

A woman with a white bonnet and a purple dress is seated at a wooden table in a cafe. Two ice cream sundaes are on the table. The background shows a cafe interior with tables and chairs.

When They Met Again

LETTERS
from
LANCASTER
COUNTY

CHRISTY AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

LESLIE GOULD

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LANCASTER COUNTY

*When They
Met Again*

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For my grandchildren,
Harlow and Teza.
I love and adore you, beyond measure.

1



The moment the ladybug landed on her arm, Joanna Grebel decided she wouldn't go to her cousin's wedding after all. She'd been cutting flowers for the bride, but now she couldn't seem to move. Why had she thought going away for a night was a good idea?

The sound of a vehicle approached, and she turned toward it. A van slowed as it came up the driveway, and the passenger window lowered as Ike Slaybaugh called out, "Joanna! Get your grandparents. We have a long drive ahead of us." His silver beard blew in the wind.

As the van stopped, the side door swung open and a dark-haired boy—young man, rather—jumped down. It was Adam Slaybaugh, Ike's grandson. He wore a blue shirt, black pants, and no hat. His wavy hair was too long. He was new to the community, but her friend Mandy already had a crush on him.

Mammi Lu stepped onto the back porch carrying a basket of food. "Joanna, grab your bag."

Adam started toward the house, asking Mammi Lu if he could help.

“*Denki*. The bags are in the kitchen.” Mammi nodded toward the door, where *Dawdi* Marcus struggled to come through the screen door with his bag and Mammi’s.

Joanna brushed the ladybug against the columbine. Then she added the flowers—dianthus, lupine, and baptisia—to the ones in the bucket and carried it and the clippers out the gate and to the back porch. *Dawdi* Marcus hadn’t made it through the door yet, but it wouldn’t do for her to take one of the bags. Instead Adam hurried past her, brushing his hand against Joanna’s arm as he did.

“Sorry.” He grinned as he sped by.

She rubbed her arm. He took both bags from her grandfather.

Mammi Lu waited at the bottom of the steps as the men continued on to the van. Again, she said, “Grab your bag.”

Joanna loved her grandparents’ place with its garden, red barn, and two-story house with a wraparound back porch. She told her grandmother, “I’m not leaving.”

“Why do you want to stay?”

Joanna shrugged.

“I don’t think you should.”

“Why?” Joanna was nineteen. And more than trustworthy.

“Your father wouldn’t approve.”

“He’s in Maine.”

Mammi’s eyes shone. “Emily is expecting you.”

“She won’t notice if I’m not there.” They hadn’t seen each other for several years.

Mammi’s expression softened. “Joanna.” Her voice was

just above a whisper. “I can’t let you stay here alone. Please grab your bag.”

Joanna shifted her gaze toward the van. Ike and Becky Slaybaugh stood beside it. They and Adam and Dawdi all waited in a semicircle, watching her. She turned her attention to Mammi Lu, locking eyes with her. “I can ask Mandy to spend the night.”

Mammi shook her head. “Both stoves are cold, I promise. Dawdi and I each checked. And I know you did too—several times.”

Joanna’s face warmed. Was she that obvious?

“We do our best to make sure our home is safe,” Mammi Lu said, “but then we have to trust the Lord.”

Joanna took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and then handed the bucket of flowers to her grandmother. “I’ll get my bag.”

She sat in the back of the van, ignoring the chatter and laughter of the others as they left Strasburg Township. Too anxious to read the book she’d brought, she stared at Becky’s snow-white bun right in front of her. It was so white—as pure as her bleached *Kapp*—that it looked as if she used a rinse on her hair, but Joanna knew that couldn’t be true.

When they stopped for a picnic dinner at a park a couple of hours later, Adam sat across from Joanna and said, “So how are you related to Noah?”

“Noah?”

Adam smiled. “The groom.”

“Oh.” Joanna frowned. “I’m not. Emily is my cousin.”

“First?”

“Second.” She paused. “Maybe third. They left Lancaster County a few years ago.”

Joanna wanted to retrieve her *Buch* from her bag and read, but Adam kept talking. There was something endearing about his chatter, in an annoying sort of way. “I’ve known Noah since we were kids, when I moved to Spartansburg.”

Joanna forced a smile.

Adam asked, “Do you live close to your grandparents?”

Joanna answered, “I live with them.”

He leaned closer. “I’m living with my grandparents too, as of two weeks ago.”

Joanna already knew that. Becky and Ike lived a half mile away. Mammi and Becky had been best friends since they were girls.

Soon they were back on the road, and Joanna fell asleep. Three hours later they arrived in Spartansburg, near both the Ohio and New York borders. The *Englisch* middle-aged driver, whose name was Nick, dropped Joanna and her grandparents off at a relative’s farm first.

“See you tomorrow,” Adam called out from the van.

Mammi turned toward Joanna as they walked to the front door. “He’s such a nice young man, don’t you think?”

Joanna forced a smile. “He and Mandy are interested in each other.”

Mammi narrowed her eyes. “Really?”



They arrived at the wedding the next morning early enough to help with the chores and to set up the chairs and tables. Joanna didn’t see Emily until breakfast. Her cousin acted surprised to see her, asking, “You came all the way from Maine?”

“*Nee*. I’m living with Mammi and Dawdi in Lancaster County.”

Emily's eyes widened. "Your parents didn't force you to move?"

Joanna shook her head.

Emily leaned forward. "I miss Lancaster County."

Joanna could only imagine. Yet that was only part of her reason for staying behind. Her mother wrote each week, saying Joanna's father wanted her to join them in Maine. Joanna was running out of excuses not to.

Unlike weddings in Lancaster County, decorations were nonexistent for Emily's wedding. The only flowers were the ones from Mammi Lu's garden. During the wedding dinner, Adam, whose hair had been cut since yesterday, was everywhere. Teasing the groom. First avoiding a pretty young woman wearing a bright blue dress and then later talking with her. Both looked sad and the girl wiped at her eyes and walked away. Later, he was helping move benches while Joanna helped Mammi and Becky wash dishes in the kitchen.

When they finished, Becky said, "We'll leave in about a half hour."

A woman approached Becky and said, "Leroy and I are having second thoughts about Adam staying in Lancaster County."

As Mammi and Joanna walked out the back door, Mammi said, "That's Adam's mother, Elizabeth."

Joanna turned her head. The woman appeared to be in her late thirties.

In the distance, at the door to the shed, Adam and Ike now talked with a middle-aged man. "And that's Adam's stepfather, Leroy," Mammi said.

"What happened to his *Dat*?"

"He died when Adam was small."

“Oh.” Joanna’s family had lived across Lancaster County from her maternal grandparents, Mammi Lu and Dawdi Marcus, who resided in Strasburg Township. Joanna had been living with them for three months now, but she was just learning the stories of the people who lived near them.

Adam threw up his hands and Ike put his arm around him, pulling him close. Joanna hadn’t seen a grandfather touch his grandson in an affectionate way before. The stepfather’s brows furrowed. Joanna couldn’t stop watching Adam. There was definitely something attractive about him. His smile. The curl of his dark hair at his neck. His bright blue eyes. The way he constantly interacted with others.

Two younger boys ran up to the group and the stepfather put his hands on their shoulders and spoke with them for a moment, but then Nick pulled the van up the driveway, waved, and parked on the other side of the shed.

“Nick’s early,” Mammi Lu said.

“It’s a long way home.” Joanna smelled smoke and turned her head, trying not to panic. A group of *Youngie* had gathered around a pit and started a fire. She took a deep breath and then exhaled slowly. She was okay. Everything was fine.

Beyond them, Adam gave his stepfather a quick wave and started toward the van.

The man called out, “Tell your *Mamm* goodbye.”

Adam veered toward the house, toward Joanna. He gave her a smile as he passed. A minute later he passed her again and practically bounced to the van. He seemed more than ready to leave Spartansburg.

Joanna followed. By the time she reached the van, Adam was sitting in the back seat. Her seat. Dawdi was in the front. The grandmothers sat in the first bench seat and Ike sat in

the third. Joanna could sit by Ike, whom she didn't really know, or by Adam.

She continued to the back bench, pulling her Buch from her purse as she did.



It wasn't until night fell that Adam began to talk. Ike had fallen asleep. Joanna was sure of it because every once in a while a snore escaped. Mammi and Becky seemed to be sleeping too. By the soft murmur of voices from the front, it seemed Dawdi and Nick were deep in conversation, although Joanna couldn't make out what they were saying. She'd come to understand over the last two days that Ike and Becky's remodeling company owned the van and Nick had worked for them full-time for the last ten years.

Joanna put her Buch in her purse when the light waned enough that she couldn't make out the words.

"What book were you reading?" Adam asked.

"*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott."

"Is it good?"

She nodded. "Very." She had only a few chapters left, but she'd read it before. She loved the sense of home in the story and thought of it as she worked in her grandmother's home and now, again, as she reread *Little Women*. That's what she wanted—a happy home. She'd found it for now with Mammi Lu and Dawdi Marcus.

"Are you allowed to read whatever you want?" Adam grinned. "I mean *were* you, when you were younger?"

"My parents didn't pay much attention. A librarian where I grew up recommended a lot of classics," Joanna said. "And Mammi Lu has quite a few books I can read."

“My stepdad was strict about what I could read.” Adam turned toward her. “I heard you’re new to Lancaster County too.”

“Not to the county.” Joanna stared straight ahead. “But to the Strasburg area, *jah*. I moved in with Mammi Lu and Dawdi Marcus a few months ago.” She gave him a sly glance. “I’m friends with Mandy.”

Adam’s voice lowered. “Mandy?”

Joanna rolled her eyes. “The girl you went on a date with.”

He laughed and brushed his bangs, which were still a little long, out of his eyes. “I didn’t. Caleb did.” Adam continued talking. “I had ice cream with the two of them last week, that’s all.”

Joanna’s face grew warm. Thankfully it was dark enough she doubted Adam would notice if she had turned red. Had Mandy lied? Or had Joanna misunderstood her?

“What were you talking to the girl in the blue dress about?”

“Ruthie?”

Joanna nodded. She hadn’t seen any other girls in blue dresses. Most of the others were wearing dark green. Except Emily, who had on a purple dress.

“Not much,” Adam responded.

“It looked serious. Did you break up with her?”

After a moment’s hesitation he said, “Jah. I don’t want a long-distance relationship.”

“Wait, so you went out on a date with Mandy while you were still courting Ruthie?” Joanna needed to stay away from Adam.

“*Nee*,” he said. He leaned back against the bench seat. “Mandy’s not my type.”

“How about Miriam?” Joanna asked. “Is she your type?”

“Miriam?” He was bluffing. No one forgot Miriam.

Joanna played along. “Mandy’s twin.”

He laughed. “Oh, her. Definitely not. She’s too wild for me.”

Miriam was too wild for Joanna too. The twins were as opposite as possible, even though they were identical. Miriam made Joanna nervous—she reminded Joanna of her Dat.

For the next couple of hours Joanna and Adam talked, first about *Little Women*, which Adam said he’d like to read. She asked what it was like to grow up in Spartansburg and he told her—lots of freedom to fish, hunt, and ride horses. He didn’t mention his stepfather, his younger brothers, or his mother. He said he moved to Lancaster County to learn more about the remodeling business from his grandfather.

“You don’t want to be a farmer?”

Adam smiled wryly. “There’s no farm for me to farm.” The tone of his voice made Joanna wonder if one of his younger brothers would inherit the family land.

Joanna wasn’t sure when it had happened, but Adam was closer to her than when they’d started the journey. He must have inched across the seat as they talked. She squinted. He wasn’t wearing his seatbelt. “You need to buckle up.” She patted the strap across her shoulder. “Mammi Lu said your grandparents are strict about safety in their work van.” Mammi Lu had mentioned that one time when they were riding in another Amish driver’s van together.

Adam hesitated.

Joanna leaned toward him until their noses were an inch apart. She smelled a hint of aftershave, which distracted her for a moment. But then she said, “I wasn’t joking about you putting on your seatbelt.” Jah, she was concerned about his

safety, but also about Mandy. Joanna wasn't sure that Mandy *didn't* like Adam. She wasn't going to betray her friend by encouraging him.

Adam smiled broadly, but retreated and did as she said. As he clicked the buckle, he shifted the conversation back to Mandy. "I don't know why Mandy would have said we went on a date."

Joanna didn't want to speak for her friend. "Well, sometimes information becomes misconstrued."

"Misconstrued?" He laughed. "What kind of *Vatt* is that?"

Joanna smiled. "An I-don't-want-to-talk-about-why-she-would-have-said-what-she-did kind of word."

He put his hand over his heart. "Ouch. You got me." He leaned toward her. "Who are *you* courting?"

Joanna wasn't courting anyone, but she didn't want to tell Adam. She ignored him.

The van began to slow, taking the exit to a rest area. Streetlights lit up the interior of the van as Nick parked the vehicle. The two sets of grandparents began to talk as they stepped out of the van. Joanna admired how close they all seemed. She wanted that someday—good friends and a strong community.

In the restroom, Becky asked Joanna if she'd found a job.

"Not yet," Joanna answered. "I've been doing chores and weeding Mammi's gardens." Mammi Lu sold flowers to tourists in a stand by the highway. Besides growing daffodils and tulips and her spring perennials, Mammi grew peonies, bachelor's buttons, black-eyed Susans, cosmos, zinnias, salvia, dahlias, gladioli, bellflowers, sunflowers, and more.

Becky took a tube from her purse and ran it over her lips.

Was it tinted? Nee. Just more expensive than the drugstore lip balm Joanna used. When she'd finished, Becky said, "I'm looking for someone to organize the warehouse, clean our two vacation rentals, and wash the linens. That sort of thing. Would you be interested?"

"Jah." If she had a job, maybe her Dat would stop pressuring her to move to Maine.

"*Wunderbar!*" Becky beamed at Joanna in the mirror. "Come into the office Monday morning." Becky put the tube back in her purse and then patted the top of her Kapp as she said, "We'll talk." Becky was Mammi Lu's age—sixty-four—but she was spry and stylish and still beautiful, with curves that showed because she, or someone, had tailored her cape dress with purposefully placed pleats and tucks. She also wore a sleek black cardigan that Joanna guessed was made out of cashmere. Jah, Becky was old—but still beautiful.

Mammi Lu was pretty too, but in a soft, squishy sort of way.

Joanna linked her arm through Mammi Lu's as they walked back to the van. Sometimes her grandmother had balance issues, and Joanna didn't want her to trip. That was Joanna's excuse. Really, she just liked to be close to Mammi Lu.

When they reached the van, Ike and Dawdi had switched seats but otherwise everyone was in the same place. Joanna stepped to the back.

Adam followed her and immediately fastened his seatbelt.

"So." He picked up the bag of chips in the middle of the seat that he must have purchased at the mini-mart. "Who *are* you courting?" He passed the bag to her.

As Joanna read the ingredients she asked, “Why do you care?” She popped a chip into her mouth and chewed slowly.

Adam leaned toward her. “Are you evading my question?” She smiled. “I’m barely nineteen.”

“I think the point is, you *are* nineteen. Most Amish Youngie start courting by our ages.”

“How old are you?”

He squared his shoulders. “Twenty.”

“You might be ready to court—but I’m not.”

“I don’t believe you. The right person hasn’t come along is all.” He sat tall. “I could be that person, that man.” He leaned closer. “Let me take you out for ice cream at the creamery for our first date.”

She forced herself to laugh. Was he serious? “We just met. We have plenty of time. Let’s just be friends.” She brushed her hand on her apron and then extended it to him because, regardless of how forward he was, she still found him appealing. “Friends?”

He crossed his arms over his chest. “Men and women can’t just be friends.”

Adam was annoying—but he was also handsome and talkative, in a good way. Plus he listened. And he also smelled good. Perhaps they could be more than friends, someday.

Adam turned forward and leaned back against the seat. “I think you’ll change your mind.”

Joanna pulled her hand back, feeling conflicted. “Time will tell.” Him asking her to court when they’d only just met seemed impulsive, a red flag for Joanna. And yet, he had a lot of good qualities.

She passed the bag of chips back to him. Joanna let out a

sigh of relief as the van turned down Mammi Lu and Dawdi Marcus's driveway. The house was intact. So was the barn.

"Do you plan to go to the Youngie gathering tomorrow evening at the bishop's farm?" Adam asked.

"Jah."

"*Gut.*" He grinned. "I'll see you there."

2



The next day was an off Sunday for church. In the afternoon Mandy stopped by, and she and Joanna sat on the porch drinking lemonade. Mandy had a little bit of makeup on, lip gloss and mascara, which made her brown eyes pop. Miriam often wore makeup, but this was the first time Joanna had seen Mandy with any on. The identical twins had blond hair and dark brows. Both were striking but Miriam, with her sparkling personality, stood out more.

After Joanna described the trip to Spartansburg and back, leaving out any mention of Adam, Mandy said, her voice a little wobbly, “Caleb—” Mandy gave Joanna an apologetic look—“asked to give me a ride home tonight after the ice cream social.”

Joanna smiled, happy for her friend. But that meant Joanna would need to find a ride home. “*Ach*, don’t worry about it.” Adam had been telling the truth about Caleb and Mandy after all. “I don’t need to go.”

“Nee, you definitely need to.” Mandy met Joanna’s gaze again. “Can’t you take your Dawdi’s buggy?”

“I don’t do very well with his horse.”

“How about your scooter?”

“Mammi doesn’t like me riding it after dark.” Honestly, Joanna didn’t either. Vehicles whizzed by on the highway, often without any thought to pedestrians or scooters.

“How about Adam Slaybaugh?” Mandy asked. “He lives practically next door. I can stop by and ask him to give both of us a ride there—and you a ride home.”

Joanna didn’t want Adam to think she was interested in him after what she’d said the night before. “Only if you tell him I only want a ride because you and I are friends—not for any other reason.”

“Why? He’s cute. And funny. Not to mention Becky and Ike’s grandson. You two would be a perfect match.” Her eyebrows arched. “Your grandmothers would be over the moon.”

Joanna was beginning to figure out the dynamics in Mammi Lu’s friend group. She and Becky were best friends. Mandy’s grandmother Elaine was friends with both of them. Weirdly, Joanna’s paternal grandmother, Mammi Rhoda, was part of the friend group too. But she lived on the other side of the county, where Joanna used to live. Also, it seemed Becky was the ringleader.

“Joanna?” Mandy was staring at her. “I asked why you wouldn’t be interested in Adam?”

“I’m not ready to court,” Joanna answered. “I’m only nineteen.” Mandy and Miriam were both twenty.

“Well, don’t wait too long.” Mandy smiled, a little patronizingly.

Maybe Joanna *should* think about courting someone sooner

than she intended to—if she could get a job working for Becky and Ike *and* start courting, surely her Dat wouldn't expect her to move to Maine. Maybe she should say yes to Adam's ice cream date offer after all.

Mandy stood. "I'll go ask Adam about a ride. I'm sure he'll say yes. We'll pick you up at five thirty."

"What about Miriam? Does she need a ride?"

"Nee," Mandy said. "She's going to ride her scooter. She said she'll find a ride home."

Joanna smiled. "With?"

Mandy rolled her eyes. "Who knows. I'm definitely not my sister's keeper."

Because Elaine was Mandy and Miriam's grandmother, Mammi Lu used to arrange playdates when Joanna visited. She and Mandy clicked immediately, more so than she did with Miriam. But she liked Miriam too.

Joanna didn't have many friends that were girls. The district she grew up in was small and had more boys. Her family had more boys than girls too—she was outnumbered six to one. She relished spending time with Mandy and Miriam when she visited Mammi Lu. Best of all, she'd already had friends when she'd arrived in Strasburg Township, hopefully to stay.



Mandy and Miriam's grandfather, Daniel, was the bishop of their district, and he and Elaine were hosting the ice cream social.

Joanna noticed a stranger—a man—who was tall, muscular, and handsome with sandy hair and deep brown eyes. She didn't recognize him, and she tried not to stare.

After the singing, the guys took turns cranking the ice cream freezer and showing off their muscles. The stranger had a five o'clock shadow and appeared a few years older than most of the Youngie. As they all stood around in groups eating the ice cream, Caleb introduced him to Joanna and Mandy. "This is Jacob Byer," he said. Miriam stepped into the circle. Caleb continued. "Jacob is new to our—"

"Hallo!" Miriam said, interrupting Caleb. "Welcome to Strasburg Township."

Jacob took a step backward but then smiled. "Denki. And who are you?"

"Miriam." She grinned and then swept her hand toward Mandy. "This is my twin." She nodded toward Joanna. "And our friend Joanna."

Forcing herself to be outgoing, Joanna asked Jacob, "Where are you from?"

"Ohio. Holmes County." Jacob took a step closer to Joanna. He towered over her, even though she was five eight. "I have an uncle who lives here. Enoch Byer."

Joanna spoke as confidently as she could. "Are you visiting Lancaster County or do you plan to stay?"

Jacob's eyes twinkled as his gaze met hers. "I'm staying."

Someone called out, "Joanna!" She turned. Adam sauntered toward them. "Are you ready to leave?"

She wasn't.

"I hope I'll see you soon." Jacob gave her a charming smile that left her feeling flustered. Miriam was now standing beside him.

Joanna gave Jacob, and everyone, a wave and turned around slowly. She didn't want to hurry and make Jacob think

she was courting Adam. Nor did she want to go too slowly and risk having Adam say something embarrassing in front of Jacob. Her heart beat faster. Perhaps she hadn't met the right person yet—until now.

On the way home as Adam chatted away about the ice cream, about Mandy and Caleb, and about his grandparents' business that he was excited to learn, Joanna thought about Jacob. About how tall he was. And how handsome with his square jaw and deep brown eyes. And his charming smile. Compared to Adam, who seemed to be an open book, Jacob was quiet and mysterious. She couldn't *stop* thinking about him.

When they reached Mammi Lu's, Joanna thanked Adam for the ride and started to open the buggy door.

"Wait!" Adam set the brake and jumped to the ground. "I need to do that for you."

Joanna waited, a little impatiently. When Adam appeared at her door he extended his hand to her as he grinned.

She took his hand and jumped down. "Denki." She started toward the back door. Mammi Lu had left a battery-operated lantern hanging to light her way.

"Wait," he said again but not as enthusiastically as before. "Aren't you going to ask me to stay? Lemonade on the porch? Maybe a cookie."

Joanna turned toward him at the bottom of the steps. "I'm tired. From the trip and everything."

"Oh." He took off his hat and ran his hand through his dark hair. "I wanted to talk about the trip. About sitting in the back of the van together. Don't tell me you didn't feel something."

Annoyed, Joanna said, "I didn't feel anything." But she

had. Although it paled when compared with what she was feeling for Jacob.

His face fell. “Well, I’ll see you tomorrow. At the office, right? You’re coming by to talk to Mammi about a job.”

“Jah.” Joanna momentarily regretted not asking him to stay. But not enough to change her mind. “See you tomorrow.” If she got the job, she and Adam would have a chance to get to know each other. Perhaps she’d want to court him eventually—unless Jacob Byer asked her out first.



The next morning, Joanna watched Becky run dishwater into the kitchen sink in the warehouse. As she added soap, she said, “Apparently the boys couldn’t wash their own mugs on Friday.” All of the mugs were white and matched. The kitchen consisted of a counter with a stovetop, a sink, a drying rack, and a small fridge.

Becky put the mugs into the soapy water as she chatted with Joanna. “Business has picked up, plus we have two vacation rentals—the apartment above the shop and a house. We’re renovating one property and looking to buy another one to flip. I need an assistant and Ike needs a couple more men. You’d be supporting the team too.” She began washing one of the cups.

“The team?”

She dunked the cup in the rinse water. “That’s what we call our crew. Have you ever heard the saying ‘Teamwork divides the effort and multiplies the effect?’”

Joanna nodded as she picked up a towel to dry. Mammi Lu sometimes said that when they tackled a big job together.

“Teamwork is one of our top values.” Becky put the mug

in the rack and began washing a second mug. “I’d need you to shop, clean and stock the rentals, launder the linens, and help with decorating the houses we renovate. Nothing big. Just enough to make possible buyers take notice, if you like that sort of work.”

The mug slipped a couple of inches through Joanna’s hand before she caught it. She loved that sort of work. She’d wanted to decorate her parents’ house but was never allowed to. Mammi Lu had let her do some painting and other projects, however.

“Are you interested?”

“Absolutely.” Joanna placed the dry mug in the cupboard. “When can I start?”

“How about today? Nick can take you into Lancaster. I have a list of supplies we need.” Becky grinned. “Welcome to the team. It’s wonderful *gut* that you want to join us.”

Joanna couldn’t stop smiling as she spent the morning shopping in Lancaster. Nor as she cleaned the vacation apartment that afternoon. After work, as she recorded her hours on her time sheet, Adam approached her. She was happy to see him, but then in the distance Jacob waved.

She smiled past Adam to Jacob. Adam turned, nodded at Jacob, and faced Joanna again. A forlorn expression settled on his face as he stopped at the counter and picked up a pen.

“Joanna.” Jacob stopped when he reached her. “What are you doing here?”

“Working.”

“Nice,” Adam muttered. She noted he had a book under his arm.

Jacob grinned.

“You work here too?” Joanna asked him, now ignoring Adam.

“Jah.” Jacob flashed his charming smile. “Ike hired me this afternoon.”

Adam groaned, and Jacob gave Joanna a wave as he headed to the other side of the warehouse.

Joanna stepped closer to Adam. She couldn’t keep herself from asking, “What Buch are you reading?”

Without smiling Adam held up the book. *Little Women*. “It’s my Mammi Becky’s copy.”



Tuesday morning as they clocked in, Jacob asked Joanna to go with him for ice cream that evening.

“How about if we meet there?” His brown eyes shone. “After supper.”

Joanna surprised herself by immediately saying, “I’d like that.” She noted Adam stood by the office door. Had he heard her exchange with Jacob? Flustered, she thought of how she’d rejected Adam’s invitation to ice cream just three days before. And then refused to serve him lemonade and cookies Sunday evening, which hadn’t been very hospitable.

She spent her morning cleaning the vacation rental house. In the afternoon, she and Becky organized the warehouse. After dinner Joanna scooted to the creamery. Jacob already waited in a line of tourists. She joined him, ordering one scoop of chocolate ice cream. Jacob ordered and then devoured a banana split—and then ordered a second one.

As he ate, he told her about growing up in Ohio. “This

is hard to talk about,” he said, “but my Dat left our family when I was six for an Englisch woman.”

Empathy washed through Joanna. In comparison to Jacob, she’d had a happy childhood. “I’m sorry,” she said. “That must have been really hard.”

“Jah,” he said. “I don’t talk about it much—I haven’t told anyone here what happened to my family.”

Joanna was touched he’d told her. “I won’t tell anyone. I don’t gossip.”

As he smiled his eyes shimmered, sending a wave of warmth through her. “You don’t seem to be the type who would.” He took another bite of ice cream and then said, “Anyway, that’s why I came here to live with my uncle. I’ll farm his land someday.”

“That’s fortunate.”

Jacob nodded. “It’s a relief to have a plan. In the meantime, I’ll work for Ike and Becky.”

While they chatted, Miriam approached on her scooter. “Joanna! Jacob!” She hopped off and yanked it up onto the sidewalk. She grinned at Jacob. “What are you doing here?”

“We’re celebrating our new jobs.” Jacob explained both he and Joanna had been hired by Ike and Becky.

Miriam tilted her head and turned her gaze to Joanna. “Lucky you.” Then she chuckled, a little ruefully. “Must be nice to be the granddaughter of Becky’s best friend.”

Joanna’s face grew warm. If Miriam thought that was why she’d been hired, which was most likely true, nothing Joanna could say would make a difference. She stayed quiet.

“Well, nice to see you, but I’ve gotta go.” Miriam jumped

back on her scooter, dodging an English couple as she maneuvered from the sidewalk back to the street and around the corner.

Jacob grimaced. “Is she always so blunt?”

“Oh, she’s fine.” Joanna wasn’t going to speak badly of the bishop’s granddaughter—or of anyone, she hoped. Besides, Miriam really was her friend, even if they were very different.

Fifteen minutes later, as they readied to leave, Jacob looked Joanna in the eye and said, “I’d like to be your friend, to get to know you. Out of all the girls at the singing last night, you’re the one who caught my attention. You seem the most interesting.”

Joanna had never been so flattered in her life. He’d chosen her, even over Miriam. And he wanted to be her friend, meaning she could get to know him before any thought of courting. She said, her voice barely above a whisper, “I’d like to be your friend too.”

The next morning, Becky appeared tired as she sat at her desk with her head down. She jotted something on a legal pad.

Joanna took a step closer to the desk. “*Guder Mariye.*”

Becky lifted her head, showing red-rimmed eyes.

Alarmed, Joanna asked, “What’s the matter?”

Becky brushed at her eyes. “Adam left for Florida.”

Joanna stepped closer. “Pinecraft?”

Becky nodded. “Two friends of his from Spartansburg have construction jobs waiting there. They stopped by last night and convinced him to go with them. Although it didn’t take much talking on their part for Adam to decide to leave.”

As she thought of Adam's forlorn expression the previous afternoon, Joanna suppressed a pang of regret. She should have been nicer to Adam. "For how long?"

Becky shrugged. "I have no idea. For a while, I'm guessing." Her eyes grew watery. "Maybe for good."