

THE AMISH

Ballerina

THE AMISH
Ballerina

RICHELLE BRUNSTETTER
WITH WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER



YOU are the reason we do what we do here at Barbour Publishing. We promise that we will always use our God-given talents to produce content with you in mind—and that we will remain biblically faithful, no matter what.

Thank you for being the heart of our business.

The Amish Ballerina ©2025 by Richelle Brunstetter with Wanda E. Brunstetter

Print ISBN 979-8-89151-197-2

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 979-8-89151-198-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without written permission of the publisher. Reproduced text may not be used on the World Wide Web. No Barbour Publishing content may be used as artificial intelligence training data for machine learning, or in any similar software development.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked *esv* are from The *ESV*® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). *ESV*® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. The *ESV*® text has been reproduced in cooperation with and by permission of Good News Publishers. Unauthorized reproduction of this publication is prohibited. All rights reserved.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, and/or events is purely coincidental.

Cover Design: Kirk DouPonce, DogEared Design

Cover Model Photographer: Richard Brunstetter III

Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1810 Barbour Drive, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.barbourbooks.com

Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



Printed in the United States of America.

Dedication

To Kristyn Miller and the Royal Spirits Drill Team.

Thanks for the helpful information you shared about the various aspects of your drill team. No doubt the joy you impart on others must also be felt by every team member while performing at various benefit functions and other important events.

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the
renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good,
and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

ROMANS 12:2



Chapter 1

Shipshewana, Indiana

ARIE KAUFFMAN RUSHED OUT OF the back room, clutching a box of merchandise to fill the barren shelves throughout the gift shop where she worked part-time. She placed the box near one of the display tables and took hold of as many bars of scented soap as she could handle, piling them up like a bricklayer constructing a wall.

A job like this is best done when there are no shoppers, Arie thought. If I don't do it now, more people are sure to come in here soon, and then I'll need to be free so I can offer them help.

"You want me to assist you with restocking the shelves, Arie?"

Arie looked over her shoulder at Barbara, who managed the store and currently stood behind the checkout counter. "No, I've got it," Arie called in response. "Besides, we've been very busy here today, so it would be good if you remained free to take care of the register if anyone else wanders in."

Barbara fussed with the ties of her *kapp*. "True, but I feel bad having you do the hard work around the shop while I stand here and watch."

"Trust me, I prefer doing this. In fact, I've had plenty of practice

in my parents' general store."

"Right. I forgot about that." Barbara slumped forward against the countertop, propping her head up with her palms. "When summer ends, will you be leaving your part-time job here and looking for something full-time?"

"I'm not sure yet. I mean, having my own money instead of depending on my parents for expenses is a *gut* thing."

"*Jab*, it is good, but there's a way around that without having to put in any work. You could always rely on Edwin's financial support once you two are married."

Arie frowned. "If we should decide to get married, I would think we could rely on each other, because I could keep working until we have children."

In that moment, the front door opened, and a gust of heat followed, along with several people. Arie reached for the now-empty box and sprinted to the supply room at the back of the store to get some more products.

In any case, I wouldn't want to burden Edwin. I know he'd be an amazing husband, and if we should get married, I would want to be a supportive wife to him, whether it be to help with our finances or as a homemaker.

Arie backed against the wall, her gaze flitting amid the boxes. As much as she longed to stay in the back room to be alone with her thoughts for a while, Arie knew she had to go back out there and put on the most cheerful demeanor she could muster. Given that the souvenir keychain display was empty, Arie opted for a box of replacements.

Reentering the establishment's main section, Arie threaded her way through the cramped aisles, greeting customers who either had sauntered up to pay for the delights they had gathered

around the shop or who stared at the items on display with looks of intense concentration. While some returned the favor, others did not even make eye contact with Arie. Which was fine, considering all that mattered was finishing the task at hand without a hitch. She knelt down with the box and dug out the keychains, then proceeded to hang each one on the hooks.

“Mommy, can I have a lollipop? I like the orange-flavored ones.”

Arie’s ears perked up, and she peered toward the front counter, where a young English girl with her auburn hair worn in a bun at the back of her head stood near her mother. Balancing on one foot, and then the other, the child pointed to the lollipops displayed nearby.

“No, sweetie,” the woman answered with a shake of her head. “You’ve had a treat already today, so no candy right now.”

The child’s shoulders drooped as she lowered her head a bit, but she gave no argument.

Arie’s gaze went to the young girl’s waistline, where a beautiful, ivory-colored tutu stuck out from underneath the girl’s hoodie. A twinge pulled at Arie’s heartstrings, and she struggled not to stare.

Everything reverted back to normal as the mother and daughter left the shop, but Arie’s thoughts stayed frozen, even as she kept scooping out more keychains.

Why was the girl dressed like that? Arie pondered. I know Lorrina’s ballet classes are similar to school days, and they resume after summer. So the girl is either enrolled in a summer program or just having fun wearing a tutu.

Arie found herself whisked away to when she had been ten years old and had observed her first and final ballet performance. Lorrina, her neighbor and friend, had a recital at the Goshen Theater and had invited Arie to go with her. Knowing full well

that her parents would be against it, Arie had told Lorrina's mother that she shouldn't go. But Lorrina's mother had insisted, and the next thing Arie knew, much to her disbelief, she was in the backseat of her neighbors' sedan. She'd had no idea what to expect when they arrived at the theater.

Arie remembered as clear as day how the voices from the audience in the auditorium had surrounded her as they made their way past rows of red folding chairs in one of the upper balconies. When she'd settled in her seat, the noise failed to quell the thoughts whirling in Arie's mind. However, the racket that rang in her ears came to a standstill once the lights lowered and the curtains on stage parted.

Arie jolted as someone nudged her shoulder. She raised her chin to see who had done it and realized it was one of the other gift shop employees, Abigail.

"You seem to be in the middle of something, Arie, but if you'd like to go home now, I can take over."

After gathering her bearings, Arie sprung up and nodded. "Jah, I think that'd be okay. *Danki*."

Abigail smiled. "No problem at all."



"Lorrina, your Amish friend is here!"

Lorrina Moore curled her fingers under the tiny rodent that scuttled across the surface of her desk. "All right, Quillace, time to go back in your home. There you go." She set her hedgehog on the padding of his cage, fastened it, and then turned to face her mother. "Mom, she has a name, you know."

"But I'm sure you knew who I meant without me being specific." Mom tossed her silky, black ringlets over her shoulders. Lorrina had always envied her mother's pretty hair.

“I would’ve known for sure if you had said her name.”

“Well, whatever.” She jerked down the cuff of her blouse and tilted her head. “I let her in, and she’s waiting downstairs for you.”

“Okay, thanks, Mom.”

Lorrina’s mother folded her arms and stepped out of the room without saying anything.

Lorrina blew out a puff of air. *I don’t understand why Mother refused to say Arie’s name.* She shrugged. *Oh well, tomorrow Mom will act as if nothing happened—just like she usually does.*

Lorrina’s heart rate soared as she bounded down the stairs. With the help of her socks, she glided down the hallway to the front door, where her friend Arie stood near the entry table.

Lorrina ran to Arie and pulled her into a hug. “Good to see you.”

Arie returned the hug. “I’m glad to see you too.”

Lorrina stepped back and took her friend’s hand. “Come on, let’s go upstairs to my room.”

Lorrina glanced over her shoulder once, just to be sure that Arie had followed her up the stairs. Once they entered her bedroom, Lorrina patted the mattress and told Arie to take a seat on the edge of her bed. After Arie sat down, Lorrina marched up to her desk chair, swung it around, and plopped down, facing her friend.

“I haven’t seen you in over a week, so catch me up.” Cupping her elbow, Lorrina tapped her earring loop. “How are things at the gift shop?”

“It’s going okay. With the flea market happening every Saturday and the large number of tourists during the summer, it can get a little crazy sometimes.”

“I hear you, which is why I prefer to stay home and away from the crowds in town. That is until summer ends, or I go on vacation

somewhere with my folks and we become crazy tourists.”

“And how would you go about that?”

“Wearing outlandish attire, claiming to speak some foreign language, photographing everything in sight—mostly food—and so on.” Lorrina swiveled her chair a smidge. “Exploring an unfamiliar place can be fun if done mindfully.”

Arie twiddled the loops of the paper bag she had placed atop the skirt of her dress’s scarlet fabric. “How about you, Lorrina? Anything new, other than vacation planning?”

“It’s basically the same old thing. My mother is keen on the idea of me landing an opportunity with one of the elite performing arts companies. She pushed for me to attend the School of American Ballet and their summer program, and I had to put my foot down again and tell her I didn’t want to go.”

“You telling her that probably didn’t go over too well, did it?”

“No, it did not. I’ve told Mom countless times that the chances of me being considered are slim, even with my ten years of dance experience. I wish she could’ve kept an open mind and accepted it when I said that I’d much rather become a dance instructor instead of a performer.” Scuffing her chair closer, Lorrina rubbed her hands together. “Speaking of dancing, are you ready for more practice today? That’s the reason you came here, right?”

“Lorrina, the main reason I wanted to visit you was because I hadn’t had the chance to in a while.” She gestured to the paper sack in her lap. “And I’ve brought you something.” Arie rose from the mattress and handed Lorrina the bag.

Lorrina grasped the straps and slipped her hand inside. As soon as she felt the shape and density of it, she knew what the object was. She lifted it out and opened the waxed paper covering, releasing a familiar floral scent that lingered in the room.

“What? No way! They sell hydrangea soap at the gift shop?” Lorrina squealed. “You’re too sweet. Thank you, Arie.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad you like it.” Arie offered Lorrina her usual dimpled smile.

“Like it? I love it. I’ll have to drop by and get more one of these days.” Lorrina laid the soap bar on her desk, spun in her chair, and wrapped her fingers on the armrests. “Anyway, am I getting the wrong impression, or do you no longer want to learn ballet?”

Her friend shrugged. “I don’t know for sure, Lorrina. There’s a lot that I’m not sure about right now.”

“I understand. Simply put, you’ve shown much improvement over the years. If you quit dancing now, it’ll be a shame that your talents will go to waste.”

When she saw her friend’s hunched shoulders, downcast expression, and pained hazel eyes, Lorrina regretted the words that seemed to have fallen out of her mouth of their own volition.

“I’m very sorry,” Lorrina spluttered while twiddling with her necklace. “I worded that wrong. What I meant was, while I’ve been delighted for the opportunity to teach you, I realize it must be frustrating not to be able to share what you’ve learned with others.”

“I expressed my interest in ballet years ago, and my parents turned it down because it’s worldly.”

“Well, you can always go with me to my dance studio in Goshen. I’ll be starting my final year of ballet at the end of August.” Her chest swelled as she unabashedly stared at her wall of ballet portraits taken over the years. “Whoa, ten whole years. I can’t believe I’ve been dancing for that long. Where’d the time go?”

“I’d love to go along with you, but my parents weren’t too thrilled when they found out your mom brought me along to your dance recital. Ballet was not a part of my upbringing, and

I've never been able to perform in a tutu. Simply a long dress when no one's watching. Even if I took classes now, I don't think I'll ever be as skilled as you or the other dancers."

"It's never too late to begin learning ballet, Arie. You've got potential, and as much as your parents won't admit it, you're an adult now and should be allowed to at least try. You got a job at the gift shop downtown, right?"

Arie nodded.

"So you could afford to take one class every week, and on the days when I don't have anything scheduled after school, I can still teach you. You have the resources to give it a shot, and I will be there for you no matter what."

"I don't think it's worth the risk."

"There are repercussions for every decision in life. Even working at a gift shop, something's bound to go awry when you least expect it. Isn't it worth taking the risk rather than regretting not experiencing dancing in a ballet studio?"

Arie smirked, and the dainty mole near her Cupid's bow rose like the sun. "You know, my parents warned me that you'd be a bad influence."

"The only person who'll have a bad influence on you is yourself." Lorrina winked.

Her smile grew more defined, but gradually it lessened. Arie sighed and knitted her brows. "Edwin's already considering joining the church soon, and if he knew about this, I doubt he would be for it." She lifted both hands and let them fall in her lap. "It's for the best, I think."

Lorrina slumped against her chair's cushion. *Poor Arie. I admire the dedication she feels toward her family, but she needs something in her life that is personally rewarding. What if Arie is intended to be a dancer, but she will never know?*



As Arie strolled along the driveway, the heap of pebbles beneath her sandals shifted with every stride. The breeze rustled among the branches above her, and birdsong filled her ears as she approached the property's fence line. She cast a quick glance at her parents' store, then the barn across the way.

Maybe I should keep my job after summer's over. It gets a little too chaotic at home, and even if it's only for a few hours, working at the gift shop is the only time during the week I get to spend away from my family. She leaned against the fence. Is that selfish of me, though, since my parents depend on my help here? And what about Edwin? I've not been seeing him very much, except for Sundays. Considering how busy he's been at his job and the drill team he's involved with, maybe that doesn't really matter.

Her attention flickered to the barn once more, and she sighed. *Not yet. First, I have to go see if Mom or Dad needs me for anything.*

Arie headed to the general store owned by her parents, where they sold clothing, kitchenware, and other household goods. A few vehicles were parked out front, and two horses and buggies stood at the hitching rail. The commotion of people milling about the store greeted her after she'd tugged the door handle and entered. The midday sunshine flowed in through the store's skylight, cascading onto the shelves and the epoxy flooring they had recently installed.

"There you are, Arie!" Her mother's voice resonated from the front counter, as she circled around and approached.

Arie's stomach roiled like winds in the waters of a pond. "*Wie geht's, Mamm?*"

"All's good so far." Mom tilted her head. "You're back an hour later than usual. What took you so long?"

Arie had to use all of her resolve to resist buckling under the pressure of Mom's penetrating gaze. It didn't help that her mother's dark brown eyes almost matched the shade of her pupils, making it indiscernible at times how dilated they were. Arie knew she had to drum up an answer fast, because if she mentioned being at Lorrina's house, her mother would go off on a tangent about why Arie shouldn't be friends with her.

"The gift shop was swamped today because of the flea market," Arie asserted. "So I had to work harder and more efficiently this morning to keep up with all the shoppers."

Mom's nose freckles darkened. "Oh, that makes sense. One of these days, I should visit the flea market and spend some time browsing. Of course, I'd have to convince your *daed* to close the store on a Saturday."

Thank goodness Mom found the reason I gave her about the gift shop being busy acceptable. I didn't have to lie to her either, which is good. "Anything I can do around here today to help out?" she asked.

"Since you're so willing to help, I've got a few tasks for you to carry out. Firstly, I need you to restock the shelves near the front of the store. I've already opened up some boxes in the back room."

Oh, yes, I'm so eager to unload more boxes. Rather than demonstrate her dismay aloud, Arie clenched her jaw and cracked her mother a grin. "I'll get right to it, Mamm."

Although Arie wasn't looking forward to doing extra work, she felt fortunate to shift her attention elsewhere. She moved on to where the recent shipment of boxes had been stowed, then brought out an inventory of canned goods and began unloading. As she eased into the rhythm of her routine, Arie recalled something her mother had often told her when she expressed her discontent with things.

“Happiness is the fine art of making a beautiful bouquet from only those flowers in reach,” she mused.

Even if that quote wasn't from her, it still holds true. There's a standard notion of what happiness looks like, but in all actuality, happiness is more about the things we have than the things we lack. Twisting her mouth, she clenched the can in her hand before lining it up on the shelf. I know this is true, but why do I still feel so frustrated? Could Lorrina be right about my desire to be a dancer? Would ballet bring me the happiness and fulfillment I desperately seek?



Chapter 2

LORRINA SQUIRMED ON HER SEAT in the pew while waiting as the church elders distributed communion trays, row by row, to those seated in front of her. Now that they had finished passing the platters and carrying the wafers, they were serving the grape juice. The sound of the organ up on the platform reverberated throughout the sanctuary, and a handful of the congregation hummed or sang along with the hymn. She looked over at her mother, who had not spoken to her since the previous day. Mom's gaze was fixed toward the podium where the pastor stood.

When one of the elders reached their row and handed her the tray of juice, Lorrina tweezed out a plastic cup and passed it to her mom. Lorrina figured out an approach to cut the tension while holding the small plastic cylinder between her fingers.

"Mom," Lorrina muttered. "Do you think they reuse these cups?"

Her mother's face flickered a meager smile. "Lorrina, don't ask questions like that," she whispered.

"Like what?" Lorrina's father interjected quietly, while pushing up his thin-framed reading glasses.

Mom leaned over to Dad and repeated what Lorrina had said.

"No, they don't do that. Well. . .maybe they could."

“Peter,” Mom tittered, covering her mouth.

Lorrina did her best to repress her snickers, and she noticed that even her parents struggled to contain their laughter. However, her mother delivered a slight finger raise, followed by a modest “*shush*.” This was understandable, given their juvenile behavior during church service. It was a good thing they sat in the sanctuary’s last few rows toward the back.

The organ music stopped, and the pastor spoke into the microphone mounted on the podium. “We read in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 25 through 27 (ESV) that Jesus took the cup after the Passover supper and said: ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ Then Paul observed, ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.’”

The pastor raised his focus from the Bible lying before him. “We evaluate ourselves for this reason. Please, as you lower your heads in prayer, look within and address what needs to be cleansed.”

Lorrina closed her eyes in prayer as the preacher requested the congregation to pray over the cup. She pondered in her heart whether she was worthy of taking communion or if there was anything she should pray about or confess before partaking of the elements. As much as she felt grateful that she and her mother were back on speaking terms, the real issue lurked beneath the surface, and it was only a matter of time before it flared up again. Lorrina hoped they could find a resolution, but how could she settle their dispute if her mother wouldn’t hear her out?

Lorrina crossed her ankles and sagged against the pew, darting a peek at Mom. *When I get home, I’m going to have a talk with her and try to make things right.*



Grasping the reins, Arie rode with Edwin along the expansive field, their horses' hooves in tandem as they trotted side by side. The clouds above scuttled along, as if trying to keep up with them.

After church service and the noon meal that followed were over, Edwin had suggested that they venture out on the scenic backroads and spend some quality time together. All for the idea, Arie had headed home with her family, filled with enthusiasm while waiting for her boyfriend to arrive so they could get a move on before the afternoon sun set over the community.

"Isn't this the most breathtaking location there is, Arie?" Edwin asked, slowing his horse near a thicket of wild roses.

Arie matched his pace and narrowed her eyes. "You say that wherever we go."

"That's the point." Averting his gaze, Edwin's face reddened. "Because when we're together, everything around you is *wunderbaar*."

Even though it was kind of corny, Arie's heart swelled at her boyfriend's sincerity. "That was a sweet thing to say, but you're very silly, Edwin."

"I meant it. That's why I have high hopes about what the future holds for us."

Arie managed to chuckle, but no matter how hard she tried to immerse herself in the moment, Edwin's words dissipated in the midst of her thoughts. She couldn't ignore the pestering notions that led her off the beaten path.

Am I truly ready to give my life to the church like Edwin is? Edwin is quite aware of who he is as a person, whereas I am not so certain. Arie's spine tensed as she gripped the reins, her nails burrowing into her palms. *Even though I love him, the thought of being with Edwin*

forever causes me to feel like I want to flee. Wouldn't my uncertainty tear him down? He should be with someone who is sure of themselves, someone as passionate and driven as he is.

A sharp pain struck her left side above her chest. Arie pressed her hand there, allowing a blast of air to pass between her chapped lips. Her ribs felt like they were hugging her lungs, impeding the passage of oxygen. She tried to ease her nerves as best as she could, yet her breathing was labored.

Aster reared up, and as she dipped her head, the mare's canter changed to a gallop.

"Arie!" Edwin hollered. "Where are you going?"

Feeling as though she was in a stupor, Arie scrunched her cheeks and squinted her eyes as she tried to make sense of what was unfolding. Once she snapped out of it, Arie instructed her mare to slow down. But Aster pressed on, quickening her pace, and Arie's pulse accelerated in time with her horse's hooves striking the ground.

She tugged on the reins and gave Aster a slight inclination of her head, and the mare went in the appointed direction. They continued to turn in a loop until Aster gradually slowed down. Arie let out the breath she held onto and managed to ease her horse to a halt by leaning back and drawing the reins to her torso.

Edwin caught up, dismounting from his horse. "Are you all right?"

"Jah, I think so." Arie moistened her lips. "For some reason, my *gaul* doesn't want to listen to me."

"You know how horses can be when they're given the opportunity to roam." Leading his horse, he sauntered up and smoothed his fingers over Aster's grayish-white coat. "How often have you been riding your horse?"

Arie hesitated. "It's been a while, but I've been so busy, and I do let her out in the pasture when I return home from work."

"All a horse needs is to feel free. Otherwise, they'll feel cooped up, and they may not want to listen anymore. If you bring her out here more often, she'll be attentive again. It could also be from nervousness, which horses can sense, and it might make them anxious as well."

"You certainly know a lot about horses, Edwin. More of an expert than I am, that's for sure."

"Hey, don't sell yourself short, Arie. You're an excellent horse-back rider. You're simply working out the kinks a bit. Getting back in the saddle, as they say." Edwin jested. "With the proper guidance, even the most rambunctious horses can listen. Isn't that right, Daisy?" He patted his horse's neck.

Daisy, Edwin's beautiful horse, whinnied and raised her head. He wasn't wrong, since Daisy was sometimes a mischievous creature. Arie had taken in some of the horse's antics when she went over to see Edwin at his parents' home. As they were all outside feeding the horses, Daisy had nipped his mother's kapp and taken off with it. Needless to say, they'd had to chase the mare down. It was no wonder his mom, who had owned the horse before Edwin, gave the stinker of a mare to her son. For whatever reason, Daisy was fond of Edwin, and Arie couldn't comprehend how such a seemingly tame horse could create such mayhem.

Arie leaped from her horse and landed on the balls of her feet, bending her knees. She kept her hold on the reins as she patted Aster's neck. "I think I need a break from riding before we head on back."

"That's fine with me." Edwin swept his sandy brown bangs away from his brows. "Are you sure there isn't anything you want

to get off your chest?”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t know. These days when we’re together it seems like you’re staring off somewhere else.”

Her sight veered to the horizon in front of them. “I just have a lot on my mind, is all.”

“Wanna talk about it?”

Arie shook her head. “I’m sure it’ll sort itself out.” She turned to face Edwin again, noticing how his blue eyes glistened in the sunlight filtering through the canopy of trees above them. “But danki, Edwin, for checking on me.”

He stepped forward and drew Arie into his arms. “I’m here for you, even if you feel like you can’t tell me what’s bothering you,” Edwin assured, his gravelly voice settling her nerves.

Sighing, Arie laid her head against his chest. *All I do is worry about everything, all the time, even over the littlest of things*, she thought. *And now I’m causing Edwin to worry. I really need to work on hiding the stresses in my life. Either that or I have to come up with some way to lessen my stress so there’s less to worry about.*

Something skidded across Arie’s forehead, and she knew right away that it wasn’t Edwin’s doing. His dark-haired mare had joined them in their intimate moment. Arie wondered if Edwin’s horse might be a bit jealous of the attention he’d been giving her instead of the mare.

“Daisy, no,” he scolded. “You goofy gaul. Back off now.” He pushed the horse’s nose away from Arie.

“Daisy might be jealous, Edwin.” Arie brought a hand to her lips.

Edwin let go of Arie and stroked under his horse’s chin. “There’s enough room for both of you in my life.”

Don’t be so sure of that, Edwin, Arie thought. *You might be better*

off with the horse providing the tenderness you need rather than me. If you knew my secret longing, I doubt that you'd even want to be seen with me. The fact that his horse intervened was fortunate. Arie found some solace in diverting attention away from herself.

“So, what about you?” she inquired. “How are things going at work?”

Edwin winced. “Oh, don’t get me started on that.”

“I’m guessing Markel did something he wasn’t supposed to do.”

“Easy guess, given that he does it almost every day.”

Edwin continued to express the displeasure he felt with his job, while Arie did her best to be an attentive listener. As he continued to speak on the subject of his brother, Arie’s mind wandered once more.

I love hearing Edwin share his interests with such confidence, but I wish I could do the same. Maybe I should just tell him what I’ve been doing for the last eight years. Since we started dating, I’ve tried my hardest to hide it from Edwin. But if I decide to set my desire for dance aside, does it even matter if I tell him?



Back home, Arie directed her horse into the appropriate stall. Through the barn’s gable vent, she could see the radiant splendor of the golden hour. Most of the horse’s care had already been handled, so Arie went to replenish Aster’s water and provide her some hay to chew on. Then she fetched the curry comb to loosen the soil from when she had rolled on the ground.

“I’m sorry for not giving you the attention you deserve.” She ran her fingers gently between Aster’s eyes several times. “I’ll try to make time to take you riding more often. At least a few times per week. Sound good, girl?”

Aster snorted and nudged against her palm.