

A motorist's decision to investigate a snowy object sets the stage for the third book of The Accidental Mystery Series. The Wrath of Grapes moves the story from the small western Michigan town to the peninsula where the widow, Sarah Blakeman, owns a vineyard. Convinced that something terrible is happening to Sarah, Clara schemes to get everyone involved in saving her. Clara's dog, Lucky, once again gets to prove just how special he really is.

The Wrath of Grapes

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*The Wrath
of Grapes*

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THE WRATH OF GRAPES

CHAPTER 1



LOOKING BACK, Sarah didn't know why she wasn't more suspicious of Frank's behavior when he returned from town on Saturday. He had been pleasant enough during the weeks she had catered to him while he was recovering from his injuries, but as soon as he started to feel better, his attitude changed. Some days he was downright nasty. It got so bad on that Saturday when he yelled that she was suffocating him, she was glad to see him head for town. Watching him leave, she wondered why she had ever thought he was good looking. In the short time he had been with her, he had even developed a pot gut.

It had taken some time to get over the fascination of watching him constantly rubbing his tongue over his broken front teeth, but when she did, she became fixated on his strange head of hair: the crown was gray, the ends were blonde. Sarah was so lonely and, needing help with the vines, she had overlooked all his faults. Since trying to run the vineyard alone was overwhelming, she prayed that if she made it pleasant enough Frank would stick around.

ONE SNOWY NIGHT in early November as she was driving past the scenic lookout on Route 116, she thought the rather large lump in the middle of the road was a deer from the herd that hung around that area.

Intending to steer around it, she changed her mind when she saw a shoeless foot sticking out of the ball of snow.

The shoeless foot turned out to be attached to a half-frozen and injured man who claimed, when she managed to rouse him, that he was the victim of a hit-and-run accident. Knowing that the combination of a dark night, a lone woman, and a strange man held the ingredients for possible gory headlines in the morning paper, Sarah had a decision to make. Since she didn't have a cell phone and there were no houses nearby, she had struggled over her options: she could leave him and hope the next car would stop, or she could be a Good Samaritan. Throwing caution and her better judgment aside, she had chosen to be a Good Samaritan.

Insisting that all he needed was a bit of first aid, the man had refused to let her take him to the hospital. Instead, he asked that she take him home with her. Sarah knew that she hadn't resisted the notion very hard. Aside from his apparent injuries, he was a fine specimen of a man, a potential worker for her vineyard.

Last harvest season when they were up to their necks in ripe grapes, her husband Larry had the audacity to up and die on her for no good reason. Now, every morning when Sarah woke up alone and faced the unending job of tending to the vineyard without his help, she got angry with Larry all over again.

That Saturday, when he didn't think she was looking, she had watched Frank put a small leather pouch into his pocket. She knew what was in that pouch because she had given it to him; it contained a razor, soap, a toothbrush, toothpaste, and a comb. When he left, she had the suspicion that Frank would not be returning to her.

HE DID RETURN. Something had happened in town that had given him a huge attitude adjustment. The Frank who had walked back into

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her kitchen late that afternoon was as jolly as old St. Nick himself. When she asked him if he was practicing being Santa, his big laugh and hearty “Ho, ho, ho” response was so over the top that she moved closer to him in an attempt to smell his breath.

While Sarah fixed soup and sandwiches, he hung around the kitchen telling her about the second Christmas parade. She was confused because she hadn’t been aware that there had been a first Christmas parade. Sarah had dropped the newspaper subscription and hadn’t replaced the television set after its and Larry’s untimely demises. The vineyard was so far out on the peninsula that she didn’t make the trip into town often enough to know what was going on. He didn’t know too much about what had happened either, but he had picked up the information by listening to conversations around him. It seemed a huge dog had mauled the first Santa and wrecked that parade.

Frank waited until they were at the table before he started to outline the work that had to be done on the vines this time of year and how they should go about doing it. Sarah almost dropped her spoon into her soup. With no newspaper to read or television to watch, she *had* seen him reading books from Larry’s library. Up until now when she tried to get him to help her, he’d look at her with disdain and walk away.

Acting as if this had been his job all along, he picked up the drying cloth and helped Sarah with the dishes. However, it was the friendly pat on her shoulder at bedtime as they went their separate ways that really puzzled her.

Something *big* must have happened in town.

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