

**BEYOND
THE STORM**

BOOK II
BEYOND THOSE HILLS SERIES

**BEYOND
THE STORM**

Vernal Lind



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PROLOGUE



August 1940

Storms often marked turning points in Matthew Anderson's life. Now he stood on the front porch of his farm home, watching ink-black clouds and sharp lightning bolts orchestrated by claps of thunder. A storm of worry began to twist his spirit every bit as turbulently as the churning clouds twisted in the sky. A hard rain pelted the dry ground and Matthew's dark premonition took hold. Something was about to go wrong.

Life had been going well. Matthew loved his wife, his five children, and the rest of his family more than life itself. Intertwined with his love of family were his love of the land and his love of God.

Though he had been trying not to worry, anything that hurt his family caused the darkness and worry to take over. It was a weakness within him.

"Lord, help!" he said, "Are you telling me something? Or is this just part of my stupid weakness?"

The words of an old hymn entered his mind. His worry began to fade as he sang the words in his rich tenor voice.

*Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,*

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*While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Savior hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide:
O receive my soul at last!*

Calm settled over Matthew once again. The storms of life would come and go just as the lightning and thunder had come and gone. Rain began to fall gently, nourishing the earth.

CHAPTER 1



September 1940

Matthew Anderson glanced at his brother. P.J. had a record of causing trouble and his remark signaled he was at it again. But would his brother dare change the course of events after today's welcoming celebration? Family and friends and community people had gathered to welcome Matthew's niece Corrine and her husband Warren to the family farm.

Matthew stood by his favorite oak tree in the yard of this farm where he'd grown up—the farm that should have been his. He wanted to spend a few moments alone before more family members and friends arrived.

Today was one of those golden September Sundays. The brilliant yellow of the poplar and ash trees with red maples in the distance and dark red sumac nearby accented the beauty of autumn. Matthew sometimes wondered if heaven could be more beautiful than the hills and valleys and lakes of Minnesota. He loved this land where he'd grown up.

Matthew looked across the lawn toward the big house, where Ma and Ellen and his sisters were arranging tables and chairs. There would soon be many more family members and friends visiting and milling around. His sons were there. He took great pride in his children. James and Johnie, looking more like men than boys, were with their cousin Jake over by the barn. His baby son, seventeen-month-old Michael had been placed in

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the care of his daughters, Margaret and Carol. His daughters, with their cousins Beth and Irene, were trying to help the women.

“The farm is mine!” P.J.’s voice echoed in Matthew’s mind as if the words spoken had been said yesterday rather than three years ago. There had been an understanding between Matthew and Pa from the time Matthew had been a youth that one day he would own the farm. Matthew had worked his whole life to make the farm a good and productive one. His life’s sweat was in this land, and it was where he expected to spend the rest of his life. When P.J. had spoken those words, Matthew’s world had crumbled.

After P.J. claimed the home farm, Matthew and Ellen had bought their own place. The stress and resentment of his brother had destroyed Matthew’s health and brought him close to death. But Matthew survived the deadly ulcer attack that would have killed most men. The following spring they moved to this richer and better farm. He was much better off on the new farm. In the years that followed he walked the path of forgiveness and experienced new life.

Pa had died eight months ago and Matthew thought of Ma being alone in the little house. Then Corrine and Warren had moved into the big house close by and they checked on Ma frequently. It seemed almost too good to be true. Then P.J. had dropped a bomb. His son wanted the farm. If P.J. carried through with what he’d said, everything would change.

Matthew’s eyes went to the front porch where his tall, dark, and menacing brother stood. P.J. was approaching fifty. His dark hair was graying slightly. He held his six-foot frame well. People seemed to notice his handsome and striking features.

Matthew had never felt he measured up to his brother. He was shorter than P.J. by two inches and his sandy brown hair had strands of gray and was thinning now. At forty, Matthew was strong but he remained thin. His physique did not have the rugged strength of some farmers.

Matthew’s thoughts were interrupted as more people arrived. The hayfield was filling up with cars, just as it had three years ago. That had been the day of Ma and Pa’s golden wedding anniversary. That day would be etched in his memory forever. Yes, it was that wonderful day of family closeness that was suddenly destroyed when P.J. revealed the terrible truth—that the farm actually belonged to him.

Matthew left his post by the tree and went to mingle with people. Soon he was talking with family and friends and neighbors. Then, he

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caught sight of Warren, walking by himself toward the garden. He hurried toward his niece's husband. "Warren, is something wrong?"

"No, Matthew, nothing's wrong. I can't believe how right everything is."

Matthew could see the younger man was overcome with emotion. "It's just a neighborhood and family gathering. Only you're the excuse. We wanted to welcome you and Corrine and the girls."

"I can't believe how good people have been. When I lost my farm in Wisconsin, I thought life was over. I didn't know how I could face the future."

"We're your family. We care." As Matthew said the words, he realized Warren was becoming as much a friend as a relative.

"I've always liked this big house and the farm. It seems to invite people to come. I'm fortunate to be able to rent it. It's almost too good to be true. This is the community where I'd like to grow old."

Matthew hoped P.J. wouldn't betray Warren too. "You're family. We want you here."

"I don't know when I've been as terrified as I was the day the bank foreclosed on my farm in Wisconsin. Corrine was ill; there were the three girls to think about; and I didn't know where to go or what to do."

"I'm glad you came here."

Ellen's voice interrupted. "Matthew. Warren. We're going to have a short program."

Matthew and Warren joined the crowd. Warren and Corrine's piano had been carried out on the front porch. Ellen sat on the piano bench. Martha, his oldest sister, stood on the front steps. The crowd quieted and a gentle breeze rustled the leaves on the trees.

"Welcome," began Martha. "I'm happy all of you could be here today. This is the day to welcome home my youngest daughter and her husband. Welcome home, Corrine, Warren, girls. We're delighted to have you in our community. It's great to have three of my granddaughters close by."

The audience applauded.

Matthew noticed his sister's graying hair and the lines on her face—gentle lines. She had grown older. Her life had not been easy: hard times on their farm in Wisconsin, health problems, and her husband's death. But she had the inner beauty that belongs only to the kindest of people.

Martha continued. "This is another celebration as well. Corrine and Warren are celebrating their tenth wedding anniversary. This couple has

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weathered some storms and difficulties, but now they are safely settled in our community. Let us sing our best wishes to them.”

Without further introduction, Ellen played the introduction to the birthday-anniversary song. “Happy anniversary to you....” The crowd sang lustily and without announcement added a second verse asking God to bless the couple.

“Celebration and thanksgiving go together,” Martha said. “We must acknowledge the Lord in all our ways. I’m calling on Pastor Strand to lead us in prayer and say a few words.”

The crowd settled down. Some people found chairs while others stood or sat on the ground. The front yard became an outdoor auditorium.

Matthew thought of the many times Pastor Strand had been part of family gatherings: baptisms, funerals, weddings, anniversaries, and countless other events. As the pastor opened in prayer, Matthew breathed his own prayer of thanksgiving and added a prayer of concern. “Please don’t let P.J. cause any trouble for Corrine and Warren. Keep them safe in this place.”

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” Strand went on to read the rest of the psalm, but Matthew’s thoughts stayed on the first words.

After the pastor finished the psalm, he began to reflect on the words. “We are brothers here, and that includes sisters as well. As we welcome you to this community and congregation of believers, we become your brothers and sisters. Already we have come to love and care for you. You have quickly become part of our lives.”

The Pastor’s talk continued. When he finished, Martha ushered her three granddaughters to the piano. As Ellen played, the girls sang the familiar words to “Jesus Loves Me.” The three children had captured the simple beauty and truth of this song. Matthew felt great pride as four of his five children sang a traditional family song. His sister’s three children joined them.

*Children of the Heavenly Father,
Safely in His bosom gather.
Nestling bird nor star in heaven,
Such a refuge n’er was given.*

The song always revived old memories in Matthew and re-affirmed his faith. Ever since Pa had died, it seemed more important than ever

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before to claim his heavenly Father as his own. In his many hours alone at work in the fields, Matthew enjoyed the company of this Father.

Matthew's eyes turned to his wife as she played the piano. Ellen remained beautiful and petite even after seventeen years of marriage. The program was informal and short. The group sang several songs, including the song about the tie that binds. Matthew felt the truth of the words, "the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above." This was indeed the good life—a foretaste of heaven above.

As the program ended, his second sister, Victoria, took charge. Her roles as teacher and principal seemed to spill over into all other situations. She was definitely in charge. The women brought out the afternoon lunch: hot dishes, sandwiches, Jell-O, cakes, desserts, along with coffee for the adults and nectar and lemonade for the children. Pastor Strand started the Table Prayer and quickly people lined up for their lunch—in reality, a feast. The talk and laughter and community and family togetherness filled the hour that followed. Then, almost as if a signal had been given, people left. Most of the guests were farmers and needed to get home for chores. Milking as well as other farm tasks were waiting.

Matthew saw P.J. walking toward his car. His brother's earlier comment clouded Matthew's mind like a summer storm or perhaps like the threat of world war. He had to make sure P.J. wouldn't cause trouble.

"P.J., wait."

"Sorry, Matthew, I'm in a hurry. I have to make another trip to the city."

"It'll just take a minute." Matthew hurried over to his brother.

P.J. spoke abruptly. "Be quick about it."

"What did you mean about Larry settling here? Corrine and Warren have moved in, and they depend on this place for a living."

"Oh, don't worry so much." P.J. opened the car door.

"I thought you made a change in your life. You said you'd make things right for the family. And letting Corrine and Warren live here is best for the family."

"We'll work things out. Making things right for the family also means that I'll look after Larry and help him. He's my son. He's more important than a niece."

"But your son knows nothing about farming. He has no interest."

P.J.'s dark features looked more menacing than ever. "He will learn."

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“But Warren’s settled here. He’s planning to rent for another year and then buy some of the land.”

P.J. seemed to sneer. “That’s his problem.” With those words, P.J. slammed the car door and drove down the road toward his lakeside home.

“Warren’s become like a brother,” said Matthew aloud to himself. “I can’t let P.J. destroy his life the way he almost destroyed mine.”