



A DRUNK DRIVER

A DEADLY ACCIDENT

A DREAM DESTROYED

# WAITING FOR MORNING

KAREN  
KINGSBURY

"What a talent! I love her work."  
—GARY SMALLEY

*Bestselling author of A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS*

BOOK ONE  
FOREVER FAITHFUL

Waiting  
*for* Morning

KAREN  
KINGSBURY



Multnomah Books

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WAITING FOR MORNING  
published by Multnomah Books

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Published in association with the literary agency of Arthur Pine Associates, Inc.

*International Standard Book Number: 978-1-59052-020-8*

Cover images by Getty Images

Cover design by The DesignWorks Group

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For information:  
MULTNOMAH BOOKS  
12265 ORACLE BOULEVARD, SUITE 200  
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80921

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Kingsbury, Karen.

Waiting for morning/by Karen Kingsbury.  
p.cm. ISBN 1-57673-415-3 (alk. paper)  
ISBN 1-59052-020-3

I. Title.  
PS3561.L483L66 1999  
813'.54—dc21

98-45973  
CIP

10 11 12 — 25 24 23

*Dedicated to  
my best friend, Donald,  
If life's a dance...  
then I pray the music keeps playing forever.  
Being married to you is the  
sweetest song of all.*

*To Kelsey,  
my softhearted little Norm,  
I can see in you the beautiful  
young woman you are becoming...  
especially your eyes,  
which so closely resemble your dad's  
and your Father's.*

*To Ty,  
my precious son...  
whose flowers have given me  
the most beautiful bouquet of memories.  
I cherish watching you grow  
in the image of the daddy you  
so clearly emulate.*

*To Austin,  
my greatest miracle...  
watching you throw the ball  
and make layups  
is daily proof of God's unending love  
and faithfulness,  
even in the darkest days.*

*And to God Almighty,  
Who has—for now—blessed me with these.*

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*Where Yesterday Lives*  
*When Joy Came to Stay*  
*On Every Side*  
*A Time to Dance*  
*A Time to Embrace* (sequel to *A Time to Dance*)  
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## *Acknowledgments*

Writing a novel about the devastating effects of drunk driving was a difficult, emotional journey and one that could not have been taken without borrowing from the pain of others. Searching for that dark place of despair and devastation, I read countless stories of tragic, senseless loss. I pored over the Mothers Against Drunk Drivers Memorial web site and often conducted research through eyes blurred with tears.

For that reason, I wish to thank Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and every person who has ever helped change or tighten a drunk driving law. You may never know this side of heaven all the lives you have saved in the process. I pray you keep on.

Thanks also to the amazing staff at Multnomah Publishers. From sales to marketing to cover design to publicity...please know that God is working through you in ways that will continue to produce books that change lives, especially books like this. Thanks so much for all your help.

Of course, as with my last book, my writing would be nothing without the God-given talents of my editor, Karen Ball. You are a friend and a mentor, and I hope to keep learning from you as long as the Lord allows. Thanks a million times over.

Also thanks to my husband and family for their support and encouragement during what is always an emotional process—the writing of a novel. I am nothing without your collective smiles, cheers, hugs, and endless love throughout the days.

As with other projects, my parents and extended family were again an encouragement that I value deeply. Thanks to you and to the friends in my women's Bible study and other close sisters in Christ who hold me in prayer, asking the Lord to use my writing for his glory.

And finally, a special thanks to my dear friend, Julie Kremer.

One day nearly a decade ago, Julie's husband got a phone call from their teenage daughter. Her friend's car had broken down on the side of the road. Julie's husband did not hesitate but left immediately to help.

While he was out, he was hit and killed by a drunk driver, leaving Julie and two teenage children alone.

I never knew Julie's husband, but I will forever be touched by the way Julie forgave. She brought a Bible to the man who killed her husband, and after that, continued to keep her eyes on the Lord.

Thank you, Julie, for teaching me what it is to forgive...and for giving me a reason to write *Waiting for Morning*.

# *One*

*I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed.*

LAMENTATIONS 1:20A

## *Sunday Evening*

They were late and that bothered her.

She had been through a list of likely explanations, any one of which was possible. They'd stopped for ice cream; they'd forgotten something back at the campsite; they'd gotten a later start than usual.

Still Hannah Ryan was uneasy. Horrific images, tragic possibilities threatened to take up residence in her mind, and she struggled fiercely to keep them out.

The afternoon was cooling, so she flipped off the air conditioning and opened windows at either end of the house. A hint of jasmine wafted inside and mingled pleasantly with the pungent scent of Pine-Sol and the warm smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

Minutes passed. Hannah folded two loads of whites, straightened the teal, plaid quilts on both girls' beds again, and wiped down the Formica kitchen countertop for the third time. Determined to fight the fear welling within her, she wrung the worn, pink sponge and angled it against the tiled wall. More air that way, less mildew. She rearranged the cookies on a pretty crystal platter, straightened a stack of floral napkins nearby, and rehearsed once more the plans for dinner.

The house was too quiet.

Praise music. That's what she needed. She sorted through a stack of compact discs until she found one by David Jeremiah.

Good. David Jeremiah would be nice. Calming. Upbeat. Soothing songs that would consume the time, make the waiting more bearable.

She hated it when they were late. Always had. Her family had been gone three days and she missed them, even missed the noise and commotion and constant mess they made.

That was all this was...just a terrible case of missing them.

David Jeremiah's voice filled the house, singing about when the Lord comes and wanting to be there to see it. She drifted back across the living room to the kitchen. *Come on, guys. Get home.*

She stared out the window and willed them back, willed the navy blue Ford Explorer around the corner, where it would move slowly into the driveway, leaking laughter and worn-out teenage girls. Willed her family home where they belonged.

But there was no Explorer, no movement at all save the subtle sway of branches in the aging elm trees that lined the cul-de-sac.

Hannah Ryan sighed, and for just a moment she considered the possibilities. Like all mothers, she was no stranger to the tragedies of others. She had two teenage daughters, after all, and more than once she had read a newspaper article that hit close to home. Once it was a teenager who had, in a moment of silliness, stood in the back of a pickup truck as the driver took off. That unfortunate teen had been catapulted to the roadway, his head shattered, death instant. Another time it was the report of an obsessive boy who stalked some promising young girl and gunned her down in the doorway of her home.

When Hannah's girls were little, other tragedies had jumped off the newspaper pages. The baby in San Diego who found his mother's button and choked to death while she chatted on the phone with her sister. The toddler who wandered out the back gate and was found hours later at the bottom of a neighbor's murky pool.

It was always the same. Hannah would absorb the story,

reading each word intently, and then, for a moment, she would imagine such a thing happening to her family. Better, she thought, to think it through. Play it out so that if she were ever the devastated mother in the sea of heartache that spilled from the morning news, she would be ready. There would be an initial shock, of course, but Hannah usually skimmed past that detail. How could one ever imagine a way to handle such news? But then there would be the reality of a funeral, comforting friends, and ultimately, life would go on. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; wasn't that what they said? She knew this because of her faith.

No, she would not be without hope, no matter the tragedy.

Of course, these thoughts of Hannah's usually happened in less time than it took her to fold the newspaper and toss it in the recycling bin. They were morbid thoughts, she knew. But she was a mother, and there was no getting around the fact that somewhere in the world other mothers were being forced to deal with tragedy.

Other mothers.

That was the key. Eventually, even as she turned from the worn bin of yesterday's news and faced her day, Hannah relished the truth that those tragedies always happened to other mothers. They did not happen to people she knew—and certainly they would not happen to her.

She prayed then, as she did at the end of every such session, thanking God for a devoted, handsome husband with whom she was still very much in love, and for two beautiful daughters strong in their beliefs and on the brink of sweet-sixteen parties and winter dances, graduation and college. She was sorry for those to whom tragedy struck, but at the same time, she was thankful that such things had never happened to her.

Just to be sure, she usually concluded the entire process with a quick and sincere plea, asking God to never let happen to her and hers what had happened to them and theirs.

In that way, Hannah Ryan had been able to live a fairly worry-free life. Tragedy simply did not happen to her. Would not. She had already prayed about it. Scripture taught that the Lord never gave more than one could bear. So Hannah believed God had protected her from tragedy or loss of any kind because he knew she couldn't possibly bear it.

Still, despite all this assurance, tragic thoughts haunted her now as they never had before.

David Jeremiah sang on about holding ground, standing, even when everything in life was falling apart. Hannah listened to the words, and a sudden wave of anxiety caused her heart to skip a beat. She didn't want to stand. She wanted to run into the streets and find them.

She remembered a story her grandmother once told about a day in the early seventies when she was strangely worried about her only son, Hannah's uncle. All day her grandmother had paced and fretted and prayed....

Late that evening she got the call. She knew immediately, of course. Her son had been shot that morning, killed by a Viet Cong bullet. A sixth sense, she called it later. Something only a mother could understand.

Hannah felt that way now, and she hated herself for it. As if by letting herself be anxious she would, in some way, be responsible if something happened to her family.

She reminded herself to breathe. Motionless, hands braced on the edge of the kitchen sink, shoulders tense, she stared out the window. Time slipped away, and David Jeremiah sang out the last of his ten songs. Lyrics floated around her, speaking of the Lord's loving arms and begging him not to let go, not to allow a fall.

Hannah swallowed and noticed her throat was thick and dry. Two minutes passed. The song ended and there was silence. Deafening silence.

The sunlight was changing now, and shadows formed as evening drew near. In all ways that would matter to two

teenage girls coming home from a mountain camping trip with their father, it couldn't have been a nicer day in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Bright and warm, a sweet, gentle breeze sifted through the still full trees. Puffy clouds hung suspended in a clear blue sky, ripe with memories of lazy days and starry nights.

It was the last day of a golden summer break.

What could possibly go wrong on a day like this?

## *Two*

*How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!*

LAMENTATIONS 1:1A

### *Sunday before Dawn*

Long before the sun came up, Dr. Tom Ryan stirred from his rumpled sleeping bag and nudged the lumpy forms on either side of him.

“Pssst. Wake up. One hour ‘til sunrise.”

The sleeping figures buried themselves deeper in the down-filled bags, and one of them groaned.

“Ahhh, Dad. Let’s sleep in.”

Tom was already on his feet, folding his sleeping bag in a tight, Boy-Scout roll and wrapping it with a nylon cord. He poked his toe first at one form, then the other, tickling them and evoking a giggle from the chief complainer.

“Daaad. Stop!”

“Up and at ‘em. We have fish to catch.”

Alicia Ryan poked her head out of her bag. “We have enough fish.”

Tom was indignant. “Enough fish? Did I hear a Ryan daughter say we have enough fish? *Never* enough fish. That’s our creed. Now come on, get up.”

More groans, and finally Jenny Ryan’s mass of blond curls appeared near the top of her sleeping bag. “Give it up, Alicia. You know how Dad is on the last day.”

“That’s right.” Tom was already pulling a sweater on. “The last day of the Ryan camping trip is famous for being the best day to catch fish.”

Alicia sighed and struggled to sit up. She reached for a rubber band and shook her thick brown hair, gathering it into a ponytail. At that hour, Cachuma Lake was cold and damp, and Alicia shivered as she pulled her sleeping bag around her shoulders once more. “What time is it anyway?”

“Not important.” Tom unzipped the tent and ducked through the opening. “Time is for the civilized world. Today, there is only us and the fish.”

Alicia and Jenny glanced at each other, rolled their eyes, and snickered. “We’re coming,” Alicia shouted after him. They stretched and climbed into their jeans and sweatshirts.

The annual camping trip was held at Cachuma Lake mostly because it was famous for its fishing. Nestled in the mountains northeast of Santa Barbara off San Marcos pass, the lake was a crystal blue oasis in a canyon that typically experienced temperatures twenty degrees higher than those on the nearby coast. Swimming was not allowed in Cachuma Lake, which supplied all the drinking water to Santa Barbara. For that reason it attracted puritan fishermen, those to whom fishing was a serious venture.

Each year Tom Ryan and his girls spent three days at the lake. Days were devoted to fishing—and occasionally drifting near enough to a secluded cove to watch deer graze unaware. Sometimes they fished in comfortable silence, but many hours were spent with Tom and his teenage girls talking about boys or the importance of a college education or what it meant to live a life that pleased the Lord. There were lighter moments on the water as well, particularly when they recalled embarrassing escapades or memories of other camping trips. Once in a while they laughed so hard they rocked the boat and scared away the fish.

There were afternoon hikes along the narrow shoreline trails, and sometimes they would drive ten minutes to nearby Zaca Lake for a swim or a nap on the beach. Back at the campsite they built a bonfire each evening, cleaned fish, and fried

them for dinner. Then in the hours before they turned in, the girls would play cards while their father played his worn acoustic guitar and sang favorite hymns and church choruses.

Campsites were not far from the shore, hidden among gnarled oak trees and without the benefit of running water or modern bathroom facilities. The Ryans brought water in ten-gallon jugs, food in an oversized Coleman cooler, and an old canvas tent that had been in the family for fifteen years. Camping at Cachuma Lake was *roughing it* at its best, and Tom Ryan wouldn't have taken his girls anywhere else.

Jenny stuffed her sleeping bag into its sack and poked her sister in the ribs. "Hey, since it's the last day and all, I just might have to catch more fish than you." She was the youngest, and a friendly competition had always existed between the two.

"Oh, okay." Alicia pretended to be concerned. "I'll try to be worried about it."

Tom kept their aluminum fishing boat docked lakeside while they camped, so there was little to carry as he and the girls waved their flashlights at the trail and made their way to the water.

"It's freezing!" Jenny's loud whisper seemed to echo in the early morning silence. The path was damp and still, awaiting the crest of new-day sunshine to warm it and stir life into the wooded shoreline.

"Remember that feeling this afternoon when we're packing the gear and it's a hundred degrees." Tom grinned.

"I can't believe it's been three days already." Alicia moved close to Jenny so that the girls walked shoulder to shoulder.

"Time flies when you're fishing, that's what I always say." Tom inhaled the air, filled with energy, loving the early hour of the day.

They climbed into the boat and took their seats, adjusting their flashlights so each could see. Tom watched the girls with

pride. Like experienced fishermen, they maneuvered about the tackle box and baited their hooks.

“We’re off.” He flipped the switch on the battery-powered motor, and a deep puttering sound broke the reverie. The sun was climbing quickly, and the girls set aside their flashlights as the boat slipped away from shore.

Four hours later they were back. Jenny was the winner with three catfish, two bass, and a beautiful twelve-inch rainbow trout.

“You guys aren’t much competition.” She held up her string and sized up her catch. “You were right, Dad, nothing like an early morning run on the lake.”

“Oh, be quiet.” Tom laughed and shoved his youngest daughter playfully. He and Alicia had caught just five fish between them. “Let’s get back to camp. We have a lot to do if we’re going to be on the road by two.”

Alicia stepped out of the boat and led the way up the trail toward camp. Suddenly Jenny stiffened and pointed at the trail in front of her sister.

“Alicia!” Jenny’s scream was shrill and piercing. Tom and Alicia froze, and Tom followed Jenny’s pointing finger... There, coiled two feet from Alicia’s muddy hiking boots, was a hissing diamondback rattlesnake.

Tom’s heart jumped wildly. “Alicia—” he kept his voice calm, “don’t move, honey.” He pulled Jenny away and motioned for her to move farther behind him. He had treated snakebites before, but he’d never encountered a snake. This one was already angry and easily within striking distance.

“What should I do, Daddy?” Alicia sounded like a scared little girl.

*God, please, protect my girl. And give me wisdom...*

“Okay, honey—” he spoke quietly and with more confidence than he felt—“don’t let your feet drag in the dirt. Lift them one at a time...very slowly...and walk backward, away from the snake.”

Alicia whimpered. "He's staring at me, Daddy. What if he bites me?"

"You'll be all right, sweetheart. That won't happen if you back up slowly." *Please, God, let me be right.* "He doesn't want to bite you."

Alicia nodded. She was an energetic girl, ambitious and rarely given to moments of stillness. But now she moved painstakingly slow, and Tom was proud of her. Right foot, left; right foot, left. Three feet, then four separated her and the hissing snake. Right foot, left...right foot, left.

Tom grabbed her hand and pulled her toward him. Together they backed up even farther to where Jenny waited for them. Alicia crumpled in her father's arms and started to cry.

"Oh, Daddy, I was so scared," she mumbled into his grubby T-shirt.

Tom could feel his pulse returning to normal, and he stroked her hair silently. He could treat snakebites when he was in an emergency room with a vial of antivenin. But here, an hour from urgent care, Alicia might not have made it. "Thank you, God." Then to Alicia, "You did it just right, honey."

Jenny moved in then, wrapping her arms around her father and sister. "I thought you were going to step on him."

Alicia looked at her. "I would've if you hadn't screamed."

Both girls shuddered, and there was a pause while they clung to their father. Fifteen feet away, the snake stopped hissing, uncoiled, and slithered off the path into the shrubbery.

Tom broke the silence. "You know what it was, don't you?"

Alicia sniffled loudly and pulled away from him, running her palms over her jeans. "What?"

"He wanted to see Jenny's catch. Rumors spread quickly along the shoreline in these parts. He had to see for himself."

Alicia and Jenny grinned and wordlessly cued each other so that they ganged up on him and rubbed their knuckles against his head.

“Okay, okay, come on, you monkeys.” He took their hands and led them once more toward the campsite. “Let’s get the site cleaned up and the car loaded. Mom’s waiting for us.”