

CREEKTOWN DISCOVERIES
VOL *The* TWO

Sugarcreek SURPRISE

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER


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Dedication

To my Amish friend LeAnne,
a dedicated schoolteacher.



*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

Prologue

Walnut Creek, Ohio

Lois Troyer took a seat at the kitchen table to read the letters she had received this morning from her newspaper column, *Dear Caroline*. The antique store she and her husband, Orley, owned was closed for the day, and Orley had gone fishing with his friend Lester. The house was quiet, and this was the perfect time for her to get some of the letters answered and sent back to the newspaper for publication.

Lois took a sip of peppermint tea, then slit open the envelope on top of the pile. “Dear Caroline,” she read out loud. “My granddaughter is twenty-five years old and has never had a serious boyfriend. Whenever a young man takes an interest in her, she pulls away. I am concerned about her, because she works all the time and has a limited social life. I have tried to coax her into doing more social things, but to no avail. Is there anything I can do to help her? —Worried Grandma.”

Lois pursed her lips. “Now, how should I respond to this letter?”

Chapter 1

Sugarcreek, Ohio

Lisa Miller rubbed her chilly arms against September's nippy breeze as she stood on the front porch of the Amish schoolhouse, ready to greet her young students, ages six to ten. The view from where she stood looked beautiful this time of the year, encompassing the resting farmlands surrounding the one-room schoolhouse. In the distance, trees had started turning gold, and the intense morning light made them appear to have a gilded glow. While Lisa breathed in the crisp air, she glanced at the neatened lawn in the schoolyard that was still being mowed weekly. It wouldn't be too many more weeks before winter would be upon them, and then the task of mowing would be finished for the year.

When Yvonne Yoder, the teacher who taught the higher grades, rang the bell, all the children from grades one to eight filed into the building.

Lisa smiled as each one came past. "Good morning," she said cheerfully.

"*Guder mariye, Teacher.*" Six-year-old Nancy Burkholder looked up at Lisa and grinned.

"*Mir hen unser middaagesse mitgnumme,*" said her twin brother, Nathan, as he held up his lunch pail.

Lisa nodded and spoke to the siblings in English, because it was important for all Amish children to learn a second language in their early years of school. "Yes, I see that you carried your dinner,

Nathan. Now both of you should put your lunch pails away, take off your wraps, and be seated at your desk.”

The twins nodded and went obediently inside.

Keeping her smile in place, Lisa greeted the rest of the students, then stepped inside behind the last one and shut the door. What a privilege it was to be teaching at this school. Each of the pupils she taught filled her life with such joy. She couldn't imagine doing anything else. Since Lisa had no plans of getting married, she hoped she'd be able to teach right here at this school for a good many years. Although she'd had no formal training, Lisa, like all young Amish women chosen to teach at a one-room Amish schoolhouse, had been an excellent scholar back when she'd attended this school. How fortunate she felt to have been chosen by the school board to teach here seven years ago. The time had gone quickly, and she'd enjoyed every year.

After Lisa stepped into the main part of the schoolhouse, she was pleased to see that each of the children now sat at their desk with hands folded. Yvonne took her place at the front of the room and read a portion of scripture from the Bible. Following that, everyone stood to recite the Lord's Prayer. Afterward, Lisa led the students in singing a few songs. She enjoyed this part of the day so much—not just in the pleasure of singing herself but in listening to the children's blended voices as they sang with enthusiasm. Although school had only been in session a little over a month so far, the entire classroom seemed quite cooperative.

When the singing ended, Lisa worked with the fifteen younger ones on their reading, using the Dick and Jane series that was popular in the middle years of the 1900s. Lisa's scholars opened their reading material to the page where they'd left off from yesterday's lesson.

Meanwhile, Yvonne taught the twenty older children, ranging in ages from eleven to fifteen. Considering the size of the class, the children were well behaved and attentive. Not like last year when Lisa had dealt with two unruly eight-year-olds who talked out of turn and interrupted with questions that had nothing to do with

the lesson. Those actions had been quite unnerving at times.

Things went well with the reading lesson until Lisa saw something furry out of the corner of her eye. Apparently the children must have seen it too, for several giggles, whispers, and snickers ensued.

The fluffy orange cat let out a loud meow. Then it darted close to where eight-year-old Gina Schlabach sat. The blond-haired girl bent down to pet the cat and squealed when it jumped up and onto her lap. But the skittish animal didn't stay there long and was soon on the floor again.

Lisa groaned. *A little unexpected excitement is not what we need this morning. Well, at least it's not a mouse. That would have really caused a stir—especially for me, since I have no love whatsoever for rodents.* Lisa had always been glad that her grandparents had several outdoor cats to keep the mice down.

She reached for the cat, but before her hands could touch the animal's furry coat, it zipped between her legs and made a dash toward the front entrance. The kids were all shouting, "Get it! Get it!" while Yvonne hurried to open the door. Instead of going out, as Lisa had hoped, the determined cat whipped around and raced to the front of the room.

David Stutzman, who'd recently turned fourteen, got up from his seat and took off after the cat. "I'll get him!" the boy hollered. The chase began, and soon two more of the older boys joined in.

There was no way Lisa or Yvonne could resume their lessons right now, so they stood on either side of the room and waited. A short time later, Johnathan Graber, the oldest boy in the class, got a hold of the cat, and everyone cheered. Lisa felt relief when the furry animal had been taken outside and everyone was back in their seats. *So much for a quiet start to the day.*



Things went smoothly the rest of the morning, and at eleven thirty, it was time for lunch. The students washed their hands before getting

out their lunch pails. Then everyone took a seat at their desk. Following a silent prayer, the children and teachers began to eat.

From her teacher's desk, Lisa listened to the children visit with one another as they ate the food their mothers had packed for them. Most included sandwiches, but some children had a thermos filled with warm soup, as well as crackers and sometimes cheese. Most often an apple, orange, or cupcake was included for dessert.

Lisa's lunch today consisted of a swiss cheese and turkey sandwich, which her grandmother had insisted on making for her. The kindly woman had also included a thermos full of Lisa's favorite cinnamon herbal tea, as well as a lemon-flavored fry pie for dessert. Lisa appreciated her grandmother's thoughtfulness in choosing some of her favorite things. Grandma and Grandpa Schrock had been good to Lisa ever since she first came to live with them when she was seven years old, after her parents and paternal grandparents had been killed in a tragic accident. Lisa couldn't remember much about the part of her childhood that had taken place before the accident eighteen years ago. She did remember the horrible sense of loss she'd felt, waking up in the hospital with Grandpa and Grandma Schrock at her side and being told that she was the only one who'd survived when the van she'd been riding in with her parents and other grandparents had been hit by another vehicle. Even their English driver had died in the crash. Lisa's maternal grandparents had told her often that it was a miracle she hadn't been killed, and they'd said they felt blessed being able to raise Lisa.

A lump formed in Lisa's throat, and she tried to push it down with a drink of water. Even all these years later, it still hurt to think about her loss. She had no siblings, and when her parents died, she'd become an orphan. How grateful Lisa was that Grandma and Grandpa Schrock had gone to Indiana and brought her to their home in Ohio. She'd been shy around them at first and tried hard not to become attached, for fear of losing them too. But it had been impossible to live in the same house and not form an attachment with such a sweet, caring couple. Even so, Grandma and Grandpa

had been the only people Lisa had allowed herself to get close to. Even Lisa's friendship with Yvonne was superficial, although the other schoolteacher had often said she considered Lisa to be her good friend.

Sometimes Lisa found herself envying others who were involved in their friendships, as they spent time together doing fun things and talking about their plans and dreams for the future. The emptiness inside could be disheartening at moments, but Lisa would always manage to push those feelings of envy aside, trying to refocus on anything else to take her mind off the sadness she felt.

I should be thankful for what the Lord has provided for me. And why am I so unsure about my future? Why can't I be like other people my age? Lisa took a few sips of her soothing, warm cinnamon tea. *What will I do someday when my grandparents are gone and I'm all alone? Will I be able to manage on my own without them?*

Lisa's attention refocused when Yvonne announced that it was time for the scholars to clear off their desks and go outside for the remainder of their lunch break.

Lisa looked at her half-eaten sandwich. Where had the time gone? *Guess that's what I get for doing too much thinking when I should have been eating,* she told herself.

"I see you're not finished with your lunch yet," Yvonne said when she approached Lisa's desk. "Why don't you go ahead and finish eating while I take the children outside?"

Lisa nodded. "Yes, thank you so much. As soon as I finish I'll be outside to join you."

"Take your time." Yvonne gave Lisa's shoulder a pat and followed the students out the front door.

Lisa felt guilty seeing her co-teacher go out alone with the children, so she hurried to finish her lunch and then slipped into her sweater and rushed out the front door.

Several of the older children had started a game of baseball, while some of the younger ones used the playground equipment. Lisa stood nearby, watching and remembering her days of playing in this same

schoolyard. She'd been a shy child back then and was still shy when around adults—especially those she didn't know very well.

Soon recess was over, and it was story time, which Lisa had enjoyed as a young girl and still did as the teacher. She was reading the second book of a five-book series about a set of boy-and-girl twins who lived in Ohio. The children enjoyed the stories about the high-spirited twins, who seemed to find some sort of adventure at every corner.

Lisa wished she had a sibling—someone with whom she could share her innermost feelings and deepest desires. But then, if she had a brother or sister, they too may have died as a result of the accident that had taken four people from Lisa's family. One thing Lisa had never understood was why her life had been spared and not the others who'd been riding in the van that fateful day. It didn't make sense that she was alive but her parents and grandparents weren't. Grandma Schrock had told Lisa on more than one occasion that God must have a special purpose for Lisa's life. What it was, she couldn't imagine, but like her grandpa had said not long ago during their family devotions, no one should question why God allows what He does. Lisa hadn't fully accepted that idea though. Over the years, she'd questioned on more than one occasion the reason why God would allow certain things to happen.

“Teacher, when are ya gonna start readin' to us?”

Caught off guard by Nathan Burkholder's question, Lisa realized that although she held the children's book in her hands, she still had not opened it or begun to read.

She quickly opened the book to the page she'd marked with a ribbon the last time she'd read to the students and cleared her throat. The children seemed spellbound as she read to them about another adventure the fictional twins experienced. Truthfully, Lisa found herself enjoying the story right along with her young pupils.

After story time ended, Lisa taught an English lesson to her students and helped them work on their spelling.

The school day ended at three thirty, and Lisa and Yvonne said

goodbye to their students.

“Feel free to go home whenever you’re ready,” Lisa told Yvonne. “I will do a few things to prepare for tomorrow’s lessons, and then I’ll close and lock the schoolhouse before going home.”

Yvonne looked a bit hesitant at first but finally nodded. “*Danki*. I’ll see you tomorrow morning, Lisa.”



Half an hour later, as Lisa was about to pick up her things and leave the schoolhouse, a knock sounded on the front door.

I wonder who that can be. I bet one of the scholars forgot to take their lunch box or something else home with them.

Lisa went to the door. When she opened it, she was surprised to see a young, beardless Amish man with a crop of thick brown hair on the porch. She didn’t recognize him and wondered if he was new to the area or visiting someone here in Sugarcreek.

“Hello.” He offered her a friendly smile and reached out his hand. “My name’s Paul, and I’m here to see about the work that needs to be done on the schoolhouse.”

Lisa’s brows furrowed. She had no idea what this man was talking about. “I—I am not aware of any work that needs to be done here at this time. Some repairs were done at the schoolhouse this summer, while school was not in session, so—”

“Oh, no,” he interrupted. “This has to do with the window that got broken during a baseball game last week.”

Lisa’s forehead wrinkled. She felt more confused than ever. “We have no broken windows here. I’m one of the teachers, and if a baseball had hit one of our windows I would most certainly have known about it.”

He reached under his straw hat and scratched the side of his head. “To ease my curiosity, and to make sure there’s absolutely no broken window at this schoolhouse, would ya mind if I walk around the outside of building and take a look? Maybe the window got broke when you weren’t here.”

She was on the verge of arguing further with him, but his determined expression made Lisa believe that the best approach was to let him look. But she needed to see for herself as well. "I'll go with you."

"Sure, no problem." He stepped off the porch, and Lisa followed. They walked around the entire building, and sure enough, just as Lisa had said, none of the windows were broken.

Paul rubbed his chin. "Hmm. . .that's sure strange. I wonder why my uncle would ask me to come here if there were no broken windows." His cheeks colored as he eyed Lisa with a look of confusion. "Sorry to have bothered you, Teacher. . . . Uh, what is your name?"

"I'm Lisa. I teach the younger grades here."

"Nice to meet you. I'm new to the area, so maybe I misunderstood what my uncle said and came to the wrong schoolhouse."

She gave a slow nod. "*Jah*, that must be what happened all right." Lisa's skin prickled as Paul tipped his head and stared at her in a peculiar sort of way. She wished he would leave the schoolyard so she could get her bike and be on her way home.

"Well," he said after a few more seconds passed, "guess I'd better head back to my uncle Abe's shop and find out where I went wrong." Paul moved toward his horse and buggy, secured at the hitching rail. "It was nice meeting you," he said once more, only this time he called it out over his shoulder.

She gave a quick nod. "I hope you find the schoolhouse you're looking for."

"Danki."

Lisa watched as he climbed into his buggy and guided his horse out of the schoolyard. It was nerve racking enough that she'd been forced to talk to a complete stranger, but the fact that he was such a nice-looking man made her feel even more rattled.