







## CHAPTER ONE

**JASON CROUCHED BEHIND** the feed barrels and listened to Barabbas. Barabbas was the big black bull Daddy had brought home from Thad Thompson's sale. Jason didn't like Barabbas. He was always crashing around in his stall, always mad.

Barabbas' stall was only ten feet away from the feed barrels. Jason watched chunks of dirt and straw churn out from between the bars. He listened to the monster's bellows roll thundering down the alleyway.

Jason licked his lips. Were his legs shaking or was the floor shaking beneath Barabbas' hooves? He felt something prickle his neck. A round, fuzzy spider. Jason flung it away. There were lots of spiders behind the feed barrels. Mice too. It was not a good place to hide, but Jason was too afraid to risk finding a better one.

Barabbas' shaggy head thumped against the bars of his stall. Fierce red eyes glared in Jason's direction. Jason cowered down out of sight. He was afraid of Barabbas, but he was even more afraid of Daddy.

Anytime now Daddy would discover the broken window and come

looking for him. Jason trembled. He knew his daddy. He would be very upset. If only he could stay hidden until suppertime, then he could sneak into the house. He'd be safer near Mom.

Jason thought about what had happened. He and eight-year-old Matthew had seen some starlings on the milk house roof. Starlings were pests. They were always invading martin houses, and sometimes they killed baby martins. Cold-blooded thieves, Daddy called them.

Jason had watched the starlings strutting across the roof. He had an idea. "Let's throw some big old rocks at those starlings!" he said. "We can pretend they are Goliath and we are David." Only this morning Mom had read them that story out of the Bible storybook. "Starlings are so bad that I bet God will send the rocks straight to their heads, just like He did for that old Goliath."

Matthew was enthused. "I get to throw first because I'm the oldest." He shook a finger at the starlings as he pried a prime looking rock out of the mud. "Your time is here!" he shouted.

Jason watched as Matthew fired the rock. He waited to see the starling fall dead. But the rock didn't go in the direction it was supposed to. It was heading for the milk house. Jason watched in horror as it shot straight through the window and disappeared inside. Showers of glass flew everywhere.

Matthew's face turned white. "Quick!" he hissed. "Daddy's in there!" The boys dashed for the barn, swung open the heavy door, and burst panting into the dim alleyway.

Matthew snatched a pitchfork and hustled into a calf pen. Maybe if Daddy came to look for him, he would think he had been bedding down the calves all the while.

But a pitchfork was too hard for Jason to use. His brown eyes darted around for a hiding place. The feed barrels. Surely Daddy wouldn't think to look for him there. He flew down the alleyway, past the calf pens, and the pony harness, and Barabbas rumbling in his stall. He ducked behind the feed barrels and waited.

Barabbas was having a fit. But even above the racket, Jason could

hear Daddy's loud voice calling for Luke and Danny. Luke and Danny were the little boys and they were always throwing stuff around, seeing who could throw the farthest. No doubt Daddy thought it was them who had broken the window.

Luke's high-pitched voice shrilled in protest. "But Daddy, it wasn't us! We were in the house helping Mom bake cookies and we just came out! See, we brought you a cookie."

**PETER KAUFFMAN IGNORED** the still-warm cookie and strode for the barn. If it wasn't the little boys, that left the other two. He ground his teeth in frustration. It was ridiculous, the way his boys were always wrecking and losing things. Last week they'd broken the handle on the scoop shovel. This week they'd lost his best hammer. And now this window. This was the last straw! How was a man to get ahead in life if his boys were always making such expensive mistakes? Peter's chest heaved as he thrust open the barn door.

Matthew was working furiously in the calf pen. When he glimpsed his father behind him, he fought down panic. He couldn't act scared if his plan was going to succeed.

Peter's words were clipped and to the point. "I'd like to know whose idea that broken window was."

Matthew forked some straw into a corner. Whew. This was going to be easier than he'd hoped. Daddy was not asking **who** had done it, he was asking whose **idea** it was. And the idea was definitely not his.

"The window?" Matthew tried to sound casual. Careless even. "Oh, that was something Jason hatched up. He's hiding down there somewhere." Matthew pointed down the alleyway.

Jason peeked between the feed barrels and saw the boots approaching. Daddy's boots were very big and very tall, and they clomped. They clomped past the calf pens and the pony harness and Barabbas' stall. They started to clomp past the feed barrels, but then they turned around and came back. Jason heard them kick loudly against the barrels.

Jason knew he had been discovered. His whole body shook. A rough

hand clamped down on his shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

Daddy's voice was loud. "Looks like you're the guilty one all right, hiding like this. Well, hiding won't lighten your punishment any." Daddy dragged him out.

Jason tried to wriggle free from Daddy's grasp. "B-but Daddy, it wasn't" ...

Peter silenced his son with a glare. "Don't go fishing for excuses now." He searched along the wall and found a small board.

**IN THE CALF** pen, Matthew cringed as he listened to the dull thuds of Jason's punishment. Maybe he should've just owned up and taken the punishment himself, like he deserved. But no, he knew how much Daddy's spankings hurt, especially if he was upset. Matthew took a deep breath. He was glad it wasn't him.

**JASON STUMBLED OUT** of the barn, furiously wiping his eyes on his shirt sleeve. Daddy had told him to stop yammering and get the chickens fed. When Daddy said something he meant it. Jason tried to choke back his sobs, but his heart hurt worse than his back, and that hurt badly.

Jason rounded the corner of the milk house. He saw the hole in the window and the shards lying on the gravel. Jason stood still. He had to stop crying. "I didn't do it," he whispered. "I didn't."

Should he pick up the glass? Glass was dangerous. He had gotten a piece in his foot once and it had made a deep cut. He didn't want that to happen again. He bent to pick up a piece, but then he heard footsteps. Footsteps that clomped.

Jason dropped the glass and fled to the chicken house. He didn't want to see Daddy again, not yet. Daddy could find someone else to pick up the glass.

For a while Jason watched the chickens pecking at their cracked corn. Then he trudged to the house. He met his sister, Heidi, at the door.

“What’s wrong Jason?”

Jason tried to dodge her. “Nothing.”

“Yes, there is. You were crying. What happened?”

Heidi could be nosy. Jason pushed past her into the wash house.

Heidi yelled into the kitchen, “Mom! MOM! Something bad happened to Jason!”

Mom hurried to the wash house. She looked at Jason’s tear stained face. “Go set the table, Heidi.”

Reluctantly, with an anxious glance over her shoulder, Heidi obeyed.

“What happened, Jason?” Mom asked. “Did you hurt yourself?”

Jason blinked hard. “No.”

Mom knelt beside him and put her arm around his shoulder. “Can you tell me what’s wrong?”

Jason leaned against Mom. She smelled good, like supper. He looked at Mom and she looked at him. “Daddy spanked me,” he whispered. “He-he said I broke the window, but I didn’t. I-it was Matthew.”

“How did he break it?”

“We were throwing rocks at some starlings on the roof. Matthew hit a window.”

“Why didn’t you tell Daddy, Jason?”

“I-I couldn’t.”

“Oh, son.” Sarah Kauffman’s heart ached for her boy. How she wished Peter would take more time to listen to the facts before he punished his children. She looked out the window and saw her husband striding up the walks, Luke and Danny scurrying behind him.

Sarah gave Jason a tight hug, then stood up quickly. “Wash your face,” she said, “and go sit at the table. “Tonight I’ll explain to Daddy.”

When Peter walked into the kitchen a few minutes later, his wife was ladling soup into a serving bowl. Jason sat at the table, staring dejectedly at his plate. Peter glanced sharply at Sarah, but she avoided his eyes. Had she been babying Jason? The thought irritated him and added to his disgruntled feelings about the window.

**JASON THOUGHT SUPPER** would never end. Not once did he look at Daddy. Not once did he look at anyone else. He crumbled crackers into his soup and ate it, but he didn't really want it. He didn't even enjoy the peanut butter cookies.

After supper, Jason went into the living room. He felt like slipping upstairs to bed, but he knew better. No one was allowed to go to bed before Daddy read the evening prayer.

Jason sat on the far end of the couch. One by one the rest of the family trickled in to take their places. Daddy reached for the little black prayer book, and then they knelt. Jason thought Daddy's prayer lasted awfully long. There were a lot of words he couldn't understand. Could God understand? Probably. Mom said God knew everything.

Jason thought about the broken window. Likely God knew about that too, by now. He felt a little bit afraid of God. But he did not know why. Mom said God was good. Jason thought God was hard to figure out.

**SARAH WAITED UNTIL** all the children were in bed, except for Amy, before she talked to Peter. She picked up Amy and sat on the rocking chair. She rocked, trying to muster her courage.

Peter was reading the *Farm Journal*. If he heard his wife clearing her throat, trying to get his attention, he gave no heed.

Sarah's hands trembled against Amy's blanket. Should she push this or not? She didn't want to. Then she remembered Jason's stricken face. She heard herself say his name.

"Peter?"

Peter finished reading his paragraph then looked up, annoyed. "Well?"

"About the window..."

Peter's face darkened.

Sarah shifted nervously. "J-Jason said he didn't break it. He said it was Matthew."

Peter waved the *Farm Journal*. "How do you know he wasn't lying?"



Matthew said it was Jason's idea."

"Maybe it was his idea, but did he break the window?"

"Listen Sarah, it doesn't matter who broke it. The main thing is that it's going to cost a lot to fix it. Windows are expensive."

Sarah felt desperate. Peter wasn't getting the point. She tried to steady her voice. "Peter. If Jason didn't break the window, he shouldn't have been punished. Don't you think so?"

Peter tossed the magazine aside and stood up. "You're a good wife, Sarah, but you pity the children too much. I think Jason lied to you. Come, it's time for bed."

Sarah followed Peter to bed. In the room above them their five-year-old son had just cried himself to sleep.