

A SEASON IN PINECRAFT

Her Only Wish

SHELLEY
SHEPARD GRAY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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Having hope will give you courage.

Job 11:18



If your mind can conceive it and your heart
can believe it, you can achieve it.

Amish saying

1



JUNE

It was a beautiful morning in Pinecraft, Florida. Once again, the sun was out, the flowers were blooming, and there was a slight undercurrent of salt in the air. It was the kind of morning that made one want to look up into the cloudless sky and give thanks for the chance to experience such beauty.

That's why it was a real shame that Mary Margaret Raber was beginning to get on Betsy's nerves.

No, that wasn't exactly true. Mary had been grating on her nerves for a good fifteen minutes. It was only in the last two or three minutes that Betsy had decided she'd had enough. There was only so much unsolicited advice a girl wanted to get before drinking two cups of coffee.

"Do you hear what I'm saying, Betsy?" Mary asked.

Taking note of the spotless kitchen, Betsy pasted on a fake smile. "Jah. I've been hearing your words loud and clear."

"Whew. For a moment there, you were looking so confused I thought maybe I was giving you too much advice." Mary

brushed a strand of blond hair from her cheek. “Jayson’s told me that sometimes I have a tendency to go on and on.”

“Don’t worry. You were fine.” She just wasn’t going to take any of her friend’s advice.

Relief entered Mary’s light brown eyes. “Oh? Well, that’s gut. Wonderful-gut.”

Betsy smiled as she tapped her foot. Her friend needed to wrap this lecture up real soon or else Betsy was going to do it for her. Not that anyone would blame her.

The simple truth was that even though Mary had been married barely a year, she was already acting as if she had all the answers. She’d also been acting a bit full of herself . . . like she knew best.

About everything.

If Betsy didn’t love her so much, she’d tell her girlfriend that this absolutely wasn’t the case.

However, since Mary and Jayson had invited her to stay in their guest room for a whole month, Betsy did what she usually did. She smiled, looked grateful, and mentally planned to do what she wanted anyway.

When at last Mary took a breath, she studied Betsy closely. “You sure are quiet. Do you understand what I’m trying to tell you?”

“I do.” Leaning against the kitchen counter, she crossed her arms over her chest. “Perfectly.”

For the first time in the past hour, Mary looked wary. “Betsy, all I’m trying to say is that you only got here two days ago. I’m sure you’re tired. Don’t you think you need more rest?”

“I do not. Now that we’ve had our chat, I’m going to head over to Snow Bird Golf Course and ask them about taking golf lessons.”

Mary frowned. “Oh, all right. Well, yes. I guess I could rearrange my day. We should go soon, since it’s so warm out.”

Mary was four months pregnant. She was still nauseous from time to time, always ready for a nap, and usually wanted to talk about her amazing husband Jayson, Jayson’s wonderful-gut job, her pregnancy, or all things baby. Betsy didn’t blame her one bit. If their positions were reversed, she’d probably feel the same way.

Perhaps they should have a talk after all.

“May we go sit down for a minute?”

“Of course. Where would you like to sit? On the lanai?”
Mary’s voice was hopeful.

Their covered screen porch was lovely. “That’s perfect. I’ll go get me another cup of coffee and you a glass of lemonade.”

“Oh, you’re the guest. I can get them.”

“Mary Margaret, I’m going to be here for a month. I don’t want you to wait on me.”

As Mary walked off to go put her feet up, Betsy went to the kitchen, got more coffee, poured a glass of lemonade, and then joined Mary on the lanai.

The area was big enough to hold a table, four chairs, two cushioned lounge chairs, and a small love seat. Everything was done in greens and teal colors. There were festive, bright-colored pillows on everything, an outside carpet, and about five terracotta pots filled with blooming flowers.

“I know I’ve told you before, but this is my favorite spot in your house. It’s so pretty out here,” she said as she sat down.

“It’s mine too. Jayson built the addition himself a few months after we got married.”

“He did a nice job.”

“I think the baby is going to like being out here too.”

“I’m sure she will.”

Mary chuckled. “You’re as certain about me having a girl as Jayson is about having a boy.”

“I can’t help myself. I’m sure you’re going to be rocking a sweet miniature version of yourself in here before you know it.”

“Whatever the Lord wants is fine with me.”

“I understand.” Taking a fortifying sip of coffee, Betsy knew she couldn’t delay the inevitable any longer. “I think we need to talk.”

“I know. You don’t want me trying to mother you, do you?”

Betsy stilled. “You knew what I was going to say?”

“We’re good enough friends for me to know what your expression looks like when you’ve reached the end of your patience. You don’t want to rest another two days, do you?”

She shook her head. “I not only don’t want to do that, I’m not going to.” Looking at Mary intently, she added, “I’m grateful to you and Jayson for your hospitality, but I tried to be upfront about what I wanted to do during my visit. I even told you that I didn’t mind going to a motel.”

“You staying in a motel by yourself was a terrible idea.”

Betsy smiled at her. “It probably was. I am glad I’m here instead of a motel—but as much as I like you, I’m not going to give up my list.”

“Your bucket list.”

“It’s not a bucket list. A bucket list is a list of things to do before you die. I have a list of things to do to make me feel like I’m finally living. It’s my life list.”

Because Mary still looked skeptical, Betsy kept talking. “Don’t you understand? All my life I’ve been standing on the

sidelines, watching everyone else try new things. I don't want to wait any longer."

"But your lungs . . . Betsy, you know your mother sent me a letter with all your medical history and doctor contact information."

"And you might recall that I was so mad at her for doing that, I barely talked to her for a week."

"She wants you to be safe."

"She wants me to be five years old again. Don't you think it would be strange if I didn't already have all that information? I'm twenty-three years old. Of course I have it!"

Mary flushed. "I . . . I should've realized that."

"I need you to stop acting like I can't tell when I need to use my inhaler or take breaks or call the doctor."

"You're right." She reached out and clasped Betsy's hand. "I'm so sorry. I'll be better."

"It's okay if you don't want to hold your tongue or you don't feel comfortable letting me do things. But if that's how it is, then let me stay someplace else. We'll still be able to see each other, you know."

"I want you here. I'll stop hovering. I promise."

"I'm going to hold you to that."

"You should." Looking sheepish, Mary added, "Jayson even told me last night that I was sounding too much like a mother hen."

Betsy smiled. "I knew I liked him."



Thirty minutes later, Betsy was walking down Bahia Vista Street toward Snow Bird Golf Course. Soon after their talk,

Mary had lain down to take a nap. Betsy hoped she hadn't hurt her friend's feelings but was pleased with herself for initiating such an honest conversation. She'd gone through far too much to put her list aside.

The reminder of the many hospital visits and tests she'd had to endure made some of her happy mood fade. Those episodes had been painful and frightening. They'd also been exhausting, because she'd gotten into an unfortunate routine of worrying about her mother's feelings more than her own. She adored her parents and her brother, but for once she didn't want to do everything they suggested just to make them happy.

She'd given them an ultimatum a month ago—saying that she needed to be gone for a whole month and that they needed to accept that fact. Or prepare themselves for her to move out permanently.

Pushing the dark thoughts away, she scanned the busy streets, looking for the golf course's sign.

And there it was. Snow Bird Golf Course, written in plain block letters in blue against a shiny black background. It was attractive and somehow looked very Plain at the same time.

She turned down the narrow lane. And gasped. There, in front of her, was a hidden gem. A bright green golf course with yellow flags at each hole, wide limestone gravel paths, bright white golf carts, a driving range, a putting green, and finally, the cutest little pale blue building with shiny black trim.

Picking up her pace, she walked toward the building, stepping off the limestone path and onto the soft green grass. Pleased with herself for not taking the meandering route, she looked around and smiled when she saw a tiny brown bunny.

“Aren’t you cute?” she murmured. “Are there bunnies like you all over this place?”

The rabbit froze, then hopped away, vanishing in seconds. Figuring rabbits were rabbits, whether they lived in Kentucky or Florida, Betsy chuckled, then kept walking, scanning the vicinity as she went. There were hydrangea bushes, lovely flowering bougainvillea, and a small pond off to her right. Anxious to take it all in, she slowed her pace.

“Hey!”

She kept walking.

“Hey! Amish lady in the orange dress! Stop!”

She looked down at herself, realized the voice was calling out to her, and stopped—about three feet from where a golf ball flew across the green. If she hadn’t stopped, it would’ve hit her.

A golf cart zipped forward and stopped next to her. One of the two men in the cart got out.

By his dress, he was obviously Amish too. Straw hat, short-sleeved shirt, long pants. He also had blond hair so bleached it looked white, gray eyes, and a really great tan.

“Hey, are you all right?” he asked.

“Jah. I d-don’t know what h-happened.” Hating that her stutter had returned, Betsy tried to calm herself. “D-do people really have to worry about d-dodging golf balls all the time?”

“They do when they’re walking in the middle of the fairway,” the other guy in the golf cart said. “What were you thinking?”

Stung by his rude tone, she propped one hand on her hip. “I was thinking that I needed to get to that b-building right there.”

“Why didn’t you stay on the cart path?”

“I . . . I didn’t know I had to.”

“Really?”

The man's voice was so filled with sarcasm, it took the edge off her nervousness. "S-sorry, but you show me a sign that says stay off the grass and I'll do it. Otherwise, I think you need to mind your own business."

The man in the cart scowled at her. "I'm going ahead, August."

The man who had gotten off the cart—August, she supposed—looked like he was trying not to laugh. "Jah. You do that. I'm gonna help this lady here."

"You want me to wait for you?"

"Better not. There's a foursome two holes behind us."

When the cart drove off, August turned to her. "Come on," he said as he reached for her elbow. "We need to get back on the cart path so we don't get dinged."

Betsy hurried to the path but started to feel like she'd just made a complete fool of herself. "I'm guessing there aren't any signs because everyone knows not to walk on the grass?"

"I'm afraid so. But, um, I agree that a sign or two might be a good idea."

"You know, you really don't need to walk me to the building."

"I think I do."

"No you don't. I was looking for the person who runs the golf course." She smiled, hoping she sounded far more confident than she felt. "I-I promise, I won't veer off the sidewalk again." She didn't want to offend him, but she wasn't there to be escorted like an errant child.

August looked bemused. "Actually, I was going there myself."

"Because?"

"Because I'm the manager of the course."

They stopped in front of the sign mounted to the siding of

the building. He pointed to the discreetly written words under Snow Bird Golf Course. August Troyer, Manager.

And then it hit her. “You’re August.”

“I am. I’m August Troyer, the manager of the golf course. I’m the guy you came to see.” His grin broadened. “What luck, huh?”

“Jah,” she muttered as she followed him inside. It looked like they both had some explaining to do.

August Troyer was handsome, personable, and very full of himself. And now he realized she didn’t even know enough about golf to stay on the cart paths.

How in the world was she going to get up the nerve to ask him about golf lessons?

All of the sudden, her grand plan of completing the things on her life list was starting to feel very overwhelming.

Pretty much impossible.