want to go to school too. And I love learning. I just didn't want to do it there."

Andrew, also smiling, nodded. "Me too. You know, Manny is finally acting like a normal boy his age. He's going to turn out just fine. I'm sure of it."

"So am I." No doubt Manny would be in jail now, just like his bank-robbing brothers, if Tante Ingeborg and Onkel Haakan had not taken him in. The boy's brothers had been arrested trying to rob the bank right in Blessing. Manny was so sullen and

uncooperative at first, on the defensive. Then for a while he was almost too nice. But you could tell when he finally figured out that he was loved and those who loved him didn't need a special reason. He did not have to earn love or even earn his way. Now, at last, he was blossoming. Soaring, if one can soar on crutches.

Andrew walked past with another bucket. "Finish that one, and I'll let them out."

Trygve stripped the final cow and, after hanging his three-legged stool on one of the barn posts, emptied his bucket into the strainer. While that drained, he lugged the first of three milk cans to the wagon waiting outside. Morning chores, other than milking that one ornery cow, could pretty much be done without much concentration. George McBride, Ilse's deaf husband, loaded the final can and took the handle to pull the wagon to the springhouse, where the milk cooled until they could skim off the cream and send that up to the cheese house. The Blessing Cheese Company shipped cheese to many cities around the country.

This morning's milking crew included Trygve, Andrew, Manny, and two of the returning students to the deaf school run by Trygve's mor, Kaaren Knutson. George had been one of their students in the early years. Then he married Ilse Gustafson, who was and remained Kaaren's main assistant.

When they all headed home to eat breakfast, Trygve stopped at his tante Ingeborg's house. He could hear Manny grumbling when he stepped up onto the porch. Ingeborg was speaking.

"Takk for wanting to help me, Manny, but school is the most important thing you can do now, and that is how you help me."

"Ain't no help in that." Manny straight-armed the screen door, nearly smacking Trygve with the frame. The boy clumped down the steps, his lunch bucket looped over his hand gripping the crutch.

Emmy, Ingeborg's adopted granddaughter who was raised on the northern Indian reservation, smiled an apology as she passed him and darted out the door. At age eight, she was several years

younger than Manny, but she still treated him more as if she were a mother instead of a schoolmate. Manny didn't seem to care. Trygve knew Manny had a grandmother, but the boy had never talked to Trygve about his mother. It could be he needed one now, even if she were a saucy little girl.

Trygve entered and crossed the kitchen. "Tante Ingeborg? Good morning."

His aunt turned away from her woodstove to smile at him. She had her silvering hair braided this morning, the braid twisted into a figure eight at the back of her head. That pleased Trygve. Some days she felt so sad she didn't bother with the braid. Still, it was obvious—and quite logical—that losing her beloved Haakan had been an absolutely crushing blow to her.

"The milk is on its way to the springhouse, and Andrew talked about going over to Thorliff's for something. I am leaving for breakfast. Can I get you anything?"

"Takk, Trygve. I can't think of anything. How is Manny doing with the farm chores?"

"Just fine. I sent him up here for his books and lunch pail before he had finished, so I stripped his last cow for him. He's a good worker."

She nodded. "Say hello to Kaaren for me."

"I shall." Trygve walked outside and stood for a few moments on his tante's porch. One thing for sure about this part of North Dakota, you could draw the horizon with a ruler. Still, it was a warm and lively place. Pastures and wheat fields stretched out almost forever, shimmering in the sunlight. The windbreak Tante Ingeborg had planted had grown into a robust row of trees now, and an orchard provided inviting shade out there.

A yellow-headed blackbird popped up out of the tall grass in the near pasture and perched on a fence post. It threw its head back and tried to sing. By no means was his song something you could dance to—coarse and harsh, no melody at all—yet he sang anyway. Like Manny coping with a new world, usually

not too effectively, at least until he could get rid of the crutches, but he was coping anyway. And like Trygve's tante, floored by her loss, yet soldiering on anyway. One could do worse than learn from a yellow-headed blackbird.

Garonnk cree cree cree.

Whistling in the morning sun, Trygve stepped off the porch and headed home to breakfast. In a way, he felt a twinge of guilt for not having anything particularly burdensome to cope with just now. And that was silly. Still—there it was. Certainly he mourned Onkel Haakan's passing, as did everyone else. But everyone died eventually, and Onkel Haakan had led a long rich life, filled with love and accomplishment. Mourn, yes, but Trygve did not really have to cope the way his aunt had to. Was he being too callous, not caring enough? Others seemed to care more than he did.

And, like always, Miriam sprang to mind. Talk about coping. She was in Chicago now with her family. A student nurse from Chicago training for a year in the Blessing hospital, she had been called home because her mother was fading, growing weak to the point of death. How was the lady doing? Rallying? She had the best of medical care. Maybe she could pull through. But what a heavy burden for Miriam! And her younger brothers and sisters had to cope just as much. Perhaps Trygve should go back there to help, to be with her. But he was needed here just as much, easing Tante Ingeborg's life as best he could. What to do? What to do?

His mor, Kaaren, was putting a big bowl of fried potatoes in the middle of the breakfast table as Trygve strode up the back stoop and into the Knutson house.

"How is Ingeborg doing, Trygve?" she asked, setting out a basket mounded high with buttermilk biscuits, butter, and a new glass of blackberry jam.

He stepped to the sink to wash his hands. "Holding on. She still weeps easily and often. I really ought to lime her outhouse. I could smell it as I left, and I left by the *front* door."

Trygve's father, Lars, sitting at his place at the head of the table, nodded. "Probably a lot to do over there. Haakan didn't move fast during his last months, but he moved steadily and kept up with a lot of the necessary things."

"I want to winterize her place too. Maybe Thorliff and I can get to that this next week." Trygve plopped into his chair.

Mor set out her delicious baked-eggs-and-cheese dish and a platter piled high with rashers of bacon.

Trygve looked at the bounty. "Whose army is visiting, and why are we feeding them?"

Far raised his voice. "Carl! Come on, boy. Breakfast!"

"Ah." Trygve picked up his napkin. "That's who we're feeding. Why is Carl here?"

"Ellie said he could stay with us a few days and help me with the garden," Kaaren answered.

Carl came thundering down the stairs. He climbed up onto his chair, Far rattled off the standard grace, and Carl reached for the biscuits.

"Ahem!" Trygve stared at him and then looked pointedly at Mor.

The boy got the hint. He picked up the basket of biscuits and handed it to Kaaren.

She put two on her plate. "I remember when you were about this age, Trygve. You were always hungry. For a few years there, we practically shoveled the food into you and still couldn't keep you satisfied. But you outgrew it. So will Carl." She handed the basket back to Carl.

Lars served himself some bacon and passed the platter across. "I wasn't much older than you are now when you were born, Trygve." He took a bite of bacon. "How're you and that little nurse doing?" Trygve's far was not a subtle person.

He smiled. "She's still in Chicago. She's supposed to return Sunday."

"Seems like a sweet girl."

Trygve picked up the bowl of eggs and served himself. “Astrid says that as student nurses go, Miriam is the best she’s ever seen. I count that more important than being sweet.” He passed the eggs on to Far.

Mor asked, “Ready for coffee?”

Ilse got up and fetched the coffeepot. Trygve held up his mug and smiled when Ilse reached him. Sitting next to him, Carl held up his cup.

“You’re kind of little for coffee.” She took the cup, filled it half full of milk, and added just enough coffee to color it. “There.”

“Takk.” The little boy’s blue eyes twinkled as he took a sip.

Trygve watched the exchange. They’d all learned to drink coffee that same way, the love of coffee passing on from generation to generation. It would probably be the same when his kids . . . For the millionth time already this morning, his thoughts went to Miriam. Sweet. Yes! Responsible. Capable. Wise. And so pretty, even with that unruly mop of black hair she tried so hard to keep pinned down.

I love you, Miriam. Return to Blessing soon.