

# **WHERE NOTHING IS HIDDEN**

**For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret,  
but that it would come to light. Mark 4:22 NKJV**

# **THE VINEYARD**

## Chapter One

### Mendoza, November 1941

A shadow flashed at my feet as the Swainson's hawk circled overhead, resting before its further migration south into the Pampas. My days here were numbered, too, a pause to erase the horrors behind me, to refocus on the vineyard's simple demands. Here, I could remove what didn't belong and protect what did, trimming leaves to display fruit to the sun, binding straggling vines to wires and stakes. I learned to appreciate the rhythms of desert cultivation, long hours of sunlight to make grape skins thicken, low humidity to keep bugs away. Cool evenings, known to produce a well-rounded Malbec, had eased the Saharan winds from memory, how they'd swept sand over lifeless bodies, one dune like any other.

Daylight was waning now, and I still had two rows to tether when the scuff of soles on sand alerted me to an intruder. Crouched at the base of the trunks, I was obscured by the shoots above me, some already pushing out hard pebbles of grape. Boots passed, two rows over, then stopped and turned back. I set down my tools and shook the dirt off my hands, pushing up to announce my presence, get a better look.

"Who are you?" I asked, irritated by the interruption. "And what are you doing in my vineyard?"

"I thought these belonged to Fil." She waved an arm across the rows as recognition caught and I felt a tug, like quicksand.

"He assigned me this section."

"And sent me to fetch the surly field hand for dinner." Her boots kicked up puffs of dust as she pushed through the vines between us. "I'm Gray's sister, Risher."

"Brandt," I said, extending my hand. "Dieter. Not surly, just busy."

Before we could touch, something shifted, and she slid on the sand. I grasped her arm, felt her steady, but then her body fell into mine, and our handshake became a hug.

"Oof," she said into my chest. "New boots."

Space opened as I stepped backward into the arms of the vine I'd just trimmed. Her cheeks flamed--whether from heat or embarrassment, I couldn't tell.

"A present," she added, unflustered by the fall. "Gray's inside, getting changed."

I'd been expecting them. To honor her college graduation, Gray had brought his little sister on this two-week trip to Argentina. He was seeking a foothold for Griffen Fabrics in the world textile capital of Buenos Aires, and she had located an archive to serve her senior thesis. This leg of the trip was at her request, to see Mendoza, meet Walther and Fil, and for some reason, me.

Other than blonde hair, they didn't favor each other. Gray was the quiet type; this woman was still talking.

"It's romantic, don't you think?" She looked delighted, surveying the rows of vines I'd labored over for months, as if they'd been planted for her personal enjoyment. I sized her up as pampered and difficult to please.

"Walther said dinner is at seven. I'll tell him you'll need a shower first." Her nose crinkled.

"I'll be back when the section's done." I checked my watch and reached for my tools. "An hour should do it."

I bent back to my vines, until a whistle made me straighten.

"Hey, Dieter." The voice faded with her footsteps. "You're not what I expected."

Seventy minutes later I reached the table that Fil's staff had set up on the front lawn. Down the middle, wineglasses reflected the light of a dozen glass votives, like those I knelt before to remember lost lives. The table was set in celebration—Gray's arrival, the rising moon, Saturday night, any excuse would do for Walther and Filiberto.

Everything about their home spelled welcome. This was a finca in the truest sense of the word, Fil's estate, transposed from Spain into the New World. An elegant ranch house, generous

property and the outbuildings supported his viticultural aims. The wrap-around porch held a neighborly number of chairs and the windows were wide enough to walk through. Inside, the walls were a freshly-painted yellow, with braided rugs before the hearths and throws on worn leather furniture. Those were probably Walther's touches—like me, he'd met Fil almost a year ago in Casablanca, when we were part of a small group of exiles eluding the Gestapo through France, Spain and Morocco. Fil had secured our passage, offered work on his finca and fallen in love.

My friends crossed the yard as I approached, Walther shaking his head at my boring attire, dark shirt and slacks, Gray rushing forward with a hug. The jacket he wore had been hand sewn by his personal tailor, a requirement for selling fabrics worldwide. Risher followed, plopping into the seat next to him, across from Walther and me. Her frilly blue blouse slid off one shoulder, and when she caught me looking, she disguised the wink with a turn of her head.

Our host stood at the head of the table as Walther served him last, lifting the wine with the formality this reunion deserved.

"I propose a toast," Fil said, swirling and sniffing. "To Gray and Sissy—welcome to Mendoza."

I started at the nickname, enough to wobble the table. Walther steadied a wine bottle and gave me a look over his shoulder.

"What?" he asked. "She said you'd met."

"We did, hypothetically." I lowered my voice and turned my face away from our guests. "Risher's just not, you know, the little girl I imagined." Her brother was a combination of best friend and commanding officer, protective of the baby of the family. Gray didn't share Sissy with his pals.

Risher was revolving her wine glass to draw the candlelight's reflection, and I wondered if she'd lived with his expectations long enough to ignore them.

"Just look at her," I whispered, forgetting Walther's immunity to such attractions. We realized my mistake at the same time and broke out laughing.

“What’s with you two? People can have more than one name, you know. It’s called a nickname,” Risher said, her patience strained.

I felt Fil’s foot nudge Walther’s as they hid smiles behind napkins, then encouraged us to enjoy the meal. As we ate, our host treated us to a history lesson.

“This country, it has also had many names. Do you know Argentina, Risher?”

“I bought a book to read on the plane.” She grimaced and Gray looked like he knew what was coming. “But I only read to where it claimed Argentina is four times the size of Texas before I fell asleep.”

“We are like your country, just younger. Argentina today, think of your Wild West. Your constitution was signed when—in the eighteenth century? But it was only one century ago that we established our government, although we broke with Spain much earlier. Things like that, politics, they take a long time here.”

“But how does it resemble the Wild West?” Risher’s personality held four men in thrall, all for different reasons.

“We have the gauchos, like your cowboys, and natives like your Indian tribes. The Quechua settled lands near here, in the northwest, the Mapuche down south in Patagonia, and the Chaco in the northeast, above our capital, Buenos Aires. Otherwise, we are immigrants, all the way back to the Conquistadores, with more arriving every day. Our borders are not closed, like yours.

I was not born here, but in Spain. We have Germans too, and Italians. Every time that countries go to war, our population grows, because we welcome those that others reject. Friends, relatives follow, find work, settle down, but mainly in the coastal cities. The land inside, the main swath of our country, it is the most beautiful and wealthiest region of our country, with its riches of oil, wheat and cattle. But the cities have the coastlines and big business.”

I knew he’d come here because of Franco, but had learned too little about this country that had welcomed me months ago.

“I came with the first wave leaving Spain, in 1936, when civil war broke out. I was on the wrong side, had opposed General Franco openly,” Fil continued. “It was clear I must leave

my home or lose my life. So, I sold my vineyard in Andalucía and recreated my lost finca on this new continent. But it's here, too, fascism; the poor like its authority, the rich its power. I've given up on Argentina's politics, too many factions. No one trusts elections, so they hand their freedom over to a single ruler, with every coup choosing a new leader, accepting a new ideology.

But why be serious tonight, with so much to celebrate? Another toast--Walther has opened our finest wine—he'll do the honors." Walther stood to reclaim the attention lost to Fil's lecture. He lived for drama.

"To friendships, new and old. Welcome, Gray, welcome Risher." Walther flourished his wineglass in their direction, then tipped it toward me. "And congratulations, Dieter, on finishing another section. I'm sure your grapes will be our best."

I thanked Walther, appreciating the friends assembled here, the meal and conversation. When the last bottle emptied, we were urged inside for coffee. Risher called out titles of songs she'd brought from the States, luring Walther away from clean-up duty to crank up the record player and roll the living room rug aside for dancing. My role as dishwasher was obvious, and I worked at the sink while Gray dried and put away, Fil attending to the coffee and crisp almond cookies as the rhythms of bee-bop and jazz floated in. The sun had set when we carried dessert in to the dancers and Gray said an early good-night, worn out by the overnight flight, the trip over the Andes from Santiago and Risher's chatter.

"I'm going up too, guys. My cabaret days are behind me," Walther said. "Must have lost my touch."

Walther's stage persona of Ginger Rogers and his impersonations of Hitler as a magician who made borders disappear had set the Gestapo on his heels. Like the rest of our exile band, he was lucky to be alive, lucky to have met Fil.

Risher appeared unaffected by exhaustion, industriously slipping the records back into their sleeves as Fil collected his partner. With everyone settling in for the night, I decided to head to the bunkhouse where I'd moved my gear to free up space for the guests.

"I'll be getting along," I said, wanting to look for the hawk from the porch, see if it still circled or had flown further south, where the grasslands were lush. I saw it catch an updraft and

soar as footsteps approached and Risher materialized beside me, watching the course I traced with my hand.

“You’re included on our flight tomorrow,” she said. “We’ll likely leave early, to beat the afternoon heat.”

Gray would pilot a borrowed plane over these vineyards, a test run before flying Risher to Buenos Aires the next day. He’d dusted crops as the oldest of three sons on the Griffen Ranch, before enlisting in the Army after the Great War, repairing planes for use in training. The plane was his for the week in exchange for delivering the owner’s wine.

Risher moved closer to follow the hawk’s flight into shadows, and I inched over to put some space between us. Her proximity poked at my nerves.

“I’ve listened to ‘Dieter’ stories for years,” she said, leaning against a post to survey me as I watched the hawk. “Conjured you up all dark and swarthy, with your dangerous ways. And here you are, tow-headed and scrawny, with crooked eyeglasses.”

I knew her tone for what it was, provocative, like the woman delaying my bedtime.

“You seem awfully skittish for a war hero,” she teased.

“My glasses aren’t crooked, just a little bent,” I said as she tugged my hand away from my face.

“Then stop pushing them around so much.” A heart-shaped locket glimmered in the concave shadow of her throat and I wondered who had given it to her.

“What will you do in Buenos Aires while Gray is working?” I asked, taking the first step off the porch to signal the evening’s end.

“Research. I chose gaucho clothing as my thesis topic once this trip was set. Their pants are popular for women now, and I can trace their origins here.” It came out easy, like something she’d be good at.

“So, you’re smart,” I said as I pushed off from the last steps. “Not just a smart aleck.”

I could hear her answer from halfway to the bunkhouse.



“You have no idea,” she called.

Her words separated and spread out across the vines, and then the front door slammed and the porch went dark.

## Chapter Two

### Mendoza, November 1941

The house was quiet when I slipped into the kitchen to pour my coffee and take a bowl of fruit and muesli to the porch, but it wasn't long before Walther's truck pulled up and honked. I cleared space for myself in the back, moving shears and bundles of twine aside to reach both windows and crank them open, excited about the flight and my first day off in weeks. The truck bounced as Risher climbed into the front, her new cowboy boots flashing in the sun. A red baseball cap with some sort of logo held her braid threaded through an opening at the back, and the breeze lifted whiffs of Walther's private-order shampoo. Her hair reminded me of wheat, spread to dry in the sun before baling.

Fil's property was fertile but dry; our tires kicked up dust that would settle onto the vines closest to the road. I leaned back and surveyed the mountains ahead—the only barrier between the finca and the Pacific Ocean that had brought us here. We had been awaiting passage on a steamer out of Casablanca when Walther met Fil. The SS Serpa Pinta, known for carrying European refugees to safety, would make its last stop there for passengers, and Fil had requested my ticket in order to accompany Walther, offering me instead a place on the crew sailing his yacht back across the Atlantic. I was happy to travel the seas on a small craft after months trudging through the Saharan sand. We made good time, landing only a week behind the steamer's first port of call in the Dominican Republic. We picked up Fil and Walther and passed through the Panama Canal to take up our route along the top of South America. After sailing down the long western shore to Santiago, we deposited the yacht in its winter docking station. The crew from Fil's finca arrived in trucks like the one today, to carry us across the Andes and home.

The sun had divested the air of its morning chill when Walther pulled onto a bumpy road. Our eight o'clock lift-off would beat the convection bumps expected as temperatures rose. We passed under a rusted arch with a broken circle L brand welded onto its iron gates. The brand was now the winemaker's logo, Walther explained, left over in the transition from ranch to vineyard. To our right was a runway—it looked as rugged as the road we'd just traveled, with a flag indicating the wind's direction. Gray stood between the flag and the plane, where Walther had dropped off him off earlier to complete a safety check on equipment and exterior.

It was a Cessna Model A, a high-wing four-seat tourer, the first single engine monoplane Cessna had produced. Acquired by the Circle L in the late '30s, it had room for two pilots and two passengers. Fil had been vague about its provenance, referring only to a big win at the tracks in Buenos Aires. Gray put the ladder down and motioned for Risher to climb in the back with Walther. As I waited for my cockpit seat, he explained how this Cessna model had rescued the company from bankruptcy following the stock market crash of 1929 and was still a popular choice for pilots. We'd reach a maximum speed of 185 kmph or 115 miles per hour today, he said as I settled in beside him and strapped up. Minutes later we were lifting off, to circle the fields I'd nurtured over the past three months.

"Hey, look at that!" Risher shouted over the noise of the engine, pointing to some dust clouds below. "Horses!"

"Those belong to Alfonse, our neighbor," Walther shouted back. "He still raises a few, sells the fastest in Buenos Aires. It's a popular pastime, racing, sometimes lucrative, more often not."

"As a bon voyage party, my friends took me to the new Don Ameche film." Risher had come alive with the flight, the view of expansive landscape below. "It's called 'Down Argentine Way' and is all about horse racing. And tango. Betty Grable dances her way into his arms--those are the best parts."

"No tango tonight, young lady," Walther shouted. "You've got a big day tomorrow."

"Fuddy-duddy," Risher pushed back. "Dieter will dance with me."

"Not a chance," Walther said before I could correct her. "Talk about a fuddy duddy."

"We're coming up on Mendoza, take a look," Gray interrupted, raising his voice to include everyone in the commentary. "It's like an oasis from up here, the little bit of green encircled by desert. See all the treetops? The boulevards run through downtown, trees on both sides so lush their branches meet in the middle."

"How is it all so green? I want to see it. We're going there next, aren't we?" Risher sounded like a typical little sister, but even she knew we'd only do what Gray decided.

“Irrigation ditches are built along the streets to sustain the trees and feed the fountains in town,” he said. “The indigenous people here are thought to be the original practitioners of the method--you could have read about it in your guidebook.”

“Isn’t this the plane we’ll fly tomorrow?” Risher asked. “It’s big enough for Dieter to come with us—and Walther!”

“I’m sure they have other plans,” Gray said. “As do you—what about your research?”

“But everyone’s coming with us today, aren’t they?” She was unstoppable. “Walther promised to show me the leather shops—they’re famous. We can get lunch in town.”

Without a word my day had filled with Risher’s whims. When Gray had turned back to touch us down and taxi over the deep gouges in the field, I released a prayer for patience.

Before we loaded back into the truck I spoke up, insisting that lunch come before sightseeing. Gray sat in front, on the passenger seat vacated by Risher, who sat in the back with me. Out of habit, I’d memorized maps of the area last night and offered Walther directions above Risher’s calls to stop at the vendor stalls lining the road to Mendoza. Better to shop on the way home, I told her, than to leave trinkets behind in the truck to attract interest.

“Turn off here, Walther, and we’ll snag a spot along Avenida Aristides. From there, we can walk through Plaza Independencia and find that café on Avenida Sarmiento.”

“Our usual,” he confirmed, pulling into a spot next to a popular bakery.

Our usual was a pulperia, an old-style tavern with a cool, cellar-like interior. But the action was out front on the street, where we could watch the passing shoppers.

“Look, Gray, the pitcher, it’s shaped like a penguin,” Risher said, holding it up as soon as the wine was delivered to our table. “See how it pours from the beak and how the handle follows its back?”

“It’s tradition,” Walther explained, “Something to do with Patagonia.”

“That’s on the way to the South Pole, attracts huge crowds of penguins,” Gray said. “Another guidebook fact.”

Walther and I ordered pizza, and Risher and Gray shared a pasta dish and a plate of grilled sausages, wanting to compare them to the mutton their ranch produced. Just as I was relaxing, watching them fight over the last sausage, Risher’s curious gaze landed on me.

“So, what is it you do when you’re not tending vines, Dieter? I’ve heard Gray’s interpretation, but not yours.”

“I’m in logistics,” I said, and a groan went up around the table.

“That’s proof, right there, that he’s a spy,” Risher said. “I’ve read that very line in Gray’s spy novels.”

“Go on, Dieter, give us something,” Walther said, and I started over, knowing he’d fill in the blanks.

“I enlisted in the Army at age eighteen,” I said.

“Wait, isn’t that really young? Can you do that?” Risher asked. Gray’s frown quieted her down so that I could continue.

“They considered my skill set unusual for an American soldier--fluent in German, English, and Spanish, with solid grades from German military academies. I trained all the way through to the Army Ranger designation—by then I was twenty.” I gave Risher a look, expecting another comment about my age. Instead, Walther piped in.

“Tell her how rigorous that is,” Walther said, elbowing me in the ribs.

“He’s right,” Risher said. “I’ve heard not many soldiers survive it. They give up and try something easier. Or drop out entirely.”

“I received my commission, which means I gained rank based on education and performance, not time served,” I said, ignoring the interruptions. “Two years ago, I was appointed warrant officer, and that’s my rank now.”

“He’s military, but like a consultant, sent where his specialized skills are most needed,” Gray added.

“Just like you, Gray—all over the place, but none of us know where, or what you’re doing,” Risher said, her tone laced with envy. “He probably really is a spy--I wish my life were that exciting.”

Underneath her refined upbringing I sensed a hunger to experience for herself all I kept hidden from others. She seemed to long for the adventures her brother freely enjoyed, and mine. Her guesses weren’t far off the truth.

“Unlike my chatty buddy, whose talents are endless,” I replied, giving Walther a look, “I operate in a narrow field and independently—it’s called special operations. My work isn’t public like Walther’s.”

“Yeah, he’s hush-hush, our man Dieter.” Walther couldn’t keep a secret to save his life. “And you never know where he’ll go next—he flitters from one daring adventure to another, comes home all beat up and dirty, then does it all over again.”

Thankfully, the waiter arrived with the bill, Gray paid, and we left.

While Walther took Risher shopping, Gray and I strolled the siesta-calmed streets. He’d read about the basilica of San Francisco and wanted to see the Virgin of Cuyo. Her name honored the region; the indigenous Huarpes’ word for sandy earth, cuyum, now referring to the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan, San Luis and La Rioja. While he toured her crypt, I found a bench and culled through my questions to fit the time we had left.

“So, why isn’t Shira here?” I asked, accepting the cold drink Gray had brought me from the vendors outside the church. I’d been curious about his bride’s absence.

“Her citizenship’s so new,” he said. “She didn’t want to leave America this soon after becoming a citizen, especially not after Mom urged her to stay close to home. It’s not easy to say no to Amanda Griffen.”

“But she’s settling in all right? I asked. “She’s so cosmopolitan—ranching doesn’t spring to mind.”

Gray stood, and we moved through the grounds around the basilica, taking advantage of the shade.

“Yeah, it’s quite a shift. But you know how flexible she is.” Gray’s eyes softened, probably wishing she were here. “Once Sissy’s finished college, they’ll be best friends. They’re already close.”

Gray’s next words brought my attention back sharply.

“In case it escaped your attention, Risher seems taken with you. She’s always found you intriguing, the concept of you,” Gray said. “Tread carefully—she’s likely to leap before she looks, and you won’t be around much longer, I assume.”

“No, to get this break from active duty, I had to sign on for another tour.” I didn’t need to tell Gray that Risher was not what I’d expected.

“No career change for you, soldier.” Gray knew patriotism, its pull. His service had reached a higher order now, politics and international intrigue. Anyone worth knowing knew Gray.

“What about you?” I kept the tone light to cloak my eagerness for the details.

“New markets are opening up for our fabrics, and the travel occasionally brings additional benefits.” Gray had once used his exporting work to help locate shelter for Jewish refugees, primarily those escaping Europe through France.

“I keep busy.” Gray said. “But I can’t get into Europe easily now, although Palestine still offers opportunity. Sometimes I miss the old excitement.”

“Until you remember how it felt being chased by Nazis,” I said.

“Not doing that again.” I hoped he was right. He pulled me up by an arm and gave me a pat on the back. He was an affectionate man, whose friendship I treasured. I took his warning to heart; I would avoid Risher’s flirtations, no matter what.

We’d agreed to meet back at the car by five o’clock, in deference to Fil’s dinner schedule. Risher was already there, insisting on one more stop. It looked like Walther was fighting a losing battle.

“But the bakery is right here,” she argued, backing against the handle Walther was trying to grab. “Just think of the sweets we can bring Fil for dessert.”

“I’ll take this,” I said, drawing her away so that Walther could get in. Gray ignored her hijinks and sat in the front seat, leaving the door open for us to climb in.

“We’ll be back, pronto,” I promised and waited while she ordered a dozen items, balancing the sticky box on my lap all the way home.

After desert on the porch, everyone retired one at a time until only Risher and I remained. My neck still prickled with Gray’s disapproving glance when she had insisted that I stay put and advise her about Buenos Aires, a city I’d never even seen.

“Tell me more about this exciting life you lead,” Risher said as soon as Gray snapped the front door shut.

“Not much more I can say to you or to anyone. My work is classified—it’s on what’s called ‘a need to know’ basis.”

“Then why does Gray know?” She was persistent, uncomfortably so.

“Your brother supports some of the same activities I do. Ask him,” I said, not wanting to betray his trust. How could I know what he’d told his family about his clandestine efforts? Until today, it had been months since we’d swapped stories.

“But you’re a soldier, for the United States,” she prodded. “That’s no secret.”

“You’ve got my name and rank—need my serial number?” She laughed and I switched to a safer topic. “What about your baseball career? Gray used to brag about your winning team.”

“Okay, I’ll change the subject. My mom insisted that I take ballet lessons from first grade on.” The idea of Risher as a six-year-old, in a tutu with pink ballet slippers made it impossible to hold back my laugh.



“Very funny, exactly. Gray convinced Mom that baseball was graceful too, that it would improve my posture and balance, strengthen my self-confidence.”

“He’s a good man to have in your corner.” Risher was the most confident woman I’d met.

“Yes, all those years he was with you, I really missed him.” Gray had carried her photograph back then, before she grew into her looks.

“Did it help?” I asked, shaking off thoughts of her beauty. “Baseball?”

“Not like my mother intended. Once I made the team, I was better at it than the boys. Not many girls play baseball,” she explained. “It didn’t make me popular, not with the girls or the boys.”

“Protective older brothers don’t help either,” I said. “Are they still at home?”

“No, Matt’s finishing a law degree at University of Texas, like Gray did, and Drew’s already working for Dad. I’ll be expected to work there, too.”

“And fashion is your field?” I asked. I didn’t know how to be more specific.

“Yes, and after Buenos Aires I’ll be able to tell you all about the fashions there,” she said. “Any tips for me—about the city?”

“Just be careful—some of the areas, they’re called barrios, are dangerous at night. Don’t wave your cash around.” I got up from the seat I’d selected for tonight, as far from Risher’s swing as possible.

“Don’t go yet--come sit with me for another minute.” Risher patted the space beside her.

“There are a dozen chairs on this porch,” I complained, then wedged myself into the assigned spot. Risher seemed to always get her way.

I flattened my palms into the swing’s splintered edge and tried to ignore how the lamplight through the window made her hair glow golden. It wasn’t braided tonight and pooled past her shoulders. Her lips had reddened, as if she’d been sipping Fil’s wine. I imagined their taste on my tongue before I could stop myself. Her voice broke into my thoughts, and I twitched.

“How much longer will you be here?” she asked.

“A week, maybe two—the vines are almost done,” I said. “I always finish what I start.”

I frowned as her bare legs pushed out from the swing. They swiped at my slacks, back and forth, back and forth.

She laughed when I stopped the swing and stood up.

“Time to go in,” I said. “We don’t want big brother coming back out.”

“Scaredy-cat.”

“How do you think I’ve survived this long?” I mumbled to myself. Once she was safely inside, I released the breath I’d been holding.