

Seasons in Paradise

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A Road Unknown
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One True Path

The Coming Home Series

Return to Paradise



Barbara Cameron

Abingdon Press
Nashville

Seasons in Paradise

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For my cousin Deb

Acknowledgments

To everything there is a season . . .

The farm my mother and her eight siblings grew up on in Indiana has been the inspiration for the farms I write about in my books. I vividly remember watching my Uncle Harvey, the youngest in the family, ride his tractor in his fields. His wife, my Aunt Delores, made the family welcome whenever they visited, and that can't have been easy given the number of family members who descended on the farm for vacations. She has often been the inspiration for the female characters who make a home so welcome, who make family keep wanting to go home. Aunt Delores made a little bedroom under the eaves of the second story so welcome for the many nieces and nephews who visited. She even kept a small toy chest that had belonged to my mom and her twin sister stocked with toys and let us choose one each time we came.

I was sitting on the grass near the road one day when I saw my first Amish buggy and became fascinated with the Amish.

Memories of how that farm looked so different from season to season inspired this story, the second in the *Coming Home* series. It starts in spring and ends up in winter, at Christmas, the holiest of holidays.

When people think of Christmas they usually think of home. But I got to wondering what happens if home is a place you've had to avoid? What happens then? My hero, Sam, has had to leave his Amish home and live in the *Englisch* world. Mary Elizabeth, the woman who loves him, believes he needs to return to his community and his faith—and her—and it will take her seasons to do so.

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Thank you, dear reader, for choosing my books.

And thank You, God, for taking my hand and helping me tell a story of faith and love.

1

Mary Elizabeth always thought there was nothing lovelier than springtime in Paradise, Pennsylvania.

Today the sky was a rich blue, not the gray it had been for too long this winter. The clouds that scudded overhead were soft clumps and a pure white, not heavy and dark and spitting snow or rain.

A warm breeze carried the scents of flowers and plants and . . .
Manure and fertilizer.

Her nose wrinkled as she stood on the back porch of her *schweschder* Lavina's big old farmhouse and watched David, Lavina's *mann*, working with his *bruders*, Sam and John, fertilizing the fields.

Well, to be honest, she watched Sam, not the other men. Sam and John came nearly every weekend now that spring planting was taking place in Lancaster County. It took all three of the *bruders* as well as occasional help from their *dat*, Amos, to do the planting, as would the eventual nurturing of the crop. It would take the four of them and some of the men from the community to harvest come November.

Mary Elizabeth had begun to think Amos would never turn the farm over to his eldest *sohn*, David, and her *schweschder* Lavina. David had finally despaired at fighting with his *dat*. Amos had been so difficult he'd driven David, then Sam and John away.

David had returned to Paradise to help his *mudder* take care of his *dat* when he got the cancer. No one had been more surprised than David and Lavina when Amos had a change of heart after recovering and decided to turn the farm over to his *sohn*.

Mary Elizabeth knew she would never forget this Christmas past when Sam and John walked into her *haus* and surprised both families after an absence of more than a year. But that return was brief and temporary.

It was a miracle, she'd thought, when they came to celebrate the birth of the Christ child that night. But her hopes that Sam would stay had been dashed just hours later. The two *bruders* went back to their apartment in town that night.

Both Sam and John said it was *wunderbaar* that their *dat* had recovered and they were thrilled that David would take over the family farm. But they refused to return home or to the Amish community the *bruders* had grown up in.

Mary Elizabeth had thought her heart was broken when Sam followed David out of the community, but that Christmas night she'd found it was possible for her heart to be broken a second time.

So now she watched Sam working in the fields she knew he loved but would leave after supper at day's end. And she knew she had to stop yearning and find someone else. She didn't feel like an old maid at twenty-three, but she wanted to make a home with a *mann* she loved, have *kinner*. Be loved and be happy.

"Mary Elizabeth, *kumm* and have some iced tea with me."

She turned and smiled at Lavina. Whenever she looked at her two *schweschders* it was like looking in a mirror. The three of them could have been triplets with their oval faces, round blue eyes, and blonde hair. They'd been born just a year apart so they'd grown up close.

Her oldest *schweschder* seemed to glow these days. She'd married David after the harvest in November and now, several months later, was obviously enjoying being a new *fraa* and making a home.

Mary Elizabeth wondered if there was a reason her *schweschder* glowed besides being a new bride . . . many Amish started their families early. And Lavina and David had lost a year of being together when he had lived away from the community.

So far Lavina hadn't said anything and with a voluminous apron tied over her dress, looked slim as ever.

"See if Waneta would like to come have some iced tea," Lavina said as she poured the tea over ice in tall glasses.

Mary Elizabeth knocked on the door of the *dawdi haus*, and Waneta opened it. "Would you like to have some iced tea with us?"

"*Danki*, that would be nice." The older woman smiled, walked into the kitchen, and took a seat at the kitchen table. "It's *gut* to see you, Mary Elizabeth."

"You, too."

Had Waneta noticed how often she came to visit—and so often on the weekends? Mary Elizabeth wondered.

The three of them chatted easily as they drank the tea and ate some chocolate chip cookies Lavina had baked earlier that day. Waneta talked about making some curtains for the *dawdi haus* and seemed happy to be living there now that Lavina and David had taken over the main part of the *haus*.

"Don't you love the color of the kitchen paint Lavina chose?" she asked Mary Elizabeth. "Yellow is so cheerful. It reminds me of the daffodils that are blooming in front of the *haus* now that it's spring."

Lavina smiled at her. "I'm glad you like it." She looked at Mary Elizabeth. "We painted the kitchen in the *dawdi haus* the same color after Waneta saw how it looked in here."

Waneta took a sip of her tea. "Amos never thought we needed to paint in here, but it had been years since we did it and it really brightens up the room."

Mary Elizabeth was glad to see how well her *schweschder* and Waneta got along. The two had always been close, and she knew

Waneta was grateful that Lavina had talked David into returning when Amos had gone into chemotherapy more than a year ago.

Amos walked in a few minutes later, hung his wide-brimmed straw hat on a peg near the door and washed his hands at the kitchen sink. Waneta jumped to her feet and hurried to pour him a glass of iced tea as he took a seat at the table.

"It's warm out there," he said. "Warm, but there's a breeze."

"Maybe you should take a little rest. You don't want to overdo."

He frowned as he took a long swallow of tea. "I'll see how I feel after I have this."

"Is the planting going well?" Mary Elizabeth asked him.

He nodded. "After all the arguing about trying new crops and fancy new methods David's planting exactly what I'd planned." He looked smug.

Mary Elizabeth exchanged glances with Lavina and her *schweschder* warned her with a shake of the head not to say anything. But Mary Elizabeth knew better. David was planting what his *dat* had planned because the order had been placed months ago and because he was grateful that he'd been given the farm. Without that gift, without Amos softening, David would have had a very hard time buying a farm in Lancaster County.

"Is David coming in for a break?" Lavina asked Amos as she pushed the plate closer to him.

He picked up a cookie and bit into it. "*Nee*, no one wanted to stop yet. Rain's coming later this afternoon, and they want to get as much done as possible."

Lavina looked at Mary Elizabeth. "I'll take some cold drinks out to them."

"I'll help," Mary Elizabeth said.

"*Danki*."

"I think I'll take a rest after all," Amos said. "*Danki* for the tea and cookies, Lavina."

"*Ya, danki*." Waneta said. "I think I'll go get some mending done. *Gut* to see you again, Mary Elizabeth."

Amos nodded to her and the couple went into the *dawdi haus* and shut the door.

Lavina and Mary Elizabeth filled glasses with ice and tea. "Are you sure you want to do this? Sam's out there."

Mary Elizabeth sighed. "I know. I want to talk to him."

"I see."

"I'm probably *ab im kop*, but I'm still in love with him."

"I know that feeling. I couldn't forget David after he stayed away for a year."

"Don't tell David what I said."

"You think he can't guess after you and Sam dated?"

"*Nee*, I guess you're right."

They put the glasses on a tray with a plate of cookies and carried them out to the edge of the field the men were working in. An old table had been placed there so trays could be set on it to serve workers in the field.

Lavina waved to them and the men stopped working and walked over.

David was the first to reach them. He took off his straw hat and wiped his forehead with a bandanna before he accepted a glass of iced tea. Mary Elizabeth saw the love in David's eyes as he gazed at her *schweschder* and looked away, feeling it was a very private moment between the two of them.

Her eyes met Sam's. He reached for a glass of tea and gulped down half of it. She watched the muscles move in the long column of his tanned throat as he swallowed.

"It's warm today," she said as she held out the plate of cookies to him.

"Hey, do I get some tea?" John demanded as he stepped up to the table.

"*Schur*," Mary Elizabeth said, handing him a glass with barely a glance.

"Talk about making a guy feel welcome," he muttered when she continued to look at Sam.

"What?" Mary Elizabeth turned to John.

“Nothing.”

The three *bruders* looked so much alike they could have been triplets—tall, square-jawed, with dark blue eyes so often serious. Sam and John wore their brown, almost black hair in an *Englisch* cut because they still lived in that world.

“Where’s Rose Anna?” John asked.

Mary Elizabeth tore her gaze from Sam and gave John a chilly glance. “She wasn’t feeling well,” she said shortly.

He set the empty glass down on the tray. “Well, that was cooling,” he said. He picked up one of the cookies and walked over to sit on the back porch.

Mary Elizabeth couldn’t help it. The three Zook *schwescheders* had always loved the three Stoltzfus *bruders*. So far only one of the *schwescheders* had married one of them.

When she glanced back at Sam, she was surprised by a look of sadness in his eyes before he set the glass down. “*Danki*.”

He glanced up at the sky, beginning to cloud over and turned to David. “Ready?”

David nodded. “I’ll be in soon,” he told Lavina and set his glass on the tray.

Lavina glanced at the sky. “Watch for lightning.”

“I will.”

Lavina picked up the tray and they walked back to the *haus*. “Do you want to stay for supper? Sam and John are eating with us before they go home. It’s the least I can do when they’re helping David.”

Mary Elizabeth bit her lip. “It might give me a chance to talk to him for a few minutes afterward.” She took a deep breath. “I’m just thinking that it’s time we either got back together or . . .” she trailed off.

“Or?”

“Or I need to move on and find someone else. I want what you have, Lavina. Oh, I’m not coveting what you have,” she rushed to say. “You know that. I just want to be with a man I love. Make a home, a family.”

"I know. And I understand. Maybe we can find a way for the two of you to have a moment alone to talk."

Mary Elizabeth grinned at her. "Playing matchmaker?"

Lavina returned her grin. "Just returning the favor, dear *schweschder*. Just returning the favor."

"You're welcome," Mary Elizabeth said.

She set the tray on the kitchen table. "Why don't you help me make supper?"

"*Schur*. What do you need me to do?"

"The men will be hot from working in the field. Let's find something that will be lighter. Maybe something cold. I already made two pies for dessert. Peach."

"Sam's favorite."

"David's, too."

Mary Elizabeth walked over to the refrigerator and perused its contents, perfectly at home in her *schweschder's* kitchen.

"We could make a big bowl of potato salad and add cubes of this leftover ham and maybe some cheddar cheese," she said. "Add some rolls and the pies and that's a nice meal."

"You're right. Get the potatoes and we'll start boiling them."

The two of them made fast work of chopping celery, onion, ham, and cheese. Lavina swayed when she turned from washing the potatoes at the sink. Mary Elizabeth grasped her shoulders and pushed her down into a chair.

"Are you *allrecht*?"

"Fine, fine." Lavina took a deep breath. "Just moved too quickly."

"Maybe I should get David." She didn't like how pale her *schweschder's* face had gotten.

"*Nee*, it's nothing. I mean it, I don't want him to worry."

"You stay put," Mary Elizabeth insisted when Lavina started to rise. "If you don't sit and rest for a few minutes, I'll call David."

"*Allrecht, allrecht*. Get the potatoes and let's get them peeled."

They peeled the potatoes and cubed them. Mary Elizabeth put them in a pan filled with water and set it on the stove.

She sat down at the table. “Lavina?”

“Ya?”

“Are you—?”

“Am I what?”

“You know.”

“Nee, I don’t know.” She looked innocently at Mary Elizabeth.

“Having a *bopppli*!” Mary Elizabeth hissed. Honestly, how dense could someone be?

“Sssh,” Lavina said, glancing at the door of the *dawdi haus*. She frowned and looked thoughtful. “Oh my, do you think . . . ?” she trailed off.

“I don’t know. Do you think?”

A smile bloomed on Lavina’s face. “Oh my,” she breathed. “Maybe.”

They sat there for a long time grinning at each other until they heard the rumble of thunder. Mary Elizabeth jumped up and poked at the potatoes. Done. She drained them and put them in a bowl over another filled with ice to quickly cool them. Once they were cool enough, she added mayonnaise, the chopped vegetables, ham, and cheese. A quick stir and it went into the refrigerator to chill.

She looked out the kitchen window. The men were still working in the fields, casting glances up at the sky as they did. She set the table and made sure they had two pitchers of iced tea waiting in the refrigerator.

She couldn’t wait until supper was finished and she could talk to Sam.

One way or another, she’d know what to do after this evening.