

A woman in a blue dress and white bonnet is shown from the waist up, holding a baby wrapped in white cloth. She is standing in a field of pink flowers under a blue sky with light clouds. The title 'A Healing Touch' is written in large white serif font at the top.

A Healing Touch

SUZANNE
WOODS
FISHER

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LOST AND FOUND*

Praise for *Lost and Found*

“This charming romance is propelled by winsome, endearing characters and digs into rich questions about tradition, progress, and loyalty. Fisher’s fans won’t be disappointed.”

Publishers Weekly

“This story is very entertaining and engaging, with lots of surprises and even a bit of suspense.”

Interviews and Reviews

“An Amish romance at its very best, author and storyteller Suzanne Woods Fisher’s latest novel, *Lost and Found*, is a fun read from cover to cover.”

Midwest Book Review

Praise for *Anything but Plain*

“Readers will be won over by the delightful leads, and the nuanced treatment of Lydie’s ADHD and crisis of faith brings depth to the narrative. This is another winner from Fisher.”

Publishers Weekly

“*Anything but Plain* is a heartbreaking yet beautiful Amish journey. Suzanne Woods Fisher tackled so many themes beautifully in this novel.”

Urban Lit Magazine

“Suzanne Woods Fisher is the master at telling historic tales.”

The Stand

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AMISH BEGINNINGS

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The Return

THE BISHOP'S FAMILY

The Imposter
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The Sweet Life
The Secret to Happiness
Love on a Whim



The Moonlight School
A Season on the Wind
Anything but Plain
Lost and Found
A Healing Touch

A Healing Touch



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To AJ,
who helped me push this book
out of the stall and into
the exciting arena!

“A doctor can treat, but only God can heal.”

—Dok Stoltzfus

Meet the Cast

Ruth “Dok” Stoltzfus (age late fifties), doctor to the local Amish of Stoney Ridge as well as non-Amish patients, sister to Bishop David Stoltzfus, married to police officer Matt Lehman. While in her teens, Dok left her Amish upbringing to pursue higher education and a medical career. In the book *The Devoted*, she was reunited with her family.

Annie Fisher (age 20), Amish, office assistant to Dok, daughter to Sally (a raging hypochondriac). Her mother’s many unusual ailments have given Annie a keen interest in the medical world.

Bee Bennett (age 51), former Olympic elite equestrian, now a horse breeder of Dutch Warmbloods. Over a year ago, Bee moved to Stoney Ridge when her husband Ted retired from his medical practice to start a hobby farm. (But then he died.)

Damon Harding (age 60), former Olympic elite equestrian, now a high-level horse trainer. Had once competed with Bee on the US Olympic Equestrian Team. To Bee’s surprise, he’s missing his left arm.

A Healing Touch

Sally Fisher (age 58), Amish, mother to Annie, wife to Eli, diagnosed by Dok to have hypochondria. Sally rejects that label. She's convinced she's not well.

Eli Fisher (age 61), Amish dairy farmer, father to Annie and long-suffering husband to Sally.

David Stoltzfus (age midfifties), bishop to the Amish church of Stoney Ridge, husband to Birdy, brother to Dok, father to many—both his own children and his flock.

Fern Lapp (age late sixties), Old Order Amish, the type of nonsense, kind but firm woman whom everyone needs in their life. First arrived in Stoney Ridge in *The Keeper*.

Matt Lehman, husband to Dok, police officer. Met and wooed Dok Stoltzfus in *The Devoted*.

Hank Lapp, one-of-a-kind elderly Old Order Amish man. Readers first met Hank in *The Keeper*. Even then, he had one volume: loud.

Edith Fisher Lapp (won't reveal her age), married to Hank Lapp. An interesting love match, because no two people could be more opposite. As Dok says, "There's a lid for every pot."

Sarah Blank (early twenties), Old Order Amish, friend of Annie's, works at Bent N' Dent store. Has a huge interest in others. Some call it nosiness.

Amish EMT . . . well, you'll just have to read on to find out more about him.

One

The workday had barely begun and Dok Stoltzfus was already running behind schedule. Levi Yutzy, an Amish farmer, had been waiting for her at the office, his hand wrapped in a blood-soaked towel. Half of one finger had been nearly severed while chopping wood. As Dok gathered clean bandages to wrap Levi's hand so she could get him to the hospital for reattachment, he asked her how much the surgery might cost him. "Doesn't matter," she said firmly. "You need your finger."

Levi's big body spilled over the edges of the exam table. "But how much, do you figure?" he said, peering at his hand while Dok bandaged it. "Might be best to just cut off the rest of it. You could do that right here, couldn't you?"

Those were the moments when Dok had to remind herself that the goal was to get this man to the hospital for reattachment of a severed digit. She had to handle this in a way that made sense to this Amish farmer, even if it made no sense to her. "Levi, if you were a few decades older," she said, "I might give you an option. But you're a young man, with a big family. You need your hands in working order to farm well."

Levi seemed unconvinced. "Besser einen Finger als die ganze Hand verloren." *Better a finger than the whole hand.*

“Besser zehe Finger.” Dok sighed. *Better ten fingers.* “God gave you ten fingers for a reason, and if we hurry, you still have a good chance to keep all ten of them.”

Levi looked down at his hands, and she knew he was considering her words. Slowly, his long beard wiggled up, then down. A nod. Still, Dok had insisted on driving him to the hospital’s emergency room, just to be sure he got there and stayed there.

And as soon as she had a moment to spare today, she would march over to the Bent N’ Dent to complain vigorously to her brother David, the bishop, about Levi’s flawed logic. Dok complained to David quite a lot about the people in his church. Imagine putting a price tag on a finger!

They were her people too, David would quietly remind her. So right. For all the frustrations she had with the Plain People, she also loved and admired them. They were her people too.

Dok had been raised Amish, though she hadn’t gone through baptism like her brothers David and Simon had. There was a deep hunger inside her for higher education, a longing to become a doctor. That desire won out over conforming to her family’s expectations, though it came with a price—losing her family. She’d gone through medical school, become a doctor, and in an unexpected turnabout, ended up back among the Amish.

Having been raised Plain, she understood them in a way few others in her profession could. Frugality and practicality were baked into them, part of their DNA. Yet while she understood it, reluctance—like Levi Yutzy’s—to take advantage of what modern medicine had to offer simply out of penny-pinching, well, those moments could try her patience.

Dok stayed with Levi in the ER’s waiting room until he was admitted and taken in to be examined. Glancing at her watch, she weighed the cost of adding one more unexpected errand into the morning’s time-crunched schedule. Annie Fisher, Dok’s office assistant, had just called to tell her the lab results from

Bee Bennett's recent biopsy. If Dok took a shortcut through the back roads, she would drive right past Bee's. House calls beat a phone call or video call, every time. Most doctors would disagree, but Dok thought a house call even beat an office visit.

Especially with this kind of news.



When Bee Bennett answered the knock at her front door to find Dok Stoltzfus, her stomach clenched in a knot. Bee's husband Ted had worked with Dok before she left the hospital to buy a practice of her own in Stoney Ridge. They'd stayed in touch over the years; Bee and Ted had even been invited to Dok's wedding to Matt Lehman. Bee and Dok were more than doctor and patient, though not quite friends. Somewhere in between. But she sensed that Dok would let any patient know, face-to-face, if something was wrong. That's just the kind of doctor she was. Dok developed a bond of trust with her patients, the same kind of bond Bee sought with her horses.

Bee invited Dok in and they sat in the living room, Dok on the couch, Bee on the seat of the large bay window. "I'm pretty sure you didn't drop by for a cup of tea," Bee said with a nervous laugh. "So my guess is you have some news to tell me."

"I do. Not the news that I had wanted for you, Bee." Dok clasped her hands in her lap. "But it's not the worst news, either. Your breast cancer was caught . . . and caught early."

So, there it was. Bee'd had a sense, all along, that the biopsy report would be positive. She'd braced herself for this moment, dreading it, yet she felt strangely detached to hear the actual outcome said aloud. She blew out a puff of air as she visibly stiffened her spine. "So, what comes next?"

"I'll get appointments set up for you with a surgeon and an oncologist. The oncologist will make further decisions about treatment."

"What kind of treatment?"

“Those decisions will be made postsurgery.”

“Dok,” Bee said, in a “you know the answer to that” tone.

Dok sighed. “Most likely, you’ll need a course of radiation. But, Bee, all of that will be decided by specialists. You can trust their decisions. And, Bee, you’ve got an excellent prognosis.”

Bee shifted on the seat to look out the window at two of her horses, Echo and Willow, in the snowy pasture that lined the house. Two of her favorites, though they were all her favorites.

Dok wasn’t quite finished. “You’re very fortunate. Catch cancer early, while it’s easy to treat.”

Bee turned to her with a scoff. “Easy?”

Dok rose to join her on the window seat. “This will end up as a blip on the radar. You’ll get through this. You’re strong, Bee.”

Was she? Bee used to think of herself as strong, but that was before her husband died so suddenly, so unexpectedly, shortly after he had retired from a demanding career as a vascular surgeon. They’d sold their home in the suburbs of Lancaster and moved to twenty acres in Stoney Ridge to start an official horse breeding farm, a lifelong dream for Bee. She’d been an unofficial horse breeder for years, trying to carry on the lineage of Ozzie, her magnificent mare. Ted had never begrudged the costs of keeping Ozzie stabled, or later on, her progeny. He was the one who found a “retirement” property that had a barn and a covered arena. He teased Bee that since she had found a way to collect horses, it would be cheaper to house them than to keep paying their board.

Happily, Ted was all in with the notion of becoming a gentleman farmer. He was eager to spend time developing skills for his interests, like gardening and carpentry, all the hobbies he had postponed for retirement. He had relied heavily on his fine motor skills for intricate surgeries and took care not to do anything that could injure his hands—even avoiding typical husband-tasks like chopping firewood or fixing a broken garbage disposal. The day after he retired from his practice, he

went to Home Depot and spent a fortune on tools. Lining one garage wall in the Stoney Ridge house was a stack of boxes of unused tools, still in their original packaging.

Barely sixty. Ted had just had his sixtieth birthday when he died. Bee had gotten what she had wanted for the next chapter of life, but Ted never had time to get what he had wanted. Over a year had passed, yet Bee still felt his loss like a fresh wound.

“You know, Bee,” Dok said softly, “over the years, I’ve noticed that many newly diagnosed cancer patients have experienced recent trauma.”

Bee blinked. “What exactly are you trying to say?”

“That trauma, like loss, takes a tremendous toll. There’s even a book about it called *The Body Keeps the Score*.”

Bee turned her gaze back to the window. “In other words, we’re all doomed, because sooner or later, no one gets by in this life without hardship.”

“No, no, that’s not what I mean. I’m not saying we’re doomed. I’ve just seen a correlation between trauma and disease in my practice. Research is starting to pay attention to this, to the toll that elevated cortisol levels take on a body. It’s why, after Ted passed, that I’ve been after you to take care of yourself, to not skip or postpone any appointments, to get up to speed with all your tests.”

This last year, Bee had been overdue for just about everything related to body maintenance—dentist, doctor, even regular haircuts. She just didn’t have the energy for them. She gave Dok a wry smile. “And here I thought you just liked to meddle.”

Dok burst out with a surprised laugh. “I do! I do like to meddle. A trait I inherited from my mother. The family had a nickname for her, though I’m not sure she ever knew it. Mammi die Nasiche. Mammi the Meddler.” She chuckled. “Anyway, lately I’ve been thinking that there’s another component to caring for my patients, especially those who’ve

experienced recent trauma.” She patted her heart. “Healing the heart, the soul.” She turned to Bee. “I think it would help you.”

“Oh no.” Bee shook her head. “I went to a grief group at a church and came home feeling even more depressed.”

“What?” Dok’s blue eyes went wide with surprise. “How? Why?”

“Because the leader invited everyone to share their feelings, and so they did. I discovered that there’s a lot of people walking around who feel just as bad as I do.”

“But didn’t the leader make any effort to help people heal?”

“He talked about how happy our loved ones are, and that was supposed to bring us great comfort.” Bee lifted a hand. “Don’t get me wrong. I’m a big fan of the hereafter. I believe Ted’s there. But how does that help me in the here and now?” She clapped her hands on her knees. “Tell me, Dok, what does it look like to heal from losing your spouse and best friend? Give me some idea of what you mean, because I can’t figure it out. I’m only fifty-one years old and I don’t know how I’m going to get through the rest of my life.” She hadn’t meant to spill so much. She hardly knew Dok! But since she’d gone this far, she might as well go all the way. “I’ve wondered if . . . maybe . . . with your news today, maybe the rest of my life isn’t going to be all that long.”

Dok reached her arm around Bee to pull her close in a side hug. “I know it doesn’t seem like it, but today’s news is a gift. Because you were willing to get a mammogram—”

“But I wasn’t willing. You made me go. You picked me up and drove me to the appointment.”

“—it caught a potential threat to your health. You don’t give up on your body because a few errant cells are multiplying. Your body just needs a little help from you. First, we’re going to deal with this breast cancer . . . and then we’re going to work on healing from grief.”

Bee pulled back from Dok. “You didn’t answer my question. What does that truly look like?”

“To be perfectly honest, I’m not sure I have a satisfying answer. Because . . .”

“Because you’ve never lost someone, have you?”

“I have, but not like Ted’s sudden death. Both of my parents have passed away. My mother died just last year, in fact. But I wasn’t surprised by her passing, not like you were.”

Boy, was she ever. Bee had gone to the grocery store to pick up a few things for dinner, and when she returned, she noticed the front door had been left wide open. Very unlike Ted. He was an attention-to-detail kind of guy. She set the bag of groceries on the porch and took a tentative step into the house, calling Ted’s name. That was when she saw her dearly loved husband on the hallway floor, clearly gone. A myocardial infarction, the coroner ruled. A fancy way to say heart attack.

“It seems to me,” Dok said, “that a sudden death might be what we all want for ourselves, but it is particularly brutal on those left behind.”

Brutal? Not even close. Shattered into a million sharp fragments was more like it.

“That reminds me. Do you stay in touch with Ted’s son? Tyler, right? I remember meeting him at Ted’s memorial service. He seemed like a very warm young man. A lot like his dad.”

Tyler, Ted’s son from his first marriage, was grown and married. And yes, he resembled Ted in many ways. “He’s a doctor at NYU and married to a doctor. Super busy, as you can imagine. Plus, they’re having a baby.”

“Bee,” Dok said, with wonder in her voice. “*You* are going to be a grandmother.”

“No, I’m not,” Bee said flatly. “His mother is.”

“You could be in that child’s life. Ted certainly would’ve been.”

“But he’s not, Dok. His death changed a lot of things.” Like

Bee's connection to her stepson. Without Ted, they'd lost that impetus to stay in touch.

Out in the pasture, one of the horses lifted its head with a loud neigh. "Bee, how many horses do you have right now?"

"Seven."

"Hmm. Seven is a lot. You're going to need extra hands around here for a while."

Bee knew Dok was trying to be helpful, but these horses weren't exactly trail nags. They were Dutch Warmbloods, strong and athletic, bred to be show jumpers. Besides, Bee didn't let just anyone near them. They were too valuable. And then there was the bond between a rider and horse. It took years to develop, and that partnership was what made jumping seem like dancing.

Of course, Bee didn't expect Dok to know that. All Dok knew was that Bee had once ridden in the Olympics on a horse named Ozzie.

Dok's phone had been vibrating. Bee could tell that she was needed elsewhere and rose to make it easy for Dok to leave. "Speaking of horses, I'd better get these two into their stalls and deliver their lunch."

But Dok wasn't quite ready to go. "Last night, Matt said something about a friend of his who trains horses. I have to admit that I was only half listening." She squinted. "Something about having time on his hands. Anyway, I'll find out more and let you know. Matt invited him for dinner tonight." She walked to the door. "And my assistant Annie will get those appointments scheduled. You've met Annie, right?"

"I do remember Annie. Very cute. Very bashful."

"Yes, both. She's an excellent assistant. One of the best I've ever had. You'll see. She'll get your appointments set up by day's end. And I think she's making some progress with her shyness." She knotted her forehead. "I hope so. That's the plan, anyway."

Bee smiled. She had a hunch that Annie was one of Dok's

projects, like she was. “You’re a wonderful doctor, but you don’t need to worry about me or my horses.”

Dok reached out and put her hands on Bee’s shoulders. “Can’t help it. Comes with the territory.” She gave Bee a quick hug and hurried out the door.

Bee waved until Dok’s car turned onto the road and disappeared. She wasn’t surprised by the biopsy’s result. But what did take her off guard was that she didn’t feel anything. Nothing at all. Dok could’ve told her that she was coming down with a cold. Bee felt utterly indifferent to having cancer. And that, she knew, was no way to live.



Although painfully shy, Annie Fisher had decided long ago that she wanted to work for Dok Stoltzfus. Her admiration first began as a result of how Dok had managed Annie’s mother as a patient.

Annie’s mother Sally always had a myriad of physical complaints, one after the other. Some of Annie’s earliest memories were accompanying her mother to a doctor’s office. Those visits were probably how Annie’s shyness—which she self-diagnosed as “social anxiety” after reading one of Dok’s medical magazines—went from mild to severe.

Her mother would insist that Annie be allowed in the exam room to be a witness to testify to her most recent symptoms. A typical scenario went like this: “I’m real sure,” Mom would tell the doctor, “it’s a case of rheumatoid arthritis. Tell him, Annie. Tell him how red and swollen my hands looked yesterday.”

But they hadn’t. They had looked just fine to Annie.

The doctor or nurse would turn to Annie for confirmation and her mind would go blank. Absolutely empty. She had no idea how to respond. She didn’t want to deny what her mother said to the doctor, but she just couldn’t lie, either. She was a terrible liar. So Annie wouldn’t say anything. Not a word. In

that awkward silence, she could feel her cheeks heat to scarlet, so she would look down at her shoes and her mother would say, “See? See that? She can’t even speak. She’s overcome with worry for me.”

Not exactly. Mostly, Annie was trying to be invisible.

And the unsuspecting, well-intentioned doctor would refer Mom to a specialist who did all kinds of tests that never found anything wrong. When Mom didn’t like what that doctor had to say, she would move on to another one.

But Annie didn’t move on. Her curiosity about her mother’s current disease—whichever one it was—would be piqued. Having never heard of it, she would head off to the library and read all about it. This kind of scene repeated itself many, many times, with a variety of diseases. Whenever her mother heard someone speak of a new ailment, most often her cousin Gloria who lived a few towns over, she became convinced she had it too.

Little by little, Annie became quite knowledgeable about serious illnesses.

It wasn’t until Dok Stoltzfus started her practice in Stoney Ridge that Mom was properly diagnosed. On the very first visit, Dok had asked Annie’s mother if she had brought her medical records with her.

Mom said no.

From under her black cape, Annie pulled a four-inch stack of records and handed it to Dok.

Mom gasped. “I’ve never seen those folders before.” From the look she gave Annie, she wasn’t happy about it. “Where did those come from?”

“After each appointment, I always kept the paperwork. I’ve brought them to each doctor visit. It’s just that . . . Dok Stoltzfus is the first doctor who asked to see your medical records.”

Dok had her eyes on them, listening to their whispered con-

versation. She spent a few minutes reading through the top few folders. “They’re in chronological order?”

Annie nodded.

Dok held up a paper of handwritten notes. “Annie, you took these notes?”

Again, Annie nodded.

“Well, Sally, you certainly do have an unusual assortment of ailments.” Dok closed the folder and held the stack against her. “I’ll give you an exam today and get some blood work, and then I’ll let you know when the results come in.”

A few days later, Dok asked for the family to come to her office—Mom, Dad, and Annie, all together. Dok explained that she was convinced Mom had a type of anxiety disorder called *hypochondria*.

“So,” Mom said, “you’re saying that if I think I’m sick, then I will get the symptoms?”

Dok nodded, like *Bingo*.

“But I do think I’m sick.”

Dok sighed. She looked right at Annie’s father. “Eli, it’s time to stop doctor-hopping. Sally needs counseling to overcome her health anxieties and she needs lots of reassurance from family, but she does not need to be going from doctor to doctor.”

Dad left Dok’s office full of relief and resolve.

Mom left Dok’s office offended. She was unwell, she was just sure of it.

Annie left Dok’s office fascinated with the anxiety disorder of hypochondria.

She went straight to the library to read all about it. She would never forget that moment—like a lightning bolt out of the sky. The diagnosis described her mother to a T! For years, the family all assumed Mom wasn’t well, and if she could just find the right doctor who could make an accurate diagnosis and provide treatment, then she could finally get better.

In a way, that was true. Dok was the right doctor. Mom finally had an accurate diagnosis of her condition. But she sure didn't like it. In fact, she refused all of Dok's suggestions for treatment. That, Annie read, was typical of hypochondriacs. They didn't want to get better.

But knowing Mom's true diagnosis was incredibly helpful for the family. Dad, especially. He insisted Mom remain a patient at Dok's practice. Dok was convenient, she gave a discount for cash, and she was the bishop's sister. Even better, Dok wouldn't refer Mom to specialists for expensive, futile tests like so many other doctors did.

Grudgingly, Mom remained with Dok only because she had no other options. She still insisted that Annie come along with her as her witness to symptoms. So on a regular basis, Annie was in Dok's office. Her admiration for Dok grew and grew, as did her determination to work for her. On the day she'd heard that Dok's assistant was getting married and moving away, Annie wrote a letter to Dok that she'd like to be considered for the job as her new assistant. Sadly, she didn't hear anything back.

Not until the October day when Dok drove to the Fisher house and offered Annie the job. She didn't even interview her. She sat at the kitchen table with Mom and Dad and Annie, sipping a cup of coffee, chatting about nothing in particular. Through the window, Mom saw the mail truck and hurried outside to post a letter in the mail. And no sooner had the screen door slammed shut behind Mom than Dok turned to Annie and said she'd like her to come work for her as her assistant. No interview necessary, she said.

At first, Annie stared at Dok in confusion, not believing what she'd just heard. She scooted forward in the chair, her fingers curled around the edge of the seat. Could she be dreaming? No! Dok was right here, waiting for an answer. If Annie didn't hurry and say something, her mother would be back in the kitchen

and decline the offer. The clouds parted and from deep inside Annie came a “Yes!” She said it in such a loud, clear voice that Dok nearly spilled her coffee.

But immediately, a glitch arose. Dad said Annie could only work for Dok until the end of March. Come spring, he needed her help on the farm. Annie’s brothers had married and moved away to start their own dairy farms. That left Annie as her dad’s main farmhand because he couldn’t afford to hire on for seasonal work, like spring planting. Crushed, Annie had dropped her chin to hide her tears.

Dok didn’t seem at all concerned about that limitation. “That sounds doable.”

Annie’s head snapped up. Was this really happening?

Dok smiled. “Anyone who can take notes and keep track of records like you, Annie, is just the person I need for this job. It’s all about scheduling and billing.” The only thing she asked of Annie was to memorize a bunch of Bible verses. “A prescription for extreme shyness,” she said, handing her a list of verses.

Annie tucked the list in her Bible and, in her excitement, promptly forgot it.

Working for Dok was all Annie dreamed it to be. Nothing seemed to bother Dok, except for one thing—those times when Annie didn’t interrupt her for an important phone call if she was in an exam room with a patient. It was the only part of Annie’s job that was a constant challenge for her. She would stand outside the exam room door, frozen. What if the patient was in the middle of undressing? What if the patient was a man? What if the patient was *naked*?

It didn’t take long for Annie to realize that Dok had a certain tone she used when she was growing exasperated. She would spell out all the reasons she wanted Annie to knock on the door to the exam room and interrupt her: “I want you to do this, Annie. It doesn’t matter what the patient might think. It doesn’t matter if the patient is half-dressed or stark naked.

It doesn't matter who the patient is. Male or female. Young or old. When phone calls come in from other doctors or the lab calls with test results or the hospital calls with a patient update, you need to come get me."

Annie hated the feeling of disappointing Dok. Yet just yesterday afternoon, a call came in from a doctor for a consult about a patient, and Annie couldn't make herself knock on the exam room door. This time, the patient in the exam room with Dok was the bishop. No way, no way. Annie couldn't open that door and risk seeing the *bishop* partially undressed.

No way.

Later, after the bishop left the office, Annie handed Dok the phone message to return the call from the doctor about the patient consult.

Dok looked crestfallen. "Annie," she said, holding the slip of paper in the air, "we've been over and over this."

Annie knew she needed to work on her social anxiety. For Dok's sake, for her own sake.

Last night, Annie skimmed through her Bible and found the list Dok had asked her to memorize. No, she had *told* Annie to memorize these verses. She looked up the first verse: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

She wrote the verse down on an index card and repeated it to herself over and over and over until she had it committed to heart.

The next morning, a phone call came in from the lab with a test result. Annie closed her eyes and repeated the verse to herself. She walked down the hall, "Boldly approach the throne of grace. Boldly approach the throne of grace," and took a deep breath before knocking on the exam room to interrupt Dok and her naked patient. (Annie was never sure if the patient was naked or not. She had kept her gaze on her shoes.)

As Dok breezed past her to get the phone call, she gave Annie an encouraging squeeze on her arm.

Annie had done it. There was *not* going to be a need for another crestfallen look of disappointment from Dok. She'd done it!

The bishop often said that God worked with us in little steps, one at a time, to get us where he wanted us.

Little steps, Annie thought. Little steps.



Heit waar der Daag en woch lang. *Today was a week long.*

Dok tried to explain that Penn Dutch saying to her husband Matt when she arrived home at nine o'clock, after missing the dinner he had planned with his horse trainer friend. "I was doing everything I could to get home in time for dinner. I really was. But I was running behind all day. I probably shouldn't have stopped by Bee Bennett's—but a cancer diagnosis isn't something to hear on the phone."

"Of course. I told you it was the right thing to do when you called on your way back to the office. But you also told me you were going to make it home for dinner, no matter what."

"And I was trying! But right at closing time a mother brought in a three-year-old boy who had swallowed a penny and it had lodged in his throat. He was having trouble breathing. I took them over to the emergency room and . . . well, you know what that's like."

Matt shook his head. "I do know, Ruth. I realize how many patients depend on you. I know how much you give to your patients. You never stop. But something's got to change."

"Matt, I said I'm sorry."

"I want you to consider getting a partner."

This wasn't a new conversation between them. Dok bristled at the thought of sharing her practice. She had yet to meet another doctor who shared her views, especially on the importance

of house calls. To her way of thinking, a joint practice was like a marriage.

“You can’t keep going like this. *We* can’t keep going like this.”

“What does that mean?” She had thought things were sailing along smoothly between them. Maybe sailing *smoothly* wasn’t the right word. Maybe the waters were a little rough at times, a bit choppy. “I didn’t realize you’ve been feeling so frustrated,” she said, trying to hide the hurt she felt.

“Not frustrated,” Matt said. “I just feel as if we could be doing more with our lives.”

Oh, come on! It wasn’t like Dok spent her downtime as a couch potato. And it wasn’t like Matt didn’t thoroughly devote himself to his career as a police officer. He did! But she knew she needed to keep the conversation going. “More in what way?”

“Like . . . we haven’t really been back to church regularly since the pandemic.”

“We watch online.” Most of the time.

He gave a scratchy, disbelieving laugh. “Not the same.”

No, not exactly. It was a lazy way to worship. But Dok did appreciate what a time-saver it was.

“Ruth, we had talked about joining a small group. About getting more involved.”

He had talked about it. She hadn’t. She couldn’t imagine fitting one more thing into her schedule. How could she when her patients needed her twenty-four hours a day? “I am sorry about missing dinner with your friend tonight. But it doesn’t seem fair to expect me to add things to the calendar.”

“I’m asking you to prioritize balance, for my sake as well as yours. Can you even remember the last time we went somewhere together? The last time we went on a date? You work six days a week and you’re exhausted on the seventh. That’s if you haven’t gone to see patients in the hospital on Sunday.”

Now Dok was getting steamed. She was hungry and tired and knew she should watch her words. Did she? No. “This is a

doctor's life, Matt. You knew what you were getting into when you married me.”

“Maybe so, but it seems . . . as if you take me, us, our marriage . . . especially our marriage, for granted. And that's a pretty lousy way to feel.”

Dok's mouth fell open. “You think I take our marriage for granted? You can't be serious.”

And then Matt brought up marriage counseling.

“Oh,” she whispered, stunned.