

Chapter 1



Bethany Gingerich smoothed her hands down her peacock-colored dress as she sat on a bench just outside the doorway of her aunt and uncle's kitchen. She glanced toward the front door and took in a deep breath as excitement bubbled up inside of her.

After months of planning and preparing, the first Thursday in November was finally here. Bethany's cousin Salina Petersheim was going to marry her fiancé, Will Zimmerman, whom she'd started dating nearly a year ago.

Bethany was honored Salina had asked her to be her attendant, and Bethany's brother, Anthony, was just as excited to be Will's. She and her brother would walk down the aisle ahead of the bride and groom in Salina's father's largest barn and then sit in a place of honor at the front of the congregation during the service.

For now Bethany sat with Salina, Anthony, and Will waiting to greet the hundreds of guests who would attend the wedding. The Petersheim and Zimmerman families had invited members of Salina's Old Order Amish community as well as the Old Order Mennonite community in which Will had been raised. About

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an hour ago, some members of Salina's church district had arrived to help with the festivities. The smells of baked chicken and freshly baked bread floated on the air, along with the voices of the community women who cooked in the kitchen behind them.

Bethany turned toward her cousin, who looked beautiful clad in a dress identical to Bethany's. Salina had taken care when she'd chosen the color of their dresses, and it was a beautiful complement to Salina's dark hair and baby-blue eyes. The bride-to-be looked radiant, but her nerves were obvious as she fiddled with her white apron.

"Are you ready?" Will Zimmerman also turned toward his bride, his blue eyes sparkling as he leaned over and took her hand in his. "It's seven thirty, nearly time for our guests to arrive."

"I think so." Salina's smile seemed forced.

Bethany placed her fingers on Salina's free hand and gave her best encouraging smile. "Everything will be fine. Before you know it, we'll be eating cookies and celebrating with the congregation."

Salina blew out a deep breath. "Right."

"We'll celebrate until we can't stand up straight from exhaustion," Will quipped, and they all laughed.

Both Anthony and Will looked handsome dressed in their Sunday black-and-white suits, complete with crisp white shirts, black vests, and black trousers. At the opposite end of the bench from Bethany sat Anthony. At twenty, he was four years younger than his sister, and although his hair was light brown rather than Bethany's golden blond, they both shared the same bright-blue eyes as their mother.

Bethany was certain to the depth of her bones that Salina and Will's relationship had been blessed by God. They'd met when Will visited Salina's Farm Stand at the Bird-in-Hand Marketplace.

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He'd come to buy produce for his business, Zimmerman's Family Restaurant, across the street from the marketplace. Both Will and Salina had been dating other people when they met, and Will had been a member of the Old Order Mennonite church. But they'd realized they belonged together, and before long, they'd fallen in love.

After they both endured emotional breakups, Will had talked to Salina's father, Lamar, who was the bishop in their Older Order Amish district, and had been invited to join the Amish church. Will met with *Onkel* Lamar for three baptism classes in the spring before becoming a member of the church. Soon after, he'd proposed to Salina.

The back door opened, and the crisp early-November morning air wafted in, bringing with it the aroma of moist earth and horses. Bethany and the others stood up and smiled as members of the congregation drifted in, the women dressed in black shawls and bonnets and the men in black coats and hats.

"*Gude mariye.*" Bethany nodded as she shook hands with an older guest who then moved down the line. She worked to keep her expression bright as she continued welcoming congregation members. After each woman greeted Bethany and the rest of the wedding party, she headed upstairs to deposit her bonnet and shawl on Salina's bed while the men went outside to gather by the barn.

Christiana Stoltzfus pulled Bethany into a hug. "Bethany, you look so *schee!*" She gasped as she looked from Bethany to Salina. "The dresses look even more beautiful on you two. I love the color." Christina was twenty-seven and only six months older than Salina.

"*Danki.*" Bethany smiled at her cousin, who seemed to glow.

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Although she had always considered Christiana to be beautiful, with her striking blue-green eyes and bright-red hair, she was even more attractive lately. She was now in her seventh month of pregnancy with her first child, and her happiness shone from within.

Salina pulled Christiana into her arms. "I can't believe I'm getting married today," she said, her voice sounding thick.

Christiana sighed. "How are you feeling?"

"*Froh* but nervous." Salina worried her lower lip.

Bethany beamed as she watched her cousins grin at each other. Christiana and Salina were more than Bethany's cousins; they were her best friends. The three of them, along with their cousin Leanna, ran booths at the Bird-in-Hand market. Bethany ran the Coffee Corner, Salina had her Farm Stand, Christiana had her Bake Shop, and Leanna kept her Jam and Jelly Nook. Leanna had been widowed several years ago but she had a son, and now Salina and Christiana would both be married—something that had more than once lately made Bethany feel a bit left behind. Aside from Leanna, she would be the last single member of their friend group. Bethany hadn't had a boyfriend since she briefly dated a member of her youth group when she was nineteen. And as of now, she had no prospects.

She pushed those thoughts away. Today was Salina's day! And Bethany needed to celebrate with her, not wallow in self-pity over her lack of dates.

Bethany looked up and saw Christiana's husband. Jeff and Christiana had met when she opened her Bake Shop booth next to his Unique Leather and Wood Gifts booth at the marketplace.

"*Gude mariye*, Jeff." She reached out to shake his hand and was met by a cold touch.

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“Sorry about that.” His dark eyes sparkled as a sheepish chuckle escaped his lips. “It’s chilly out there.” He pushed his hand through his dark hair, which matched his beard, and the curl that always hung over his forehead bounced back into place.

“That is true.” Bethany laughed, then turned to the next person in line. “*Gude mariye*, Leanna!”

Leanna reached around and hugged Bethany. “*Gude mariye!* I’m grateful to see you—and that it’s nice and warm in here.” She rubbed her hands together.

Leanna was her oldest cousin as well as the shortest. She had the same lovely shade of dark-brown hair as Salina, but what Bethany most admired about Leanna was the kind of woman she was. Leanna had been only thirty-one when she lost her husband, Marlin Wengerd, in an accident. Five years later, she was still raising her son alone, although they did live with her parents. With an unwavering positivity, Leanna always remembered to count her blessings, including the success of her Jam and Jelly Nook booth at the marketplace.

“*Ya*, it is cold outside,” Chester, her son, chimed in. At fourteen he already towered over his mother by nearly five inches. He shared Leanna’s bright smile and chocolate eyes, but his hair was a lighter shade of brown, almost blond, resembling his late father’s. He hugged Bethany.

“Hey, Chester.” Bethany smiled, patting his shoulder.

“You look beautiful,” Leanna said, her eyes misting over. “I can’t believe our Salina is getting married.” She sniffed as she turned to greet the bride. “You are gorgeous today and always.”

Salina blushed, and Bethany felt a tug at her heart as her cousins embraced.

“They’re so mushy,” Chester quipped, and Bethany gave a

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bark of laughter. She cupped her mouth with her hand to stifle the sound.

Leanna and Chester moved on down the line, shaking hands with Anthony and Will before disappearing into the knot of people gathered by the stairs. Bethany shook a few more hands, greeting members of her congregation and also Will's Older Order Mennonite family members and friends. When she spotted Micah Zook and his grandfather, Enos, standing near the end of the line, her heart turned over in her chest. She tried her best to continue greeting the guests moving past her, but her eyes were drawn to Micah. As he moved closer, she sneaked peek after peek.

One of the older men in the congregation paused in front of her and began talking about the cold weather. Down the line, Micah was saying something to his grandfather beside him. She took in his stature, as he stood nearly a foot taller than her own height. His brown hair was hidden by his black hat, but she enjoyed the sight of his intelligent brown eyes, which reminded her of her favorite dark-roast coffee. With his strong jaw and intense demeanor, he was the handsomest man she'd ever met. And he looked even handsomer than usual dressed in his Sunday best. Or perhaps she was seeing him through new eyes lately. His black winter coat was unzipped, and she admired his traditional black-and-white suit as it accentuated his trim waist, broad shoulders, and wide chest.

While she didn't know him well, she cherished their brief encounters each Saturday morning when he and his grandfather came to visit her at her Coffee Corner to purchase coffee and a few donuts. Their visits had become a routine during the past year, and she could count on their arrival soon after the marketplace

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opened each Saturday. They had become the highlight of her week, and she found herself often wondering about Micah.

If only she could take their relationship from acquaintance to something more . . .

“Don’t you agree?”

Bethany’s gaze snapped to the older member of her congregation who stood in front of her, obviously waiting for an answer. “I’m sorry?”

The elderly man blinked. “I said we might be getting some snow earlier than usual this year.”

“Ya, maybe so.” Bethany smiled and nodded, then turned to the next person in line, the man’s wife. “*Gude mariye*, Fannie.”

“It’s a *schee* day for a wedding,” Fannie said.

Bethany’s mouth dried when Micah finally approached her. She looked up at him towering over her, and felt as if her heart might beat out of her chest as she held her hand out to him. “*Gude mariye*, Micah.”

“Hi, Bethany.” He took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. She enjoyed the feel of his cool skin against hers, and a shiver of pleasure trilled along her spine. Oh, how she hoped he couldn’t see how his touch affected her, sending her nerves jangling to life.

“How are you today?” She prayed her voice wasn’t too perky.

Micah pulled his hand back and nodded. “*Gut, gut.*”

She grasped for something—anything else—to say. “It’s awfully cold out there, isn’t it?”

Micah glanced at his grandfather. “We were just discussing how the temperature dropped last night.”

“Ya, it sure did.” Enos reached over and shook her hand. Although the wrinkles on his face told he was close to his mideighties, the sparkle in his brown eyes was a clue to his youthful spirit.

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Bethany opened her mouth to say something more to Micah, but he had already moved on to greeting Salina and Will.

“I look forward to having your *kaffi* on Saturday,” Enos told Bethany. “It’s the highlight of my week.”

“Danki.” And Micah’s visit to my booth is the highlight of mine.

Enos moved along, and Bethany swallowed a sigh. If only she could figure out how to get to know Micah better. Though friendly, their short Saturday-morning chats weren’t enough to forge a relationship.

With Enos and Micah gone, the line of greeters dissipated for a moment. Salina leaned over to Bethany. “*Gern gschehne,*” she whispered.

Bethany felt her brow furrow. “What do you mean, ‘you’re welcome?’”

“I invited Micah and Enos to the wedding.”

Bethany blinked at her. “Why?”

Salina gave a knowing smile. “Because I’m tired of watching you flirt with Micah on Saturdays in your booth and not ever getting further than that. You never have time to talk to him at church services, so I thought maybe you’d have a better opportunity today.”

Bethany stared at Salina and her cousin laughed.

“Did you think we all hadn’t noticed how you act with Micah?” Salina leaned closer. “We’d love to see you date again. It’s been a long time, and he would be a great match for you.”

Before Bethany could respond, another line of guests came in the door, bringing with them a blast of cold air. As Bethany greeted the visitors, her mind swirled with what Salina had told her. Was there a possibility that she and Micah could be more than acquaintances?

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She shook her head. For years she'd witnessed men in the community asking her cousins out on dates while they walked past Bethany. Most men found her to be cute and silly. They didn't take her seriously or see her as someone with whom they'd share a meaningful relationship.

A few minutes before eight o'clock, Salina leaned over to Bethany. "It's time for Will and me to meet with *mei dat* and the ministers," she whispered, her voice quavering.

Bethany gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Everything will be fine." She walked with Salina and Will to the family room. When she glanced out the window, she spotted members of their community filing into the barn where the service would be held.

The back door opened, and *Onkel* Lamar, the bishop, walked into the house. With him were Salina's brother, Neil, who was the deacon, and the minister.

"Are you two ready to be married?" Lamar asked his daughter and Will.

Will and Salina nodded before following the three men upstairs. The sound of their footsteps echoed in the stairwell as voices and rattling pots and pans flowed from the kitchen where women from the church district continued preparing for the noon meal. Bethany hugged her arms to her middle. She glanced around the family room as her mind jumbled thoughts of Micah with questions about how her life would change after Salina was married.

"I feel like it was just yesterday that Will asked me to be his attendant."

Bethany turned toward Anthony. She'd almost forgotten her brother was standing beside her. "I know. The wedding came so quickly."

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Anthony tilted his head. "You okay?"

"Ya, of course." Bethany smiled. "I'm so *froh* for Salina. She and Will make a great couple, and I know they will be happy together."

It seemed like minutes before footfalls again sounded in the stairwell. "Sounds like it's time," said Anthony.

Bethany followed him to the bottom of the steps where they met Will and Salina.

Excitement filled Salina's pretty face as she looked up at Will. "I'm ready."

Will gazed down at her adoringly. "I am too."

And Bethany's heart turned over in her chest.

Chapter 2



When they reached the barn, Bethany's legs wobbled as she and Anthony walked down the narrow aisle together. The congregation sang a slow hymn as the attendants made their way to four matching cane chairs that sat at the front of the barn. Once there, Bethany stood facing Anthony and folded her hands in front of her. She held her breath, waiting for Salina and Will to join them. Then the bride and groom made their way down the aisle, and everyone sat in unison as the wedding service began.

Bethany did her best to focus on the ceremony, but she couldn't stop her mind from wandering as *Onkel* Lamar spoke. She glanced beside her and silently marveled at how mature and beautiful Salina looked. She peered over at Will and found him gazing at her cousin with a look in his eyes that could only be love.

She turned back to *Onkel* Lamar as he lectured concerning the apostle Paul's instructions for marriage included in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. She couldn't help imagining what it would feel like to sit up in front of this congregation for her own wedding. Would she ever have the chance to be a bride, a wife, a mother?

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Would she ever meet a man who took her seriously and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her?

She glanced over toward the married women's section of the congregation and found Christiana resting her hands on her abdomen. Although Leanna was a widow, she still sat with the other married women, right next to Christiana. Bethany smiled as she imagined Christiana holding her first child.

Then an unexpected pang of sadness hit her. After the wedding, Salina would join Christiana and Leanna in the married section of the congregation, and Bethany would be left to find someone else to sit with among the unmarried women. She imagined herself sitting with Phoebe, Christiana's younger sister. Although she loved her younger cousin, she would still miss being with her favorite cousins during the service.

She knew more than just their seating arrangements at church would have to change soon. When Christiana had her baby, she would most likely stop running her Bake Shop at the marketplace. That would mean Bethany wouldn't see her Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Jeff would probably build Christiana a stand at their house for her to sell baked goods when her baby was older. And when Salina had her first child, she, too, would close her booth at the market—if she didn't close it sooner to help Will run his restaurant.

Bethany felt her emotions reel as she contemplated losing her close relationships with her cousins. She would miss them desperately!

Her gaze moved to Leanna, and she felt a glimmer of hope. At least she would still have Leanna at the market.

Pushing her selfish worries away, she looked over toward the unmarried men's section. As Micah studied his lap, Bethany tried

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to imagine what it would be like to date him. Could a man like Micah Zook care for someone like her?

He suddenly looked up, and when his gaze tangled with hers, heat infused her cheeks. She smiled, and to her surprise, the corner of his lips turned up, sending her heart into a wild gallop.

How she longed to befriend Micah and get to know him. Did he already have a girlfriend? She'd never seen him with a woman when he and Enos visited her booth on Saturdays, but of course, she'd never asked.

Breaking their gaze, Bethany looked down at her hands. *Onkel* Lamar instructed Salina and Will on how to run a godly household before moving on to a sermon on the story of Sarah and Tobias from the intertestamental book of Tobit. The sermon took forty-five minutes, and when it was over, *Onkel* Lamar looked back and forth between Salina and Will. "Now here are two in one faith—Salina Marie Petersheim and William Martin Zimmerman."

Bethany held back happy tears when *Onkel* Lamar turned to the congregation. "Do any of you know any scriptural reason for the couple to not be married?" he asked, waiting a beat before looking at the couple again. "If it is your desire to be married, you may in the name of the Lord come forth."

Will took Salina's hand in his, and they stood before *Onkel* Lamar to take their vows.

Onkel Lamar addressed Will first. "Can you confess, brother, that you accept this, our sister, as your wife, and that you will not leave her until death separates you? And do you believe that this is from the Lord and that you have come thus far by your faith and prayers?"

"Ya," Will said.

Then *Onkel* Lamar looked at Salina. “Can you confess, sister, that you accept this, our brother, as your husband, and that you will not leave him until death separates you? And do you believe that this is from the Lord and that you have come thus far by your faith and prayers?”

“Ya,” Salina said.

Bethany looked down at her lap and sniffed, then felt someone watching her. She tilted her head up and found Micah still staring at her, which sent her senses whirling. Was he thinking about her? No, he couldn’t be. After all, they hardly knew each other.

Onkel Lamar looked at Will again. “Because you have confessed, brother, that you want to take this, our sister, for your wife, do you promise to be loyal to her and care for her if she may have adversity, affliction, sickness, weakness, or faintheartedness—which are many infirmities that are among poor mankind—as is appropriate for a Christian, God-fearing husband?”

“Ya,” Will said.

Onkel Lamar asked the same of Salina and she responded with a strong, “Ya.”

While Will and Salina joined hands, *Onkel* Lamar read “A Prayer for Those About to Be Married” from an Amish prayer book called the *Christenpflicht*. Then he announced, “Go forth in the name of the Lord. You are now man and wife.”

Tears trailed down Bethany’s cheeks, and she was grateful she’d stuck a handful of tissues in her pocket. Weddings always pulled at her heartstrings. She wiped her eyes and glanced at Christiana and Leanna, finding her cousins wiping their own tears as well.

Salina and Will sat down for another sermon and another

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prayer, and Bethany forced herself not to look at Micah again and instead listen to *Onkel* Lamar. After he recited the Lord's Prayer, the congregation stood, and the three-hour service ended with the singing of another hymn.

And then it was official—Salina and Will were married. Her cousin was now Will's wife, and Bethany thought she might choke on the lump forming in her throat. She was so happy for them.

Keeping with tradition, younger members of the congregation filed out of the barn first, followed by the wedding party. Anthony nodded at Bethany, and she smiled at him as they walked together to the barn exit with Will and Salina close behind them.



Micah couldn't take his eyes off of Bethany as she stood surrounded by her cousins. In the warm yellow glow of the lanterns, her eyes seemed a lighter shade of blue than they did in the fluorescent lights at the marketplace. She looked beautiful in her bluish-green dress with her sunshine-blond hair peeking out from under her prayer covering. Something so sweet and innocent about her seemed to lure him in.

Micah had noticed Bethany the first time he'd attended church with his grandfather. That had been two years ago when Micah made the decision to move in with *Daadi* and help him run his custom outdoor-furniture business after *Daadi's* helper left to move to Indiana. It had been the perfect opportunity for Micah to leave his father's farm, his father's castigation, and his community behind. Micah had been certain the change would be good after he'd lost his fiancée, Dawn, following a short battle with leukemia—especially when he received no sympathy or support

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from his father. His heart had been in shambles, and he'd needed a new start. How else could he escape the memories and give his soul room to heal? After all, he'd known Dawn nearly his whole life, and they were going to be married. They had hoped to have a family and grow old together. He had proposed to her, and they'd been planning for the special day. But then she didn't feel well, and the diagnosis came.

Six months later she was gone.

Micah swallowed back the grief that threatened to choke him even now. He had to be strong. After all, it had been two years since he'd lost her. Still, weddings were difficult for him. Such joyful occasions also reminded him of everything he'd lost when Dawn passed away.

He was certain he'd never meet anyone who would warm his heart the way Dawn had, and he still believed he'd never find another woman he would love the way he'd loved Dawn. And he couldn't bear any possibility of facing that kind of loss again.

But there was something about Bethany Gingerich. It wasn't that he longed to replace Dawn. And Bethany couldn't anyway. Bethany didn't look a thing like Dawn, and while Dawn had been outgoing and sociable, Bethany was even more talkative and friendly, not seeming to have a shy bone in her petite body.

Still, as much as Micah craved solitude to spare his heart from more tragedy and sadness, he felt Bethany's charisma pulling him in. At the very least, Micah longed for a friendship with this cheerful young woman.

He hadn't planned on attending the wedding today when Salina invited him. But he was grateful he'd come. It gave him an excuse to see Bethany outside of church and the marketplace.

When he'd felt like his grief was going to overcome him

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during the service, he had looked up and found Bethany smiling at him. And to his surprise, her pretty gaze had been just the balm his broken heart needed in that moment. There was something special about Bethany that soothed his spirit.

“What are you looking at?” *Daadi* asked from across the table where they sat eating their roasted-chicken lunch. *Daadi* craned his neck to look over his shoulder at where Bethany stood talking and laughing with her cousins. Turning back to Micah, he wagged his eyebrows. “Oh, I see.”

“It’s nothing,” Micah muttered, scooping up more mashed potatoes.

“I may be old, but I’m not blind, Micah. I know our visits to the marketplace are about more than *appeditlich kaffi* and donuts.”

Micah ignored the comment and forked more chicken into his mouth.

Daadi leaned forward and lowered his voice. “It’s okay to fall in love again.”

“I’m not in love,” Micah hissed through gritted teeth.

Daadi harrumphed and returned his attention to his plate, and Micah felt his shoulders relax. He often wondered how *Daadi* seemed to know what he was thinking. Was it an old man’s intuition?

He looked past *Daadi* to where Bethany had turned to speak to another group of young women. Her smile reminded him of the summer sun, and when she laughed, he couldn’t help but grin himself.

How he longed to be as outgoing and friendly as she was. Micah often found himself at a loss for words when he was surrounded by a group of people, especially if they were strangers. But he’d never witnessed Bethany struggle for something to say to her

customers in her Coffee Corner. Instead, she often commanded conversations with sweetness and grace.

“Would you get me a piece of *kuche* and some *kichlin*?” *Daadi*’s question broke through Micah’s thoughts.

“*Ya*, of course.”

Micah stood and walked over to the dessert tables at the far end of the room. The sweet aroma of cakes and cookies beckoned to him as conversations swirled around him. He filled two plates with pieces of chocolate cake and a mountain of peanut-butter, macadamia-nut, and oatmeal-raisin cookies.

When he turned, he stilled as he found himself face-to-face with Bethany. She raised a blond eyebrow and pointed to his plates. “Are you going to eat all of that yourself, Micah?”

“No.” He shook his head, then nodded toward where *Daadi* sat talking to an older couple from their church district. “*Mei daadi* asked me to get him some dessert.”

“A likely story.” Bethany folded her arms over her chest as her pretty pink lips twitched. “I bet you’re going to eat it all yourself and then come back for more.”

Micah studied her, taking in her beautiful smile and the ease with which she teased him. He wished he could make conversation the way she did.

She picked up a plate for herself and began filling it with peanut-butter cookies. “I’m just kidding. The desserts are for everyone. Don’t they look fantastic?”

“*Ya*. They smell fantastic too.”

She added a piece of cheesecake before she turned toward him. “Will you be at the market for your usual *kaffi* and donut Saturday?”

“Of course.” He shifted his weight on his feet. “*Daadi* likes to

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start every Saturday morning with our trip to the market.” *And I do too.*

“*Gut.*” She smiled and reached for a piece of pumpkin pie. “I don’t think I’ll be at the market tomorrow. I’ll be over here early to help Salina and Will clean up.”

“But you’ll be there for sure Saturday, right?” He wondered if she heard the hope in his voice.

“Oh, *ya.*” She turned back to the table and added a chocolate-chip cookie to her plate. “I missed today, and I’ll miss tomorrow too. I can’t go all week without opening my booth.”

“How long have you had it now?”

She looked over her shoulder at him. “My booth?”

“*Ya.*”

She stood up straight and twisted her lips as if contemplating the question. “I think it’s four years now.”

“What inspired you to open it?”

“Well, my cousin Leanna had opened her Jam and Jelly Nook to make some extra income after her husband passed away. I went to visit her one day, and I saw that the booth near hers had become available. I’d been playing around with flavored *kaffi*, and my family enjoyed it. Also, *mei mamma* had taught me how to make donuts. So I asked my parents if I could open the booth as a way to make some money and also spend more time with Leanna. To my surprise, *mei dat* said yes, and the Coffee Corner was born.” She laughed lightly. “I didn’t think it would last that long, really.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I suppose I didn’t think the *kaffi* was *gut* enough. And I wasn’t sure I’d have enough customers to make a profit.”

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“But the customers are lined up whenever *mei daadi* and I come to see you.”

She shrugged. “I’m grateful the Lord has blessed me with success.”

He studied her. She was humble, but obviously gifted with good business sense and a strong work ethic. An admirable combination.

“Bethany!”

Bethany turned toward the table in the corner where Salina, Will, and Anthony sat. She lifted the plate toward Anthony. “I’m coming!”

She looked back at Micah. “*Mei bruder* is waiting for his snacks.” Her smile was warm. “It was *gut* talking to you.”

“You too.”

Micah watched Bethany walk toward her brother and not for the first time wished for more conversations like the one they’d just had.

Chapter 3



Bethany hummed to herself as the warm and delectable aroma of bananas Foster–flavored coffee filled her booth Saturday morning. She flipped donuts in oil on her stove. Once they were golden brown, she set them on the cooling rack and glanced over at her row of coffeepots.

This was her favorite time of the morning—before her customers came in and while the donuts were frying. Anthony always dropped her off a few hours before the rest of the booth owners so she could prepare her donuts and set up the booth well in advance of when the marketplace doors opened and the customers arrived.

She glazed the donuts, then set them on shelves behind her, smiling as she took in the different flavors—cinnamon-sugar, chocolate, strawberry-iced, chocolate-iced with sprinkles, vanilla-iced with sprinkles, and plain glazed. How she loved baking donuts for her customers! She was grateful *Dad* had agreed to allow her to open her booth four years ago.

Ever since she was little, she had enjoyed meeting people. Her *mammi* had always called Bethany a social butterfly, and it was

true. Bethany never felt uneasy in a crowd. Instead, she enjoyed talking to people and learning their stories. While Salina would shut down at youth gatherings with other groups, Bethany would take charge, finding out everyone's names and where they were from. Salina called it Bethany's gift, but Bethany just found entertainment in talking to people she had never met before.

When the timer went off indicating it was time to add the vanilla icing to the dozen waiting on the cooling racks, she set to work, humming and glazing while thoughts of Micah filled her mind. The market would open soon, and he and his grandfather would stop by for their usual Saturday-morning snack. Her heartbeat ticked up at the thought of seeing Micah's handsome face and gorgeous smile.

When she heard a meow and a peep, she looked down. Daisy and Lily, the two resident market cats, blinked up at her.

"*Gude mariye, mei freinden.*" Squatting down, Bethany rubbed Lily's chin and touched Daisy's nose. While Daisy was a rotund gray tabby, her daughter, Lily, was a sleek brown tabby. "I suppose you're looking for breakfast. *Ya?*"

The cats responded with a chorus of meows, and Bethany laughed as she motioned for the animals to follow her to the corner where she kept the cat food and their bowls. She filled two bowls with dry food and the third with water.

"Enjoy," she told the cats as the sound of their crunching overtook the booth.

"Do I smell banana-flavored *kaffi?*"

Bethany looked up as Leanna and Christiana stepped into the booth. "*Ya.*" She pointed to the blackboard where she'd written today's specials—coconut-almond, bananas Foster, butter-pecan, regular, and decaf. Just a few months ago, she'd decided to start

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adding three flavored coffees to her daily specials in order to add more variety for her customers. “Do you want to give it a try? I have regular if it doesn’t sound appetizing to you.”

“*Ya*, I’ll take a cup,” Leanna said.

“It smells amazing, but I have to stick with decaf,” Christiana said as she gingerly sat on one of the stools at a nearby high-top table.

Bethany cringed at Christiana’s effort. “Do you want me to get you a regular chair?”

Christiana glared at her. “You sound like Jeff. I’m fine.”

“Okay, okay. I’m sorry.” Bethany held her hand up and tried to stop her snicker.

Leanna gave a little snort as she walked over to the table at the far end of the booth where Bethany stocked the creamers, stirrers, powdered flavorings, and sweeteners. She gathered up some coffee fixings and carried them to the table while Bethany poured two cups of coffee for her cousins. Bethany then poured herself a cup of coconut-almond coffee before joining them at the table.

“This *kaffi* is fantastic,” Leanna said, holding up her cup.

Christiana nodded. “The decaf is great too.”

“*Danki*.” Bethany sipped her own drink. Today’s flavors were good, but not her best. “So, how are you both doing this morning?”

Christiana cupped her hand to her mouth to stifle a yawn. “Still tired from the wedding.”

Leanna chuckled. “*Ya*, I am, too, but it was lovely.”

“It was.” Bethany nodded. “I had fun helping clean up yesterday too.”

“I wanted to help, but Jeff insisted I rest.” Christiana rolled her eyes and laughed. “I appreciate that he cares, but he must

think I'm a weakling. My back does hurt, though. And my feet." She paused, then shrugged. "He was right." She looked behind her toward the entrance to the booth and then back at them. "But don't tell him I said that."

"Where is he?" Bethany asked.

"He'll be here soon. We unloaded my baked goods, and he ran to the hardware store for some supplies for his booth." Christiana sipped more coffee. "It will be strange to look across at Salina's booth and see it closed today, even though it was closed last week too. It's not the same when she's not here."

Bethany sighed. "Ya, I know. I miss her too."

"But she said she'll be back next week." Leanna stirred more creamer into her coffee. "That's if she's done settling into her new *haus*."

"It's so great that Will found them that four-bedroom *haus* to buy near her parents so they didn't have to stay in that little *daadihaus* he'd been renting," Christiana said. "Salina said Will was concerned about finding her the 'perfect *haus*.'" She made air quotes as she shook her head. "He's so sweet to her."

Leanna held up her cup toward Christiana. "Just like Jeff is to you."

Christiana smiled fondly and gazed down at her abdomen. "I'm very blessed." Then she looked up again. "Now Salina will have to replant her garden in the spring. Her parents said she can still use her original garden, but she'd like to have her new garden going as soon as she can. She said she still has some canned goods to sell this winter, but she'll run out before long and have to close."

Bethany cradled her coffee in her hands as she considered Salina's new life. "I know she's mentioned that she might close

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down the booth for good and work at the restaurant instead. Do you think she will?"

Leanna nodded. "She told me again that she might. It would give her more time with her husband."

"True," Bethany said, and that familiar sadness crept into her heart. She would miss Salina if she closed up her Farm Stand. Why did everything have to change so quickly?

"Oh." Christiana chuckled as she placed her hand on her belly. "The *boppli* is kicking again." She divided a look between Bethany and Leanna. "Do you want to feel?"

"Ya." Leanna scooted her stool over and set her hand on Christiana's abdomen. She nodded at the movement there. "I remember that feeling. Chester had the hiccups every morning when I was pregnant with him. I loved it."

Bethany carefully placed her hand on Christiana's belly and sucked in a breath when she felt the little *bump-bump* of a kick. She giggled. "Hello, little one!"

Christiana laughed too. "I can't wait to meet this little person."

"I know you're excited." Leanna touched her arm. "We're all excited."

"Ya." Bethany lifted her cup and once again found herself contemplating if she would ever be as fortunate as her cousins. Would God lead her to a man who would want to marry her, to care for her and make her a home? If so, would God bless them with children?

The buzzer rang, indicating the dough had risen and was ready for Bethany to prepare another dozen donuts for frying. She jumped up and rushed across the creaky, worn wooden floors to her stoves, where she began punching the dough. While she worked, she heard the doors at the front of the market *whoosh*

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open and voices bouncing off the walls. The marketplace was open for business.

"It's time to get to work," Christiana said as she climbed down from the stool. "I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to get on your stools, Bethany."

"That's why your husband worries about you," Leanna teased. Christiana sighed and rolled her eyes.

"You two have a *gut* day," Bethany called to them. "I'll see you at lunchtime."

She busied herself cutting out donuts and began frying them in the oil. Then she finished glazing the last batch. She looked up just as her first customers, Micah and Enos, walked into the booth. Warmth curled in her chest.

Micah had kept his promise from the wedding. He was here to see her. And he looked handsome clad in the gray shirt she could see under his unzipped black coat. A straw hat covered his head, and his eyes were bright and focused on her, sending a ripple through her.

She smoothed her hands down her black apron and stood up straighter. "*Gude mariye.*"

"Hi." Micah nodded toward her row of coffeepots behind the counter. "Do I smell banana *kaffi*?"

"*Ya.*" She shrugged, suddenly feeling self-conscious with her choice of coffee flavors. "I had read about it in a magazine, and I thought I might try it. But maybe it wasn't the best choice."

She pointed to the list of specials on the blackboard beside him. "I also have coconut-almond and butter-pecan. They seem to be popular." Her cheeks heated when she realized she was babbling, but she couldn't stop her mouth from moving. "I sell the most when I stick with almond, caramel, or cinnamon."

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"Bananas Foster sounds great." Micah pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and turned toward Enos. "You want a cup, *Daadi?*"

Enos's smile was wide. "Of course I do." He pointed toward the shelf of donuts. "And two of those cinnamon donuts."

"I'll take two donuts as well." Micah set the money on the counter.

"Okay." Bethany poured the coffee and slipped the tops on the cups. She set them on the counter and then put donuts into a small box. After handing the box to Micah, she took his money and set the bills in her cash register before giving him his change. "*Danki.*" She set a pile of sweeteners and a pitcher of cream on the counter beside the cups.

"Thank *you.*" Micah added cream and a few packets of sweetener to the cup before he took a sip.

"Do you like it?" Bethany held her breath.

"It's different." Micah took another sip. "I like it." He looked at his grandfather. "What do you think?"

Enos also added sweetener and cream before he took a sip. "Fantastic."

"I'm so glad you like it." Bethany racked her brain for something else to say to Micah besides the regular pleasantries. Behind him, she spotted customers filing into her booth, and she wished she could ask them to wait until she was done talking to him. "Did you enjoy the wedding?"

"*Ya.*" He nodded. "How did the cleanup go yesterday?"

"It was okay. I had fun, but it took all day."

"I'm sure it did," Enos said. "There had to be three hundred people there."

Bethany nodded. "That's true."

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Enos glanced over his shoulder. "Looks like you have a line already. I think your booth is the most popular in the marketplace." He leaned in as a hint of a smirk danced across his face. "Don't tell your cousins I said that, though."

"I won't." Bethany looked up at Micah, wishing she could ask him to stay and chat with her while she served her customers. "I hope you have a great day."

"You too." Micah picked up the box of donuts and lingered for a moment. "I think you'll be busy today. The *kaffi* is great."

"*Danki*." Bethany leaned over the counter as Micah and Enos started toward the booth exit. She tried to imagine how it would feel to spend more time with Micah, get to know him, or even date him. But she quickly dismissed the idea. Surely Micah had better prospects for women in the community. She was just the perky *maedel* who served his Saturday-morning flavored coffee and donuts.

Pushing herself upright, Bethany smiled at her next customer in line, a woman who looked to be in her early twenties, dressed in jeans, a pink coat, and a purple knitted cap. "Good morning. How may I help you?"

The young woman held up her wallet. "I'd love a cup of that bananas Foster coffee and a vanilla-sprinkled donut."

"Coming right up," Bethany said as she shoved thoughts of Micah from her mind and turned her attention back to the workday ahead of her.



Micah followed *Daadi* through the knot of customers clogging the aisles of the marketplace as they made their way to the exit.

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The scents of wood and leather wafted around them as they moved past Jeff Stoltzfus's Unique Leather and Wood Gifts booth. Micah glanced into the booth and spotted shelves filled with wooden trains that spelled out names, leather key chains, belts, and personalized bracelets.

The delicious smells of baked goods overwhelmed him as they next walked past Christiana's Bake Shop, which displayed a variety of cakes, pies, and cookies. He spotted the candy, handbags, and lunch meat booths before they reached the exit.

The large glass doors opened with a *whoosh*, and Micah stepped outside behind his grandfather. The crisp air greeted him and seeped through his coat. He glanced around at the parking lot, finding nearly all of the spaces clogged with cars. A line of horses and buggies stood at the hitching post.

Micah climbed into his own buggy and grabbed the reins as *Daadi* took a seat beside him.

"It's another busy day at the marketplace," *Daadi* quipped.

"That's true. I don't think I've ever seen this parking lot empty, except during the dead of winter when the tourist season slows down." Micah guided the horse toward the exit and waited as cars rolled by on busy Old Philadelphia Pike. "And I think you're right that Bethany's booth is the busiest."

Daadi smiled at him. "I still say you're there for more than the *kaffi* and donuts."

Micah shook his head. "You need to stop trying to marry me off. You know I'm not looking."

"You may not be looking, but God always has a plan." *Daadi* opened the box of donuts and held one up. "And God is always in control."

"I know." Micah kept his eyes on the road as he guided his

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horse out onto the highway. He set his jaw as he considered the idea of God's plan. He'd never understand why it had been God's plan for Dawn to pass away from leukemia at the age of twenty-three. It would never make sense to him, but he kept those questions to himself. "I'm not interested in falling in love again. I just want to help you run your business."

"We'll just see what God has in store for you. It could be that *schee maedel* with the lovely smile who happens to make the best *kaffi* and donuts in all of Lancaster County."

Micah pressed his lips together. "I'm sure she's nice to all of her customers." He had to change the subject so that *Daadi* would stop nagging him about his nonexistent future wife. "So what are we going to work on today?"

"I thought we'd continue on with our current projects. The winter is the best time to stock up on benches, picnic tables, gliders, and rockers. Then we'll be ahead when the orders show up in February."

Micah halted the horse at a red light while *Daadi* talked on about their plans for the day. He was grateful *Daadi* had accepted his offer two years ago when he asked if he could move to Bird-in-Hand and help him run his business. Getting away from his father and their volatile relationship had been the best choice for him, especially when he no longer had Dawn at his side to keep him calm when things at home got out of control.

Furthermore, Micah enjoyed the hands-on work of building custom outdoor furniture more than helping out on his father's dairy farm. And he'd also longed to take care of his grandparents. Micah and *Daadi* had been devastated when *Mammi* passed away less than a year after Micah moved in. Micah had tried to help *Daadi* through his sadness by keeping him busy with the busi-

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ness and comforting him when the grief threatened to suffocate him.

It seemed God had sent Micah to his grandparents' not only to heal his own broken heart but also to be a comfort to *Daadi*.

Micah steered the horse up the long rock driveway that led to his grandfather's large house, workshop, and barns and guided the animal past the two-story brick farmhouse to the large cinder block workshop. After dropping off *Daadi* and stowing the horse and buggy, he walked toward the shop and the faded sign announcing Zook's Custom Outdoor Furniture. Inside, the large open area was lined with toolboxes, worktables, workbenches, and supplies. The comforting smell of wood and stain welcomed Micah as he walked around the shop and flipped on the overhead propane lights. He spotted the line of benches at the end of the shop and looked over at *Daadi* as he sat down at the desk on the far end of the work area.

For the last couple of months, Micah had suspected that the business was floundering, but *Daadi* never seemed to want to discuss just how bad it was. If Micah brought up the finances, *Daadi* would ignore the question or change the subject.

Micah hung his straw hat on a peg by the door and then turned toward *Daadi*, who was flipping through envelopes. "Are those bills?"

"No." *Daadi* kept staring down at the desk.

"Is there something you want to discuss?" Micah prodded him.

"No, I want you to finish that bench we started yesterday."

Micah walked over to the bench and picked up his sanding block. He looked back over at *Daadi*. "Have you considered maybe advertising in some of the local tourist magazines? Or maybe we

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can talk to some of the owners of the local home-improvement stores and see if they'll add us to their websites?"

"No." *Daadi's* voice was stern and insistent. "There's no need to give in to the fancy ways of websites and such. We'll keep running the business like I always have. The orders always pick up in the spring." He looked back down at the desk. "And no matter what, we'll be fine."

Micah felt his jaw tighten as memories of his father lecturing him for doing or saying the wrong thing plagued his mind. He took a deep, shuddering breath, doing his best to settle his nerves and tamp down his temper. He would not allow himself to behave the way his father always had.

"Okay," Micah finally muttered.

Still, as he turned his attention to the bench, he tried to think of a way to convince his grandfather to let him help with the finances and make sure the business truly was fine.