

# ACCLAIM FOR BETH WISEMAN

## An Unlikely Match

“The glowing second in Wiseman’s Amish Inn series (after *A Picture of Love*) features elderly sisters Esther and Lizzie, who run The Peony Inn and enjoy a bit of surreptitious matchmaking . . . With multiple vibrant story lines, Wiseman’s excellent tale will have readers anticipating the next. Any fan of Amish romance will love this.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“This was such a sweet story. I cheered on Evelyn and Jayce the whole way. Jayce is having issues with his difficult father, who’s brought a Hollywood crew to Amish country to film a scene in a nearby cave. Evelyn has a strong, supportive family, so she feels for Jayce immediately. As they grow closer and help each other overcome fears and phobias, they know this can’t last. But God, and two persnickety Amish sisters, Lizzie and Esther, have other plans. Can a Hollywood boy fall for an Amish girl and make it work? Find out. Read this delightful, heartwarming story!”

—LENORA WORTH, AUTHOR OF *THEIR AMISH REUNION*

“Beth Wiseman’s *An Unlikely Match* will keep you turning the pages as you are pulled into this heartwarming and unpredictable Amish romance story about Evelyn and Jayce, two interesting and compelling characters. Beth doesn’t disappoint keeping you guessing as to how this story will end.”

—MOLLY JEBBER, BESTSELLING AMISH INSPIRATIONAL  
HISTORICAL ROMANCE AUTHOR




## A Picture of Love


“Beth Wiseman’s *A Picture of Love* will delight readers of Amish fiction. Naomi and Amos’s romance is a heartfelt story of love, forgiveness, and second chances. This book has everything readers love about a Beth Wiseman story—an authentic portrait of the Amish community, humor, the power of grace and hope and, above all, faith in God’s Word and His promises.”

—AMY CLIPSTON, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE FARM STAND*

## A Beautiful Arrangement



“Wiseman’s delightful third installment of the Amish Journey series (*Listening to Love*) centers on the struggles and unexpected joys of a marriage of convenience . . . Series devotees and newcomers alike will find this engrossing romance hard to put down.”



—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“*A Beautiful Arrangement* has so much heart you won’t want to put it down until you’ve read the last page. I love second-chance love stories, and Lydia and Samuel’s story is heartbreaking and sweet with unexpected twists and turns that make their journey to love all the more satisfying. Beth’s fans will cherish this book.”

—JENNIFER BECKSTRAND, AUTHOR OF  
THE PETERSHEIM BROTHERS SERIES

## Listening to Love

“Wiseman is at her best in this surprising tale of love and faith.”

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*



“I always find Beth Wiseman’s books to be both tenderly romantic and thought provoking. She has a way of setting a scene that makes me feel like I’m part of an Amish community and visiting for supper. I loved the title of this book, the message about faith and God, and the heartfelt romance between Lucas and Natalie. *Listening to Love* has everything I love in a Beth Wiseman novel—a strong faith message, a touching romance, and a beautiful sense of place. Beth is such an incredibly gifted storyteller.”

—SHELLEY SHEPARD GRAY, BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
OF THE SEASONS OF SUGARCREEK SERIES

“*Listening to Love* is vintage Beth Wiseman . . . Clear your calendar because you’re going to want to read this one in a single sitting.”

—VANNETTA CHAPMAN, AUTHOR OF THE SHIPSHAWANA AMISH MYSTERY SERIES

## Hearts in Harmony

“This is a sweet story, not only of romance, but of older generations and younger generations coming together in friendship. It’s a tearjerker as well as an uplifting story.”

—PARKERSBURG NEWS & SENTINEL

“Beth Wiseman has penned a poignant story of friendship, faith, and love that is sure to touch readers’ hearts.”

—KATHLEEN FULLER, AUTHOR OF THE MIDDLEFIELD FAMILY NOVELS

“Beth Wiseman’s *Hearts in Harmony* is a lyrical hymn. Mary and Levi are heartwarming, lovable characters who instantly feel like dear friends. Once readers open this book, they won’t put it down until they’ve reached the last page.”

—AMY CLIPSTON, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE BAKE SHOP*

## Amish Celebrations

“Wiseman’s (Amish Secrets) collection of timeless stories of love and loss among the Plain People will delight fans of the author’s heartfelt story lines and flowing prose.”

—*LIBRARY JOURNAL*

## Home All Along

“Beth Wiseman’s novel will find a permanent home in every reader’s heart as she spins comfort and prose into a stellar read of grace.”

—KELLY LONG, AUTHOR OF THE PATCH OF HEAVEN SERIES

## Love Bears All Things

“Suggest to those seeking a more truthful, less saccharine portrayal of the trials of human life and the transformative growth and redemption that may occur as a result.”

—*LIBRARY JOURNAL*

## Her Brother’s Keeper

“Wiseman has created a series in which the readers have a chance to peel back all the layers of the Amish secrets.”

—*RT BOOK REVIEWS*, 4<sup>1/2</sup> STARS AND JULY 2015 TOP PICK!

“Wiseman’s new launch is edgier, taking on the tough issues of mental illness and suicide. Amish fiction fans seeking something a bit more thought-provoking and challenging than the usual fare will find this series debut a solid choice.”

—*LIBRARY JOURNAL*

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## OTHER BOOKS BY BETH WISEMAN

### THE AMISH INN NOVELS

*A Picture of Love*

*An Unlikely Match*

*A Season of Change* (available October 2021)

### THE AMISH JOURNEY NOVELS

*Hearts in Harmony*

*Listening to Love*

*A Beautiful Arrangement*

### THE AMISH SECRETS NOVELS

*Her Brother's Keeper*

*Love Bears All Things*

*Home All Along*

### THE LAND OF CANAAN NOVELS

*Seek Me with All Your Heart*

*The Wonder of Your Love*

*His Love Endures Forever*

### THE DAUGHTERS OF THE PROMISE NOVELS

*Plain Perfect*

*Plain Pursuit*

*Plain Promise*

*Plain Paradise*

*Plain Proposal*

*Plain Peace*

### OTHER NOVELS

*Need You Now*

*The House that Love Built*

*The Promise*

### STORY COLLECTIONS

*An Amish Year*

*Amish Celebrations*

## STORIES

*A Choice to Forgive* included in *An Amish Christmas*

*A Change of Heart* included in *An Amish Gathering*

*Healing Hearts* included in *An Amish Love*

*A Perfect Plan* included in *An Amish Wedding*

*A Recipe for Hope* included in *An Amish Kitchen*

*Always Beautiful* included in *An Amish Miracle*

*Rooted in Love* included in *An Amish Garden*

*When Christmas Comes Again* included in *An Amish Second Christmas*

*In His Father's Arms* included in *An Amish Cradle*

*A Cup Half Full* included in *An Amish Home*

*The Cedar Chest* included in *An Amish Heirloom*

*When Love Returns* included in *An Amish Homecoming*

*A Reunion of Hearts* included in *An Amish Reunion*

*Loaves of Love* included in *An Amish Christmas Bakery*



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THE AMISH INN NOVELS

BETH WISEMAN

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*An Unlikely Match*

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*To all those who have lost a loved one to Covid-19.*



## GLOSSARY

*ab im kopp:* crazy, off in the head

*ach:* oh

*boppli:* baby

*bruder:* brother

*daadi haus:* a small house built onto or near the main house for grandparents to live in

*daed:* dad

*danki:* thank you

*dochder:* daughter

*Englisch:* those who are not Amish; the English language

*fraa:* wife

*Gott:* God

*grossmammi:* grandmother

*gut:* good

*haus:* house

## GLOSSARY

*kaffi*: coffee

*kapp*: prayer covering worn by Amish women

*kinner*: children

*lieb*: love

*maedel*: girl

*mamm*: mom

*mei*: my

*mudder*: mother

*nee*: no

*Nichts zu danken*: You're welcome.

*Ordnung*: the written and unwritten rules of the Amish; the understood behavior by which the Amish are expected to live, passed down from generation to generation. Most Amish know the rules by heart.

*rumschpringe*: "running around"; the period of time when Amish youth experience life in the *Englisch* world before making the decision to be baptized and commit to Amish life.

*sohn*: son

*Wie bischt*: Hello, how are you?

*ya*: yes

# O N E

ESTHER STARED OUT THE WINDOW IN DISBELIEF AS HER HEART pounded like a bass drum.

“Lizzie, what have you done?”

Two large buses pulled into the driveway, followed by two sleek black cars—limousines, she thought they were called. Esther raised the blinds higher. “You said our guests were *Englisch* executives from a large produce company who planned to have meetings here.”

Lizzie scowled. “*Ach*, well, that’s what I thought they said.” She blew a strand of gray hair away from her face, then tucked it beneath her prayer covering. “That’s what the message on the answering machine said, and when I called the man back, he said they were coming all the way from Los Angeles, California. He asked if we had room for them to park their vehicles, and I told him we have eighty acres. I figured they’d go back and tell their fancy friends what a wonderful gem they’d found hidden here in southern Indiana.”

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Esther took a deep breath and clenched her hands at her waist. “Those *Englisch* folks aren’t from a produce company, Lizzie.” She turned to her younger sister. “Do you see what is written across the sides of those buses?” She waved toward the window and sighed. “Or motor homes. Whatever they are.”

Lizzie scrunched up her face and squeezed her eyes closed, then she lifted her chin and looked at Esther. “I must have made a mistake.”

Esther shook her head. “There is a big difference between *produce* and *production*.” She pointed out the window, tapping the glass this time. “Clarkson *Movie* Productions, Lizzie. You didn’t give them permission to film a movie here, did you?”

“Of course not! I would have remembered something like that.” Lizzie huffed. “I don’t know what you’re so upset about. They are still paying customers.”

Esther raised a hand to cover her forehead. “They made reservations for twelve to stay in the main *haus*. Are we expected to feed all the other people in those buses and cars too? There are bound to be more than twelve, and we only have enough groceries for those staying in the guest rooms.”

Lizzie turned away, her chin still raised. “I don’t know.”

Esther began to count as people started getting out of the vehicles. Six stepped out of the first bus—four men and two women dressed in fancy clothes. They huddled in a circle, eyeing the property from behind dark sunglasses. It was a bright sunny day in the middle of April without a cloud in the sky. Five more people emerged from the second bus as still others began pouring out of the black cars.

Esther glanced at Naomi and Amos, who were standing on the porch of the *daadi haus*, surely wondering what all the commotion was about. They'd known the inn was expecting a dozen guests, not this crowd. Naomi was like a daughter to Esther and Lizzie. She'd lived and worked at the inn before she and Amos married the previous spring and rented the small house. Gus Owens leased the third house on the property, a small cottage. Esther had seen him leave in his rusty black truck earlier that morning. She was grateful he wasn't here now. Gus had a disposition that warranted filtering, to say the least. He was a grumpy old man who spoke his mind no matter how rude or obnoxious his comments were.

"Look." Esther pointed out the window again. "That man seems to be the one in charge. He's gathered everyone around him, and he's doing all the talking."

Lizzie was quiet but kept her eyes on the group. Esther stayed by her sister's side wringing her hands. Should they go outside and greet their new guests or wait until someone approached the house?

Finally, the man who had been talking pushed his sunglasses up on his head and started toward the front door. He looked middle-aged with dark hair graying at his temples. His slacks were tan, and he wore the same color loafers with a short-sleeved white collared shirt that wasn't tucked in.

Esther instructed Lizzie to let her do the talking, then the sisters met the man on the porch.

"Welcome to The Peony Inn." Esther nodded and shook his hand when he extended it. The others stayed where they were, talking among themselves while the bus engines roared.

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“Are you who I spoke to on the phone? Lizzie?” He directed the question to Esther, but Lizzie cleared her throat.

“*Nee*, that was me.” She tried to smile, but it was brief.

“We have rooms ready for twelve,” Esther said as she looked over the man’s shoulder. One young man stood off to the side of the group.

“Yeah, that’s fine. I appreciate you letting us park our RVs here. We were having trouble finding a place to accommodate all of us and the motor homes in one place.”

Esther swallowed hard. “How many should we plan to cook for? We are a bed-and-breakfast, but we usually cook three meals a day for those who rent a room.” She hoped he understood without her having to say she didn’t have enough food on hand to feed his entire crew.

The man glanced at his phone when it beeped, then looked back at Esther. “Uh, don’t worry about meals. We’ll have food catered in or have someone pick it up for everyone.”

Esther’s worries reversed as she thought about all the food she had stocked up, much of it produce that would go bad if not eaten. “The cost of the rooms includes the meals. Perhaps some of your group would like to eat at least part of the time.”

“We’ll see how it works out. We don’t have a set schedule.” His phone beeped again, gaining his attention for a few seconds before he looked back at her. “Uh, I think there will only be six people staying in the house. We’ve got room in the motor homes for everyone else.”

Esther thought about all the work she and Lizzie had done to accommodate twelve people, but she nodded.

“I’ll go get the six staying in the house.” He nodded over his shoulder. “Are those other houses rented?”

“*Ya*, one is leased long-term to a gentleman, and the other *haus* is occupied by a young couple.” Esther didn’t think she’d ever referred to Gus as a gentleman before. She hoped he would stay tucked away for the next month, but all this activity was more than likely going to upset him. And when Gus was disgruntled, there was no telling what he might say or do.

The man flinched. “We’ll have to run the generators for the motor homes most of the time while they’re parked here. They’re rather loud. I didn’t know there would be other residents close by.” He paused. “By the way, I’m Brandon Clarkson, the producer. I’ll be staying inside, along with my son and four others. I’ll go get everyone staying in the house and introduce you. We have a few who aren’t thrilled about sleeping in a house without air conditioning.” His voice held a tinge of irritation.

Esther pushed through her worry. About the food overage, the loud generators, and the likelihood that Gus would throw a fit.

“I’ll be right back with the others.” Mr. Clarkson did an about-face and rejoined his crew.

Esther glanced at Lizzie, proud that her sister had pressed her lips together and stayed quiet. “You can speak now.”

Lizzie stretched her arms stiffly at her sides. “Don’t yell at me. I didn’t know it would be like this.”

“I don’t ever yell at you.” Esther grinned. “I might scold you when you act like a child, but I don’t yell.” They watched as Mr. Clarkson spoke to the group. “Gus is going to be very unhappy.”

Lizzie cackled. “Well, now, there’s a silver lining after all.”

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Esther's sister avoided Gus whenever she could. Most people did, but Lizzie and Gus fought like five-year-olds, even though they were both in their seventies. In his own disconnected way, Gus was like family. The black sheep, for sure, with a nasty temper and a foul mouth to match. But he'd been good to Esther during a health scare not long ago. Besides, Lizzie and Esther's mother had made them promise before she died to let Gus live in the cottage for the rest of his life, for reasons she would not share with them.

Mr. Clarkson walked back up the porch steps with five others in tow. He introduced Esther and Lizzie, then each person individually. "This is Quinn. She's our art director." He nodded at the tall slender woman with white hair as short as a man's. Then he pointed at the two men on either side of her as he spoke their names. "That's Hal, our director, and Giovanni, our cinematographer."

Esther had no idea what any of those titles meant. One of the remaining unidentified men moseyed up to Mr. Clarkson. "And I'm Jesse, the production designer."

The younger man who had been off to the side of the group earlier was still lagging behind. Mr. Clarkson gestured over his shoulder without turning around. "And that's my son, Jayce."

The lad nodded when he reached the steps but didn't say anything. Most of the people Mr. Clarkson had introduced appeared to be in their late thirties and early forties. Jayce was younger—maybe early twenties. His sour expression was a mystery, but when Mr. Clarkson locked eyes with the boy, he just shook his head and frowned at his son.

He turned back to Esther and Lizzie. "We'll get our things, and then if you'd be kind enough to show us to our rooms, I know we

all have work to do.” He snapped his fingers. “Oh, I know you don’t have Wi-Fi, but can we get cell service inside the house?”

Several guests had asked Esther about this before, so she was familiar with the lingo. “I’m told only one to two bars,” she said apologetically.

Mr. Clarkson glanced around at the others. “Everyone just hot-spot. It seems a little faster if you only have one or two bars. Do the best you can.”

“We have lunch planned for twelve if anyone is hungry.” Esther smiled as her stomach churned with worry.

Quinn stepped forward. “We ate on the road, but how nice of you to offer.” The woman was dressed in a sleek black pantsuit that was belted with a white sash. A long white necklace and matching earrings completed the outfit. With her short white hair, she reminded Esther of a zebra. Her fingernails were pearly white and long, and the spiked white heels made her appear at least five inches taller than she was. Esther couldn’t imagine walking in such footwear.

They all echoed her response, then headed back to the vehicles to get their luggage. All but one.

“I’ll eat.” The youngest of the group, Jayce, stuffed his hands in the pockets of his jeans. He wore a yellow T-shirt, and the edge of a tattoo showed beneath one of the short sleeves. His dark hair was wild and untamed, landing just above his shoulders. He was handsome and tall with an athletic build, the type Esther thought would be confident, like most English men with such stunning looks. Instead, an air of isolation clung to him, most evident in his dark eyes. This boy had a story. Esther was sure of it. But for now, she was glad at least one person was willing to eat.

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Jayce stowed his suitcase in the small room upstairs. It was a far cry from the luxury hotels his father's crew usually stayed in. But Montgomery, Indiana, didn't have such accommodations, and this Amish house was big and had room for the motor homes on the property.

He sat on the bed and gave it a little bounce. Seemed comfortable enough. He pressed down on one of two feather pillows. There was a small desk and chair against one wall, along with a small dresser, and a rocking chair took up one corner of the room. His father probably chose the largest room for himself.

The only reason Brandon Clarkson was staying in the house was because he and Veronica had recently broken up, and she refused to stay under the same roof as him, motor home or otherwise. After dating for two years, Veronica had finally come to her senses and ditched the old man. Out of all the actors and actresses Jayce had been around over the years, Veronica was the nicest. She wasn't just talented—she was also kind to everyone she met. Jayce understood how a woman could succumb to his father's charm, but it never lasted. He eventually showed his true colors.

Jayce was pretty sure staying inside the inn with no air conditioning was not his father's first choice.

He lay back on the bed and flung his arms wide. He liked the quaintness of the room, the smell of freshly cut hay wafting through the window screen on the tail of a cool breeze. But this was going to be the longest month of his life. He'd only agreed to work for his father because he offered Jayce a ridiculous amount of money

to basically be a roadie. At the end of the month, he'd have enough money to get his own place and walk away from Brandon Clarkson once and for all.

That was what his father wanted after all, and it was definitely what Jayce wanted. He didn't have any idea where he would go, but it would be far away from the hub in Los Angeles. His father thrived on the hustle and bustle. Jayce longed for a life that wasn't so busy. The price of freedom was enduring each other's presence for a month.

Jayce's father represented everything he didn't want to be. His dad was greedy, unscrupulous, and had a way of convincing everyone in his life that he was a god to be worshipped. People actually worked hard to earn a place in Brandon Clarkson's world, a world Jayce had been trying to escape since his mother ran off with another man seven years ago. That had been a hard pill to swallow at fifteen, especially since his mother insisted Jayce stay with his father. His dad had been difficult before the split, but his disposition grew progressively worse after he became a single parent. Jayce didn't think dear old Dad missed his mom as much as he let on. It was the blow to the man's ego that bothered his dad most.

Now Jayce was twenty-two and had given up the party life the Los Angeles elites had to offer. It had been over a year since he'd walked away from that lifestyle. He credited God for guiding him onto a different path—God and a girl named Susan. Unlike Jayce, Susan had been raised going to church. She introduced him to God, and once the acquaintance was made, Jayce knew his relationship with the Lord was going to be lifelong, even after things didn't work out with Susan.

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His father didn't credit God for anything, and it was a source of contention between them. Sadly, if Jayce hadn't run with the wild crowd for so long, he would've already had enough money to move out of his father's condo.

He'd done a short stint in college, then tried his hand as an entrepreneur, a venture that might have thrived if not for his father's interference. These days, his jobs came in the form of bartender or waiter.

He and his father lived together as roommates, tolerating each other. It made Jayce sick to watch the man use people, mostly women. But Brandon Clarkson had made a fortune by taking advantage of plenty of men too. The sad part was that he was a brilliant man. He didn't need to flaunt his wealth or treat people poorly. His talent alone could have made him into the better man Jayce occasionally caught a glimpse of.

Jayce thought his father's movies were successful because they included multidimensional characters, all created with the positive attributes Brandon Clarkson kept hidden from the world. But Jayce had given up on any real relationship with his father a long time ago. And his mother was flitting around the country with a man half her age. Jayce couldn't remember the last time he'd heard from her.

Forcing the gloomy thoughts from his mind, he got up and walked to the window. Eyeing the motor homes and limos from upstairs, he knew half of the occupants were whining about the accommodations. Jayce found this small room in an old farmhouse to be a welcome change. And whatever was cooking downstairs awakened his senses and reminded him how long it had been since he'd had a home-cooked meal.

The Amish seemed like strange people. They didn't use electricity, drove around in buggies pulled by horses, and dressed like pioneers. Jayce had Googled the area during the long drive. He was skeptical until he saw his first horse and buggy, and he noticed that the people were dressed like the photos he'd seen online. He found their traditional way of living appealing, in a strange sort of way. Except for one thing. According to what he'd read, they were super religious. Jayce considered himself a man with a strong faith, but organized religion had left a bad taste in his mouth.

From the aromas wafting up the stairs, the Amish were apparently good cooks, and Jayce was hungry. When they stopped to eat earlier, the meal was cut short as soon as his father finished eating and rushed everyone else to hurry up.

Jayce made his way downstairs, hoping the food was as good as it smelled.

A quaint but roomy dining area revealed enough prepared dishes to feed an army. An old grandfather clock chimed just as he walked into the room, and then he was drawn to several paintings on the walls, colorful landscapes with modest wood frames. Some were signed by N. Lantz and others by A. Lantz.

He refocused on the food and couldn't believe Quinn and the others were going to pass this up. Surely they could smell the food too. Hungry or not, anyone should have been lured by the heavenly aromas.

"Wow. That's a lot of food." He eyed the offerings as the two older women who had greeted them walked into the room. "Sit anywhere?"

"*Ya*, of course." The woman who had introduced herself as

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Esther, and who had done most of the talking, stood off to the side with her hands folded in front of her. She was a tall, stocky woman. The other lady—Lizzie—was tiny and hadn't said much. Now she stood beside her sister watching him.

Jayce took a seat in the middle of the twelve place settings and eyed the offerings. "Wow," he said again. "This looks awesome." He reached for a large bowl of mashed potatoes nearby. After scooping a generous helping onto his plate, he stood and made his way around the table gathering roast, peas, corn, bread, and broccoli salad. His glass was already filled with tea.

When he sat back down, he said a silent prayer of thanks, unsure what proper protocol was with these people. Then he took a couple of large bites and thanked God again. The food was amazing. The two women were still standing at attention side by side. "Aren't you going to eat?"

They exchanged looks. The petite one—Lizzie—clenched her teeth before moving to a chair across from Jayce. "Well, I'm eating." She looked over her shoulder at her sister. "And you should too. There's going to be a lot of food wasted if more people don't eat." Visibly bothered by the lack of attendance, she frowned even more as she sat. While Esther remained standing, Lizzie lowered her head, presumably to pray. Jayce stopped chewing, which seemed silly but somehow respectful. He started eating again when Lizzie raised her head and began to fill her plate.

When she finished, Esther made herself a plate and joined them. She sat beside her sister, also lowering her head right away. Despite a mouthful of roast, Jayce stopped chewing again and resumed after her prayer.

Jayce had helped himself to seconds before the women finished a third of their meal. "I can eat enough for at least three people." He hoped to quench their disappointment that no one else had joined them for the meal.

Esther cleared her throat. "So, what type of movie is your father making?"

Jayce held up a finger as he finished chewing another large chunk of roast, possibly the best meat he'd ever had. "It's about six people who get stranded on an island, then they find a cave to take shelter in when a storm comes, leaving them trapped inside. One of them is a murderer, but no one knows who."

"There are a lot of caves around here." Esther delicately forked a piece of meat. Her tiny sister ate like she hadn't had a meal in days. She'd piled her plate with almost as much food as Jayce. *No way that little old lady can eat all that food.*

"Tomorrow we're loading up to go to Bluespring Caverns to film. The people running it said they would close it for half a day and offer patrons a free pass for the following day." He helped himself to another slice of bread and slathered butter on it. "This is the greatest meal I've ever had," he said. *The food will definitely be the best part of this gig.*

"*Danki*. I mean, thank you." Esther blushed a little. Lizzie was too busy eating to acknowledge the compliment. "Will your group be spending the night in the cave?"

"Do what?" Jayce covered his mouth with his hand so he didn't spew food everywhere. "I don't see that happening."

"Oh. I just wondered." Esther raised an eyebrow, seemingly amused. "Bluespring hosts a lot of Boy Scout troops, church groups,

and students, so they have a section of the cavern set up with electricity, beds, and other accommodations.”

Jayce tried to picture anyone from the film spending the night inside a cave. “Nah, I seriously doubt it, but it sounds cool.” He pointed to the roast. “May I?”

“Eat all you want,” Lizzie said before she rolled her eyes. “Doesn’t appear anyone else is going to.” She grunted. “Nothing like *gut* food going to waste.”

Jayce smiled apologetically. “I’ll do my best not to let that happen. I—”

A large heavysset man with a gray ponytail stomped into the room. By the look on his face, he wasn’t here to eat. He crinkled his nose. His big jowls jiggled as he shook his head and folded his arms across his chest, resting them on his oversized belly.

“What in the . . . ?” He rattled off words that obviously upset the sisters. The smaller one stood and picked up her plate, firing the man a look filled with anger as she squinted and snarled at him.

“I am forced to eat two meals per year with you. Thanksgiving and Christmas. That’s all you’ll get from me, you grumpy old excuse of a man.” Carrying her plate, she stormed out of the room.

Jayce stifled his amusement. The woman had been mostly quiet up to this point. *What a spitfire.*

“Gus, I have told you repeatedly that you can’t use such language in this *haus*.” Esther turned to Jayce, her face red. “*Mei* apologies.”

“No problem.” Jayce refocused on his plate and began cutting off another bite of roast. He’d noticed the women’s accents. Some of their words sounded different, kind of like German.

“Gus, why don’t you sit down and eat?” Esther waved toward a chair across the table. “Most of the guests had already eaten before their arrival, so we have plenty.”

The man—Gus—turned to Jayce, nostrils flaring. “Who are you? Are those your motor homes causing all that racket outside? Not to mention there are people everywhere—in and out, doors slamming, and someone playing loud music.” He faced Esther before Jayce could answer. “This ain’t gonna work, Esther.”

“Just eat, Gus.” She lowered her head, shaking it. “It’s only for a month.”

Gus let out enough expletives to offend even Jayce, face flaming as his jowls bounced. “And this is surely something Lizzie did!” he added at the end of his rant.

“Dude, whatever your problem is, that’s no way to speak to a lady.” He reached for his fourth slice of bread but kept his eyes on the man. He was an old guy, but he was big.

“Sonny, you zip it.” He pointed at Jayce before he turned back to Esther. “You’d better at least make sure those idiots turn off those generators at night or I won’t get a lick of sleep.”

Jayce stood. “Sir, I don’t know who you are, but—”

“Kid”—the old guy’s finger moved in Jayce’s direction again—  
“I’m pretty sure I told you to zip it.”

Jayce took a deep breath, wiped his mouth with his napkin, then set it next to his plate. He glanced at Esther. The poor woman’s face was still red, and her lip quivered slightly. He turned and walked to the man, who outweighed him by at least a hundred pounds. He’d held his own in plenty of fights with bigger guys. Surely this old man wouldn’t throw any punches.

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“You need to leave.” Jayce spoke as calmly as he could, but his comment was met with thunderous laughter.

“Shut your mouth, you little runt.”

Jayce tensed as he felt a muscle in his jaw quiver. It wasn’t cool to mistreat old ladies. He looked over his shoulder just as Lizzie came running barefoot back into the room, carting her plate. She slapped it down on the table and pulled out a chair beside her sister.

“I could hear from the kitchen, and I don’t want to miss this.” She put her elbows on the table, then propped her chin on her hands with eagerness in her eyes. “Go on, young man. Don’t stop.”

The old man clenched his fists at his sides as he turned his attention away from Jayce. “Lizzie, you’re like a worm that gets under a person’s skin and crawls around until a fellow goes crazy.”

“Sir, I have to ask you to leave. I’ll escort you out if I need to.” Jayce motioned in the direction of the door. “These lovely ladies invited you to join them for a fine meal, which you really should have taken them up on. But instead, you’re talking like a fool and being rude.” He stepped closer to the man, who was now shaking with rage. “So you’re going to leave. You just need to decide how. On your own or with my escort?” Jayce raised an eyebrow.

Hands still fisted at his sides, Gus glared at Esther. “We will speak about this tomorrow. As a renter, I have rights.”

He stomped out of the room grumbling, each step heavier than the one before.

“Don’t let the door hit you on the backside on the way out!” Lizzie yelled, her eyes lit up with victory.

“It’s not funny, Lizzie.” Esther blinked back tears as she turned to Jayce. “*Mei* apologies again.”

Lizzie stood, walked around the table to where Jayce was standing, and put a gentle hand on his arm. “It’s not our way to be physical, *sohn*.”

“I didn’t know that, and I meant no disrespect.” Jayce paused. “I was hoping it wouldn’t come to that, but I couldn’t stand watching him speak to either of you that way.”

“As I said, it’s not our way.” Lizzie displayed a perfect set of pearly whites that couldn’t possibly be her own teeth. “But I would have paid *gut* money to see you knock the meanness out of Grumpy Gus Owens.” She guided him to his chair. “You sit. I’ll be right back.”

Esther’s eyebrows drew together in an agonized expression. “I’m so sorry.”

Jayce stared into the woman’s kind eyes. “You’ve apologized three times, and you shouldn’t. That guy is the one who should be apologizing.”

Lizzie rushed back into the room balancing four pies on her arms with the precision of a seasoned waitress. She set each one within Jayce’s reach.

“Pecan, rhubarb, apple, and key lime.” She batted her eyes at him. “You should have some of each.”

Jayce couldn’t help but smile. He’d somehow stumbled into food heaven.

He was reaching for a slice of apple pie when his father burst into the room.

“I was in the shower, but I could hear all the ruckus even with the water running.” His eyes blazed in the familiar way Jayce had seen before. When he was younger, the expression was usually

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followed by a good smack across the face. These days, his old man knew better. “We haven’t even been here a day, and you’re already stirring up trouble!”

“*Nee*, it wasn’t his fault at all, Mr. Clarkson,” Esther said, echoed by Lizzie.

But the damage was done, and Jayce felt his face seething red with embarrassment. He pushed back his chair, scraping it against the wood floor. After thanking the women for a wonderful meal, he left the room. He stormed out the front door, past the motor homes and the small house with a couple sitting on the front porch, then he turned onto the road and kept walking.

## T W O

EVELYN TRIED REPEATEDLY TO PICK UP MILLIE'S HOOF SO SHE could see what the horse had stepped on, but each time the poor girl whinnied and pulled away from her. Drops of blood spotted the pavement on the back road that led from her house to the Bargain Center where she worked.

"You've got to let me have a look, Millie." She scratched behind the mare's ears, hoping to calm her.

Evelyn had brought her mother's emergency cell phone, but the battery was dead. Her mother had asked her to charge it when she got to work, which wasn't going to happen anytime soon at this rate. Both of her brothers left for work over an hour ago. Her father was busy in the fields. Her mother said she had no plans today, so it was unlikely anyone would be coming to her aid.

Unless someone happened by, she might be stranded for a while. She bent at the waist and tried again to look at Millie's foot, but the

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horse neighed with even more agitation. When Evelyn stood, she caught movement out of the corner of her eye. Someone had just rounded the corner and was heading toward her. The only people who lived on that road were Esther and Lizzie, along with their renters. *This man must be a guest at the inn.*

Evelyn raised a hand to her forehead, blocking the sun's glare as she waited for him to get closer. He was tall and apparently not Amish since he wasn't wearing a hat. That was all she could see until he came into full view a minute or so later.

"Hey, you okay?" He raised a bushy eyebrow that hovered above eyes as dark brown as a moonless night, obscure and intense.

Evelyn felt a shiver run the length of her spine, despite the warm weather. She opened her mouth to say something, but a warning bell sounded in her mind.

"Are you staying at The Peony Inn?" Her voice wavered, but if he was a guest of Lizzie and Esther's, maybe she could shed this unexpected fear. He was a tall English man, muscular with unruly long dark hair. Evelyn was small, weighing in at about a hundred and twenty pounds and only five foot two.

The man nodded, then reached into his pocket and pulled out a phone. "Do you need to call someone?" He glanced at Millie, whose leg was still bent at the knee.

"Um . . ." Evelyn began to tremble, but the man smiled, and everything changed, softened. Even his eye color seemed less intense.

"*Ya*, I might need to borrow your phone, but *mei* horse . . . She, uh, has something in her hoof." She nodded at Millie but quickly looked back at the man as she tried to figure out why she was so

unnerved by his presence. She didn't know him. He was a stranger.  
*It's normal to be cautious around a man I don't know.*

"Want me to have a look?" He stuck his phone in his back pocket, then tucked his dark hair behind his ears—hair much too long for a man. Before she could answer, he made his way to the horse and began rubbing her neck. "What's her name?"

"Millie." Evelyn didn't move as she tried to calm her erratic pulse. *What is wrong with me?*

"Hey, Millie. Did you step on something?" He moved his hand to Millie's nose, and Evelyn was about to tell him the mare didn't like her face touched, but Millie leaned into him and nudged him with an acceptance Evelyn hadn't seen before. She believed animals had a sense about people. If Millie trusted him, then Evelyn would try to do the same.

"I was on *mei* way to work, but Millie stopped abruptly and has been holding her leg like that for about fifteen minutes, refusing to budge." Evelyn eyed the blood that had pooled below Millie's hoof. "Not that I blame her. But every time I try to see what's wrong, she pulls away from me."

"Hey, girl. Are you going to let me have a look?" He alternated between stroking Millie's nose and scratching behind her ears. Then he ran his hands down her sides, talking softly near her ear. "Please don't kick me in the face."

Evelyn squeezed her eyes shut when he leaned over, sure that he was indeed going to get kicked in the face. But when she opened one eye, he was standing with a sliver of glass in the palm of his hand.

"It's not very big, but it was keeping her from putting pressure on it." He offered the glass to Evelyn, and she slipped it in her apron

pocket. She'd put it in the trash at work. "Do you have anything to wrap around her foot, like to stop the bleeding?"

Evelyn thought for a few seconds. "I-I don't have anything in the buggy." She wished her pulse would slow down.

"What about that thing on your head?" He pointed to her prayer covering.

"*Nee!*" She gasped as she raised a hand to the top of her head. "I mean, no. I can't take this off." *Not even for Millie, and especially not in front of a man I don't know.*

"Okay, sorry. I didn't know. This is an old T-shirt I'm not terribly attached to." He lifted the yellow shirt, revealing what she'd heard her brothers refer to as a six-pack.

"No, no, no!" She turned away and quickly untied her black apron. "Here, use this." She pushed the apron toward him.

"Really? It'll get blood on it." He eyed the garment, frowning.

"It's fine. I have plenty more at home." There was probably an extra at work she could use for the day.

He shrugged and folded the apron into a small square with the ties hanging out, then tenderly lifted Millie's hoof, placed the square cloth on it, and gingerly wrapped the thick strings around her hoof and leg to hold it in place. When he was done, he stood.

"How far do you have to go?" He lifted a hand to his forehead, blocking the sun.

"Not far. A few miles up the road to the Bargain Center." She paused and leaned over to run her hand down Millie's side. "I'll call a vet when I get there." She gave the animal another long stroke down her flank. "We recently had a farrier out to shoe all the horses, so I'm surprised this happened."

“The glass was stuck at an angle inside the shoe, but it won’t hurt to have it checked out. You don’t want it to get infected.” He took his phone from his pocket again. “Do you need to call anyone now?”

Evelyn studied the man for a few moments. He was handsome. In an English sort of way. She tried to picture him without all the long dark hair he seemed to be hiding behind. Yet there was no hiding the intensity in his dark eyes.

“*Nee*. I’ll use the phone at work to call the vet.” She took a deep breath and forced a smile, anxious to get on her way, but also curious. “How do you know so much about horses?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know a lot. As a kid, I was sent off to summer camp pretty often, and they had horses. I remembered that there’s a certain way to touch an ailing horse to keep the animal calm.” His left eyebrow rose a fraction. “Fifty-fifty shot. I could have gotten kicked in the face just as easily.”

Evelyn flinched. “Well, I’m glad you didn’t, and *danki*—I mean, thank you for your help.”

A smile filled his face. The lopsided grin was cute, in an adolescent sort of way. She could tell by his features that he was close to her age, maybe a year or two older.

“I like your accent,” he said. “I’ve never been around your kind of people before.”

*A tourist.* Montgomery was becoming more and more of a destination to get a glimpse of Amish life. Some folks were glad because it brought income to the community. Others, particularly the elders, weren’t so fond of the visitors.

“I’m Jayce, by the way.” He extended his hand. Evelyn paused, but her hand found its way into his firm handshake.

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“Evelyn.” Her cheeks felt warm as she pulled back her hand.

He scratched his forehead. “You said you’re on your way to the Bargain Center. Is that like a Walmart?”

“We have Walmarts, but they are too far to go by buggy. I guess you could say the Bargain Center is like a mini Walmart.” She paused, searching for a way to explain. “A *very* mini Walmart, but it has most everything a person could need. Groceries, a deli, household items, gifts. But no clothes, if that’s what you’re looking for.”

He looped his thumbs in the back pockets of his jeans. “Could I ride with you? I forgot a few things at home that I’d like to pick up.”

Evelyn was caught off guard and unable to do more than nod. What would her coworkers think when they saw her pull into the parking lot with this handsome English man?

“If it’s a problem, no big deal.” He shrugged.

“*Nee*, it’s not a problem.” It was the least Evelyn could do. She climbed into the buggy and waited for him to sit beside her, then she slowly tapped the reins. “I’ll take it slow and easy.”

“I’m in no hurry.” He pulled out his phone and focused on it for a few minutes.

Evelyn kept a close eye on Millie, relieved the horse wasn’t limping. Finally, she turned to her passenger. “So, what brings you to Montgomery?” No wedding ring, so he didn’t have a wife who’d brought him along on a tourist trip.

He lifted his eyes to hers, but she quickly looked back at the road.

“My dad owns a production company. He’s wrapping up a movie, shooting a final scene or two here.” The man—Jayce—spoke in a

low voice, but there was an air of contempt that made Evelyn wonder about his relationship with his father.

“You’re making movie scenes at the inn?” Evelyn couldn’t believe Lizzie and Esther would allow such a thing. Or that the bishop would consent.

“No. We’re just staying there. Some of us are staying inside the house, and we have a couple motor homes too.” He raised his eyes from his phone and shook his head. “We’ll be here about a month, and I’m dreading every moment.”

Evelyn wasn’t sure what to say, but when he refocused on his phone again and didn’t offer an explanation, she cleared her throat. “This part of Indiana is very lovely. Hopefully you’ll have time to do some exploring when you aren’t working.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty here. The location isn’t the problem. My father is.” Sighing, he still had his head down as he punched buttons on his phone. Evelyn had been right when she noticed the contempt regarding his father.

“He’s always wanted me to be involved in his business, but I don’t want anything to do with it. I’m only here because he offered me a lot of money to do the heavy lifting. I just have to survive this month of being around him, then I can move out on my own. Maybe even leave LA altogether.”

Evelyn was surprised he was sharing so much, and there was no mistaking the bitterness in his voice. “LA?”

“Los Angeles.” His eyes were still on his phone.

“*Ach*, in California.” She’d heard of Los Angeles but suspected it was a busy place she’d never visit.

After more typing on his phone, he looked over at her. “Sorry.

I'm listening. I'm just sending a text for someone to pick me up later. I'm letting him know I'll text again when I'm ready." He set the phone on his lap. "You've probably seen some of my dad's movies."

"I-I've never been to see a movie in a theater." Evelyn had been in her running-around period for three years now, since she was sixteen, so technically she could break a few rules and venture out, but the opportunity had never presented itself.

Jayce's jaw dropped. "You're kidding, right?"

Evelyn shook her head. "Nee. I mean, I could go. I'm not baptized yet." She raised a shoulder and dropped it slowly as she kept Millie at a slow pace. "I just never have."

Jayce closed his mouth and rubbed his forehead. "Sorry, but that's so weird for me. Is it a rule or something?"

"I guess it is. But when we turn sixteen, we enter into a *rum-schpringe*. It's a time for exploration, when we can go out into the *Englisch* world and experience life before we choose baptism into the Amish faith."

The left side of his mouth curled up. "No offense, but you look older than sixteen."

"None taken. I'm nineteen."

He scratched his chin. "So for the past three years you've been allowed to go to the movies, yet you've never been?"

"Ya, that's right." She paused. Most folks knew at least a little about the way Amish people lived. This man didn't seem to have a clue. "It's a time when our parents turn a blind eye and allow us privileges we won't have after we're baptized."

He stared at her wordlessly for a few long, awkward moments.

“I have no idea how God, baptism, and the movies fit together, but you’re saying you *can* go see a movie?”

“*Ya.*” Evelyn had dated a few men in her small community, but none had asked her to go to a movie. And it hadn’t seemed all that important.

“Are you allowed to date?” He raised an eyebrow, grinning. “What do you do? Dinner and a movie are kind of a thing where I come from.”

Evelyn felt herself blush. “*Ya*, we can date.” She kept her eyes on the road. “We go out for meals at restaurants, and sometimes we go on a picnic. And there are other things to do.”

“Like what?” He twisted slightly in the seat. She’d captured his full attention but wished she hadn’t. His eyes pierced the short distance between them, and an unwelcome tension settled into a knot in her stomach.

“There’s the zoo, the corn maze in the fall, or we can always go horseback riding.” She glanced his way, but quickly faced forward again when his leg brushed against hers. “Uh . . . in the winter, we go on sleigh rides. And there are singings held for the young people. We find lots of things to do.”

He was looking ahead but gave her a sidelong glance as if contemplating something, and the longer he was silent, the larger the knot in her stomach grew.

“Well, then.” He tipped his head to one side. “We have to go to a movie.”

Evelyn’s eyes widened. “What?” Was this English stranger asking her out?

He crinkled his nose and frowned. “Wow. What was I thinking?”

AN UNLIKELY MATCH

Someone as gorgeous as you must have a boyfriend.” A swath of his wavy dark hair fell across his forehead. After he pushed it aside, he said, “You need to make him take you to a movie.”

“*Nee*, I don’t have a boyfriend.” Evelyn’s chest tightened, and she wished she’d kept quiet. Now she’d opened a door she wasn’t ready to walk through. She was, however, basking in the compliment.



Jayce stared at the beautiful Amish woman far too long, and she refocused on the road. He continued to take in her features. Dark hair tucked beneath that thing on her head, which he assumed had some kind of religious meaning. Green eyes set against a dark olive complexion, like a really good tan from being outside a lot. He’d already noticed her slender figure when her apron was tied around her waist. All other physical details were hidden beneath the dark-green dress she wore.

The few times she’d smiled, her face lit up. The woman was a knockout.

“Sorry.” He gave his head a quick shake. “I know I’m staring. I just don’t see how someone as pretty as you isn’t spoken for.” He laughed. “Or hasn’t been to a movie. I grew up in a theater. I love movies, which is ironic because I hate my father’s business, and I’m not fond of enclosed spaces. I do okay as long as I know I can leave. It’s the feeling trapped that bothers me.”

“I’m not sure I understand.” She glanced his way briefly.

“For example, elevators are a problem. Even going up one floor

makes my heart race.” He shrugged. “Yeah, weird, I know. I’d flip out if I ever got stuck in an elevator. Luckily, that’s never happened.”

“I don’t think it’s weird.” She spoke with confidence, like she really didn’t think his claustrophobia was odd. She seemed like a sweet girl. Maybe that was why he was oversharing.

“Theaters, restaurants—even small ones—don’t bother me because I can get up and walk out. Tomorrow I’ll be in a cave while they shoot my dad’s latest movie. Caves are big, spacious, and I can leave anytime I want. If I feel like I’m going to suffocate, I’ll walk outside for a break.”

She slowed the horse, turned to face him, and with sympathy in her eyes said, “You have to go by boat into the cave. There’s no way in or out except by boat.”

Jayce felt like a hand was closing around his throat. “You’re kidding.”

“*Nee*. Each boat holds twelve or thirteen people, I think. To return to the dock, everyone in the boat would have to go back too.”

Jayce groaned. “I had reservations about this trip, but I’ve been in other caves. And they all had easy exits.” He leaned his head back and momentarily squeezed his eyes closed. No wonder his father offered him a ridiculous amount of money for this project. In addition to wanting Jayce to move out of his apartment, his father would have an opportunity to humiliate him in front of the crew.

“I’m sure dear old Dad has picked a place that will make me feel like I’m dying.” He half snickered, half growled. “Wow. I sound like a wimp. I don’t even know why I’m telling you this.” He was quiet for a few seconds. “Hey, your people are religious, right? Maybe

you can pray for me? You can bet I'll be praying, but I suspect you have a more direct line to the Big Guy."

She laughed and her green eyes twinkled against her olive complexion, which rendered her even more beautiful. *Wow.* "Gott hears all of our prayers equally, but I do think when we pray for others He hears those prayers before the ones we say for ourselves."

"Great. I'm going to need an abundance of prayers. As many as you can spare, beginning immediately." He winked at her and was unsure if she saw the gesture at first, but then she began to blush.

"In return for all those prayers, I'm going to take you to a movie." He kept his eyes on hers as they widened. He waited for her to say no.

Instead, she pointed right. "We turn there, and the Bargain Center is on the left a little farther down."

"What night do you want to go to a movie? Unfortunately, I'll be trapped in caves most days. There's bound to be a theater not too far away, right?"

"Um . . ." She looked at him again. "I think the theater in Washington is the closest. It's only eleven miles away, so the horse can make the trip."

He couldn't stop the grin that covered his face. *She didn't say no!* "No, I should pick you up. Isn't that proper protocol, even here? I've got access to cars and drivers. Or we can call a cab or Uber."

She giggled, and her eyes twinkled again as her cheeks dimpled. "I'm afraid we don't have cabs or whatever that other thing is."

"Then car it is. What night and what time?" He rubbed his hands together. "This is going to be great—watching someone experience their first movie."

She pulled into the parking lot of the mini Walmart and right up to a hitching post. “Well, that’s convenient,” he said as he stepped out of the buggy and waited for her to tether the horse next to two other horses and buggies. “I guess a few Amish people must come here.”

She grinned. “You might say that.” She leaned down and unwrapped the bloodstained apron square from around the horse’s foot, then straightened. “No more bleeding. But I’ll ask the vet to take a look, just to be sure.”

Jayce nodded, knowing he was running out of time. “How about tomorrow night at six o’clock? I’ll pick you up and we’ll eat and go see a movie.”

She was quiet. It was out of character for Jayce to be this pushy about asking a woman out. But he didn’t know much about the Amish rules and worried he might not see her again. He held his breath and waited.

“I-I guess eating out and seeing a movie would be okay.”

*She said yes!*

“Where should I pick you up?” He heard the eagerness in his voice and wondered if she did too. This would give him something to look forward to.

She started walking toward the entrance as she rattled off an address, then picked up her pace and strode into the store. Jayce repeated the street and number in his mind over and over as he pulled out his phone and followed her inside. He punched in the address and looked up.

*Wow.* His jaw dropped when he took a few steps inside.

## THREE

EVELYN TRIED TO WALK AHEAD OF JAYCE SO IT DIDN'T LOOK like they were together, but he stayed close behind her.

“Am I the only person in here who isn't Amish?” His eyes grew wide as he spoke in a whisper. “And there aren't any men.”

Evelyn tried to ignore the people peering at them from every direction as she beelined toward the back of the store. There was a line of Amish women waiting to check out and several more in the aisle as Evelyn led the way.

“The *kinner*—children—are in school but will be out soon. The store usually fills up this time of day. The women will get their groceries then meet the children at the school, where most of them left their buggies. It's close enough to walk. The men are at work.” She pointed to a door that read Employees Only. “I have to go get an apron. Hopefully you can find everything you need.” She nodded