

ROOTED IN LOVE

Chapter One

ROSEMARY CROSSED HER LEGS, FOLDED HER ARMS ACROSS her chest, and tried to focus on the bishop's final prayer as he wrapped up the worship service. Saul Petersheim was making that a difficult task. She'd made it clear to Saul that she was not interested in dating him, but the man still gave it his best shot from time to time.

"He's doing it again," Rosemary whispered to Esther. "Smiling and staring at me."

Her best friend grinned. "Are you ever going to give that poor fellow a break and go out with him?"

"We've been through all this, Esther. Saul and I dated when we were sixteen. It didn't work out then, and it wouldn't work out now." Rosemary clamped her mouth closed when she realized that Bishop Glick had stopped talking and was staring at her, along with most of the congregation. She could feel the heat rising from her neck to her cheeks, so she sat taller, swallowed hard, and didn't breathe for a few seconds.

"See, Saul even gets me in trouble at worship service," Rosemary said once the bishop had recited the final prayer and

dismissed everyone. She stood up, smoothed the wrinkles from her white apron, and shook her head.

Esther chuckled. "You're twenty-one years old. I think you're responsible for your own actions at this point."

Rosemary sighed as they waited for several of the older women to pass by before they eased into the line that was forming toward the kitchen. "I guess. I just wish Saul would find someone else," she whispered as she glanced over her shoulder toward him. "Someone better suited to him." The words stung when she said them aloud.

"Saul only has eyes for you." Esther smiled. "And I don't understand why you won't give him another chance. It was five years ago." Rosemary bit her bottom lip, tempted to tell Esther the whole story. But every time she considered telling her friend the truth, she stopped herself. There was once a time when Rosemary couldn't picture herself with anyone but Saul.

All the men had gone in the other direction toward the front door, most likely to gather in the barn to tell jokes and smoke cigars while the women prepared the meal. Rosemary shrugged. "It just wouldn't work out."

Esther picked up a stack of plates from the counter and shook her head. "I don't understand you, Rosemary. Saul is one of the most desirable single men in our district. The fact that someone else hasn't already snagged him is mind-boggling." She nudged Rosemary's shoulder. "But I really do think he is holding out for you."

"Well, he is wasting his time." Rosemary picked up a pitcher of tea and followed Esther out the kitchen door and onto the porch. As they made their way down the steps toward the tables that had been set up in the yard, Rosemary commented to Esther

that the Lord couldn't have blessed them with a more beautiful day. She wasn't going to let thoughts about Saul ruin it.

It seemed like spring had arrived overnight following a long winter that had seen record-low temperatures in Lancaster County. The Zooks were hosting church service today, and their flower beds were filled with colorful blooms. Rosemary glanced to her right at the freshly planted garden, then sighed, knowing how disappointed her mother would be if she were still alive. Rosemary hadn't planted a garden in four years. She'd tried to maintain the flower beds, but even that effort had failed.

She'd filled up most of the tea glasses when she saw Saul walking toward her. She swallowed hard. All these years later, Saul still made her pulse quicken.

"You look as pretty as ever, Rosie." Saul pushed back the brim of his straw hat, then looped his thumbs beneath his suspenders. There was no denying that Saul was a handsome man with his dark hair, deep-blue eyes, and boyish dimples. He had a smile that could melt any girl's heart. Aside from her father, Saul was the only other person who called her Rosie, and a warm feeling filled her when he did. But she'd never tell him that.

Rosemary looked up at him and forced a smile, wishing things were different. "*Danki*, Saul." She turned to walk away, but he was quickly in stride with her. "Can I help you with something?" she said as she continued to walk toward the house. She kept her eyes straight ahead and masked any facial expression.

"*Nee*, just going inside." He scratched his chin. "And trying to figure out how long it's been since I asked you out. Wondering if I should try again."

Rosemary stopped midstep. She glanced around to see if anyone was in earshot, and after waiting for one of her brothers

to jet past them, she said, “I-I just don’t think it’s a *gut* idea for us to date. I’m very busy trying to run a household full of boys and take care of *mei daed*.” She locked eyes with his, knowing she’d do better to avoid looking at him altogether.

“Did I hear hesitation in your voice?” He grinned, and Rosemary’s knees went weak. Saul wasn’t just nice looking, he was also well respected within the community and known to have a strong faith. He was sure to be a good husband and provider since he ran a successful construction company. He’d taken over his father’s business when his father never fully recovered from back surgery. But there were two reasons Rosemary wasn’t going to get involved with Saul. And one of them was walking toward them. Her five-year-old brother stopped in front of her, his face drawn into a pout.

“I can’t find Jesse or Josh.” Abner stared up at Rosemary.

“They’re around here somewhere.” Rosemary straightened her youngest brother’s hat, making a mental note to cut his blond bangs when they got home. “We’ll be eating soon, and neither Jesse nor Joshua is going to miss a meal.”

Saul squatted in front of Abner. “Anything I can help you with, buddy?”

Abner shook his head. “*Nee*.”

Rosemary looked down at her feet for a moment. Saul was born to be a father. She’d watched him with the *kinner* in their district over the years. The man was loving and kind to anyone he came in contact with. She needed to get away from him before she threw herself into his arms or said something she’d regret. She held up the empty pitcher and focused on Abner. “I’ve got to go refill this and help get lunch on the table. Don’t go far.” Then she turned to Saul, and a sadness weighed so

heavy on her heart, she couldn't even force another smile. "I have to go."

Saul scratched his chin again as he watched Rosemary walk away. Most days, he wondered why he continued to pursue her since she always turned him away. But every now and then he would see something in her beautiful brown eyes that made him think he might still have a chance. Or like today . . . he was sure he'd heard regret in her voice.

Sighing, he turned and headed back to the barn. As he pulled open the door, the stench of cigar smoke assaulted him. He'd never cared for this recreational activity that some of the men practiced. It used to be reserved for after the Sunday meal, but somewhere along the line, a few of the men began having a smoke before they ate. Saul enjoyed the jokes and company of the other fellows, but considering John Zook had already lost one barn to a fire, Saul was surprised he allowed smoking in his new one. The men were already walking toward the door, so Saul turned around and they all made their way to the tables.

Saul took a seat at the table beneath a large oak tree, mostly because Rosemary's father, Wayne Lantz, was sitting there. Wayne was a leader, a fair man, and someone Saul had always looked up to. Saul wouldn't be surprised if he became bishop someday. He was also the first person on the scene of any emergency and available whenever a neighbor had a crisis. Saul glanced toward the Zook barn. On the day of the barn raising, Wayne had spent more time working than any of the other men. And even after his wife died four years ago, he continued to do for others.

"Any luck with that *dochter* of mine?" Wayne's face was void

A LOVE FOR IRMA ROSE

Jonas glanced around the small cemetery, sprigs of brown poking through the melting clumps of snow. Sunshine beamed across the meadow in delicate rays, as if God were slowly cleaning up after one season, in preparation for the next. Soon it would be spring, Irma Rose's favorite time of year, when new foliage mirrored hope for plentiful harvests, when colorful blooms represented life, filled with colorful variations of our wonderment as humans.

"I love you, Irma Rose. I've loved you since the first day I saw you, sittin' under that old oak tree at your folks' house, readin' a book. You musta been only thirteen at the time, but I knew I'd marry you someday."

—FROM *PLAIN PROMISE*, BOOK THREE IN THE
DAUGHTERS OF THE PROMISE SERIES



Chapter One

1957, FIFTY-THREE YEARS EARLIER

JONAS CLUTCHED THE REINS WITH SWEATY HANDS, HIS FINGERS twitching as he waited for Amos Hostetler to blow the whistle, signaling the start of the race. He glanced to his right and scanned the crowd, at least fifteen onlookers—including Irma Rose Kauffman. This buggy race down Blackhorse Road was more than a friendly competition. More than just a group of Amish kids enjoying their *rumschpringe* on a Saturday afternoon.

He peered to his left at Isaac Lapp's flaring nostrils, knowing that his rival for Irma Rose's affections wanted to win as badly as he did. Jonas knew that pride was a sin, as Isaac surely did, but when it came to Irma Rose, Jonas figured Isaac's thoughts were as jumbled as his own. Jonas had been waiting to court Irma Rose for three years, since right after his father died. He recalled the way she lit his soul at a time when his grief threatened to overtake him. And now that she was sixteen, her parents were allowing her a few freedoms. Buggy races were looked down on by the elders in the community, but the young members of the

district still gathered at the far end of the road most Saturdays to see who had the fastest horse and buggy.

“That ol’ horse of yours ain’t gonna be able to keep up with Lightning.” Isaac smirked from his topless buggy, the type used for courting. Jonas hoped he never had to see Irma Rose riding alongside Isaac.

“Ya, well . . . we’ll see about that.” Jonas kept a steady hand on the reins while he and Isaac waited for the spectators to start loading into their buggies. They would wait about ten minutes, until everyone reached the finish line down by the old barn at the far end of the King property. Then Amos would blow the whistle to start the race.

Jonas sat taller, raised his chin, and tried to ignore that his own horse chose this moment to relieve himself. Bud was a fine animal. And fast. But Bud pooped more than any other horse around, and always at the wrong time, as if he was showing off. Or just trying to irritate Jonas.

Luckily the whistle blew before Isaac had time to make a joke, and Jonas slapped the reins. “Ya!” Within seconds, he was several yards ahead of Isaac, squinting as the late-afternoon sun almost blinded him. But he kept pushing Bud, anxious to see Irma Rose standing at the finish line, hopefully cheering him on.

Competition was against the *Ordnung* and everyone knew it, but there was a certain thrill about being victorious, even though deep down, Jonas knew God wouldn’t approve. As he crossed the finish line two buggy lengths ahead of Isaac, God wasn’t the one on his mind. As he pulled back on the reins, he looked to his right, searching the crowd standing in the grass on the side of the road.

Bud was completely stopped—and relieving himself again—

when Jonas finally located Irma Rose. Even though the women in his district all dressed similarly, Irma Rose was easy to spot. She was tinier than most of the women, with dainty features. Loose tendrils of golden hair framed her face from beneath her *kapp*, and if a man was lucky enough to attract her gaze, he could feel her green eyes searching his soul. Even though she was petite and flowerlike, she had the perfect balance of femininity and strength. But she wasn't even looking toward the road. Instead of watching Jonas whup Isaac in the race, she was standing way off to the side of the crowd, smiling and seeming to enjoy the company of someone who threatened Jonas's potential courtship with Irma Rose way more than Isaac or anyone else. Jake Ebersol.



Irma Rose hung on Jake's every word. He was so wise and knew more about Scripture and the teachings of the *Ordnung* than anyone she knew. He was only nineteen, but he had the mind of someone much older. When Jake Ebersol spoke, people listened. And it didn't hurt that he was quite handsome. His big brown eyes peeked from beneath sandy-blond bangs cropped high on his forehead, and his face was bronzed from his work outdoors. Jake was tall and muscular, his suspenders tightly fitted atop his blue shirt. He was everything an Amish girl could want.

"I'd love to go with you to the singing next Sunday." Irma Rose blinked her eyes a few times, unable to control her reaction to his invitation as a smile spread across her face. She'd been waiting for Jake to ask her to a singing since she'd turned sixteen

last month. She loved when someone hosted a singing for the young people in her district, a time for fellowship, prayer, and singing. And best of all, it was a time to socialize without adults hovering nearby.

“*Gut, gut.*” He pushed back the brim of his straw hat, smiling, then he brushed a clump of dried dirt from his britches. Several of the men who were standing too close to the race had been splattered with mud.

Irma Rose snuck a peek at Isaac, who was standing a few yards away. He’d been staring at her most of the day. She’d known for a long time that he was interested in courting her, and he was nice enough . . . but in her mind, there was only Jake. She offered Isaac a quick wave before she turned her attention back to Jake. A smile lit his face again, and she was basking in the moment when Jonas Miller walked up.

“I won. Ol’ Bud came through for me.” He smiled as he looped his thumbs beneath his suspenders, which were not doing a very good job holding up his britches.

Irma Rose hoped Jake would make pleasantries with Jonas so she didn’t have to. Jonas was wild and reckless, and Irma Rose could often smell the lingering scent of cigars when she was around him. He was the same age as Jake, and while Jonas was handsome in his own way, he was certainly not Irma Rose’s type.

“It was a *gut* race,” Jake said, smiling. “Congratulations on the win.”

Irma Rose was thinking about sitting next to Jake in his buggy on Sunday and wondering if he’d kiss her at the end of the night. She became aware that Jonas was speaking to her.

“Did you ask me something?” She blinked her eyes a few times, then brought her hand to her forehead to block the sun.

His firm mouth curled as if always on the edge of laughter, and Irma Rose found it unsettling. As his dark eyes raked boldly over her, she felt her cheeks reddening, the way they always did around him. He caused a tingling in the pit of her stomach that made her uncomfortable. Jonas was tall, but unlike Jake, he was thin, like he hadn’t yet grown into his height. Jonas had the biggest feet she’d ever seen, and she’d heard that Mr. Tucker at The Shoe Barn had to order his black leather loafers from another state. Jonas took a step closer to her, and she noticed the stubble on his jawline. It seemed that no matter what time of day or night, he was never quite clean-shaven. Maybe because his hair was as black as a starless sky.

“I asked what you thought about the race.” Jonas’s smile grew and so did the funny feeling in Irma Rose’s stomach.

She lifted her chin. “I don’t think such competition is necessary.” She shrugged and smiled back at him. “It’s just silly.” She turned to Jake, wishing he’d reach for her hand—something to let Jonas know that Jake would be courting her. Or at the least, taking her to the singing next Sunday.

“I’ll be back,” Jake said as he pointed to his right. “*Mei* sister is yelling for me.” He extended his hand to Jonas. “Congratulations again. Bud is a fine animal.”

Irma Rose glanced around, looking for a way to escape being caught in a conversation alone with Jonas, but everyone seemed involved in their own conversations. She twisted the tie on her prayer covering, hoping Jake would return soon. And that Jonas would mosey along.

"I was wondering . . ." Jonas grinned as a river of sweat flowed down both sides of his face. ". . . if you'd like to go with me to the singing on Sunday?"

Irma Rose pulled a hand-stitched handkerchief from the pocket of her apron and dabbed at the perspiration beading on her forehead. She cleared her throat, her heart hammering against her chest. She hated that he had this effect on her. "Nee, I can't," she finally said, fighting the knot rising in her throat. "I'm going to the singing with Jake."

Jonas took another step closer, his tall build casting a protective shadow over her, shielding her from the setting sun behind him. July had never felt so hot. "I think you should go with me instead."

Irma Rose stepped back as she tried to get control of her uneven breathing. "I just told you . . . I'm already going with someone else." She turned away to find Jake.

She could feel Jonas's eyes on her as she rushed away. Blotting her forehead with her hankie again, she picked up the pace.



Jonas took a step to go after her, but stopped himself. He rubbed the stubble on his chin and took a deep breath, knowing he had to make Irma Rose see that they were meant for each other. Jake Ebersol was a likable fellow, a pillar in the community, and everyone thought he'd follow in a long line of footsteps and become a deacon or bishop someday, like his father and grandfathers. But Jake wasn't the right guy for Irma Rose. Jonas had watched her for three years. She had a fire for adventure. He'd watched her jump from the highest peak into Pequea Creek, and

A L O V E F O R I R M A R O S E

she could run faster than any girl he knew. She could swing a baseball bat and knock a volleyball over the net with ease, and her laughter stole his breath.

Irma Rose was beautiful. Great with the *kinner* in the community. And she was going to be the mother of his children.

She just didn't know it yet.

PATCHWORK PERFECT

Chapter One

ELI WALKED TOWARD A GROUP OF MEN GATHERED IN THE front yard. He'd met several of them over the past couple of weeks, but he was having a hard time remembering names. Back home, there weren't nearly as many people to keep track of. Then he reminded himself, *This is home now.*

Amos Glick extended his hand when Eli joined the men. Amos was an easy name to remember since it was his father's.

"It was a fine worship service today," Eli said as he greeted the other men with a handshake. Amos introduced everyone to Eli. Some were repeat introductions, but Eli was grateful to hear their names again.

"For those of you who haven't met Eli before now, he comes to us from a small church district near Bucks County." Amos stroked his beard, a mixture of brown and gray streaks, though Eli suspected the gray was premature. Amos looked about Eli's age, early thirties, and couldn't be over five foot five. He'd also met Amos's wife, Sarah, who towered over her husband. One thing Eli liked right away about Amos was that he smiled a lot.

Eli remembered a time when he smiled often, and he wondered if he'd ever be that man again.

"What brings you to Lancaster County?" one of the other men asked, an older fellow with a big black mole above his left eye. Eli had already forgotten his name.

Eli had practiced how he would respond to this question. "More opportunities for work here." He forced a smile, content that he'd told the truth, even if it wasn't the entire truth.

"Do you farm?" The same man squinted one eye, still stroking his beard.

"Ya, mostly farming." Eli tipped the brim of his hat to block the sun that had reached its midday peak. This was his favorite time of year, when the foliage shifted into soft hues of amber and crimson. His former home was only an hour and a half from here, and they'd enjoyed the same type of Octobers in the past. Not only was the shift in seasons a feast for the eyes, but cool breezes drifted beneath the brilliant blue skies. Soon they could expect low clouds that floated like billowy cotton overhead. Best of all, it signified that the fall harvest would soon be upon them. It was always a lot of work, but following the harvest there would be time for rest. And weddings. Almost everyone waited until the fall to get married.

"Eli bought the old Dienner place," Amos said as he looped his thumbs beneath his suspenders. "And Gideon had already done all the planting, so it'll be ready for harvesting in a few weeks."

Eli was grateful to the prior owners of his new farm, though Gideon had planted alfalfa before he knew he'd be moving away. The kindly older man had met with unfortunate circumstances of the financial type. That was all Eli knew. It was the only

reason Eli had been able to buy the Dienners' farm. It was worth more than he'd offered Gideon, but it was all he could afford. Eli had been surprised when Gideon had accepted his bid, but somehow it seemed like a win-win situation for both men. A chance for Gideon to relocate with his wife to a smaller house now that their *kinner* were grown and living in a different district, and a fresh start for Eli, Ben, and Grace.

The men began to disassemble when the ladies starting bringing out trays of food, placing them on tables set up in a shaded area. But Amos lingered behind with Eli until they were alone.

Amos's smile grew as he nudged Eli. "Ach, let's get down to business." He pointed toward the group of women and lifted up on his toes, closer to Eli's ear, so Eli leaned down a bit. "See that woman in the maroon dress, the one carrying the tea pitcher? She's a widow."

Eli nodded, grinning. He'd told Amos that he lost his wife two years ago in an accident. Eli would always miss Leah. But he was ready to find a wife and a mother for his children. He'd been ready for the past year, but with no more than twenty Amish families in his area, his choices had been limited.

"Her name is Elizabeth," Amos whispered as two men walked past them. "She's twenty-five, no *kinner*, and her husband passed a few months ago."

Eli stretched his neck to have a better look at her. She was a petite woman with dark hair, but he couldn't make out her features.

Amos tapped him on the arm. "Let's walk that way."

Eli fell in step beside Amos, who slowed down as they approached the crowd. Most of the men were finding seats at

the tables as the women delivered pitchers of tea and glasses filled with ice. "She's pretty," Eli said as he studied her. He could tell by the way she moved around the table carrying glasses of ice that she was graceful and feminine, flowerlike. Her eyes were dark brown, set against an olive complexion, and when she smiled, Eli instinctively smiled too.

"*Ach*, and not only is she pretty, but she might be the best cook we have around here." Amos raised his chin as he also looked at Elizabeth. "I'll introduce you to her after the meal."

Eli wondered if Elizabeth was too young for him. Probably no one would think so, but eight years was stretching it. He had been married at seventeen, widowed at thirty-one, and now was raising a fifteen-year-old and an eleven-year-old. He felt older than his thirty-three years. And would someone Elizabeth's age want to step into a family with older children? He scratched his chin as he watched her.

Amos cleared his throat, then whispered again. "Sarah told me that Elizabeth is in a hurry to get remarried. She wants *kin-ner*. Her husband died of cancer." Amos shook his head. "A real shame. He took sick not long after their wedding. He had lots of treatments in the hospital. I don't think they ever had a chance to think about starting a family. Elizabeth took care of him for their entire marriage, right up to the end. I think everyone was surprised at how strong she was, and what a *gut* caregiver she was to John." Amos turned to Eli and sighed. "We're all praying Elizabeth will find a nice fellow. There are several vying for her affection, but if the truth be told, I don't think a one of them is right for her."

Eli was seeing Elizabeth in a new light. Taking care of someone like that lent her a maturity that was uncommon for her age. *Pretty, can cook, graceful, and wants more children.* Eli wanted more

children too. "I'd like to meet her." He took a step forward, but Amos tugged on his shirt.

"Hold on there, fellow." Amos nodded to his left. Almost everyone was seated now, and Eli could feel several sets of eyes on them. Amos must have, too, because he was whispering so softly that Eli had to ask him to speak up a little.

"We have one other widow in our church district that I'll point out to you as soon as I find her. Her name is Ruth." Amos turned to Eli. "There are plenty of younger women who are available, but . . ." He grinned. "They got their eyes set on the young bucks. You'd be an old man in their eyes."

Eli took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. He knew Amos was right. But at least there were two widows in his new church district. It would be nice if he was properly suited to one of them and didn't have to travel outside of the community to find a *fraa*.

Amos scanned the tables looking for Ruth. Eli's stomach rumbled, and his need to eat was becoming more important than being introduced to anyone. But when he heard a screen door slam in the distance, he turned his attention to the tall woman floating down the front porch steps as if she had angel wings on her back. Even from a distance, Eli was mesmerized as she strode across the yard. The closer she got to him, the more her beauty shone, and he had to force himself to breathe. From beneath her *kapp* wisps of red hair blew against her rosy cheeks. But it was her green eyes twinkling in the sunlight that kept Eli from being able to look away. He'd been taught that pride and vanity were sin, and most of the time he did his best not to let them dominate his choices.

"She's a beauty, isn't she?" Amos said as they finally started making their way to two empty seats. "That's Ruth."

Eli nodded, finally pulling his gaze from Ruth. After he was seated, he bowed his head in prayer, then reached for a slice of bread. He was glad to see Ben two tables over talking with two boys who looked to be around his age, maybe ten or twelve. But as his eyes traveled from table to table, he didn't see Gracie. He took a bite of bread, assuming his daughter must be inside. Maybe the bathroom. Or maybe just sitting in the living room avoiding everyone. His fifteen-year-old hadn't been happy about the move and leaving her friends behind. But Eli was certain a fresh start was just what they all needed.



Grace loved kissing as much as chocolate pie, a warm bath on a cold winter's night, and reading *Englisch* magazines on the sly, the ones she kept hidden between her mattresses. But Wayne Huyard was interested in a lot more than just kissing, and she was having a hard time guiding his hands away from places they needn't be. They'd barely been in Lancaster County a week when she'd met Wayne at a Sunday singing. He was sixteen, a year older than Grace, and with his dreamy blue eyes and blond hair, he was cuter than cute.

"*Mei daed's* going to come looking for me," she said, latching onto one of Wayne's roaming hands. Actually, she doubted that was the case. The only thing her father was looking for was a wife. She'd met Wayne behind the far barn on the property. As everyone was getting ready for the meal, they'd slipped away as planned.

"I love kissing you," he said as his mouth covered hers again. She loved the way he cupped her cheeks in his hands, thankful

to know exactly where those hands were for the moment. But within seconds, they wandered again.

“I can’t,” she said as she eased her lips away from his, stepping back until his hands finally fell to his sides.

Wayne gently touched her cheek with the back of his hand. “You’re so pretty. I *really* like you.”

Grace felt herself blush as he slowly inched forward, kissing her again. She tried to relax. Wayne had kissed her one other time, after the singing the night they’d met. Maybe he thought she was easy, as the *Englisch* girls would say, since she’d allowed him to kiss her that first night. But his roaming hands could get them both into trouble. She’d seen it happen with other girls.

Grace put her hand on top of his, hoping she wasn’t going to make him mad. She was grateful to have met someone so cute not long after moving here, and she’d only kissed one other boy; that was about a year ago. He’d been shorter than her and didn’t seem to know what he was doing. Wayne was a take-charge man. Handsome. And he knew what he was doing. Grace had never had anyone like him take an interest in her.

“I want to spend time with you,” he said between kisses. He pushed away a strand of hair that had fallen from her *kapp*, a gesture that caused her to shiver. “Some of us guys play baseball in a big field at the Lantzes’ *haus* on Saturdays.” He kissed her tenderly on the lips. “I want you to come watch.” He pulled her closer and whispered, “As my date.”

Grace felt herself relaxing a tiny bit and she wasn’t as quick to latch onto his hand. She’d never had a boyfriend, and for the first time in two years, she wondered if maybe she could be happy again. But no matter how good looking and sweet Wayne

might be, some things were just off-limits. She grabbed his hand again, but he didn't leave the area. She eased him away.

"I'm sorry, Wayne. I just can't." She took a deep breath and held it, knowing that some boys—even *gut* Amish boys—wanted a girl who was willing to go further than just kissing.

"It's okay," he whispered in her ear. "I like you so much, I don't mind waiting. I think you're someone I could really fall for."

Grace was sure the clouds were opening up and raining down blessings on her, and for a brief second, she considered giving him some freedoms that went against what she believed was right, but at the last minute, she took his hand and repeated, "I can't."

Wayne trailed his kisses down her neck, and Grace wasn't sure what was happening to her. She was a bit weak in the knees, but a rustling in the leaves to their right caused both of them to stop and turn. Grace's heart was beating hard, but she quickly thanked God that it wasn't her father.

"Wayne Huyard, what are you doing back here?" A woman a few years older than she and Wayne walked toward them, stopping a couple of feet away. Grace remembered meeting her earlier that morning before the worship service. Her name was Miriam, and Grace was pretty sure her last name was Fisher. The woman didn't look as old as Grace's father, but she had those feathery lines women get when they start to age. Miriam had a smudge of dirt on her chin.

Scowling, Miriam put her hands on her hips. Grace was pretty sure this woman was going to haul them back to the group, and her father would know she'd been alone with a boy. And so would everyone else. She swallowed hard, wondering exactly how much Miriam had seen.

WHEN CHRISTMAS
COMES AGAIN

Chapter One

KATHERINE ZOOK FELL INTO STEP WITH TWO *ENGLISCH* women who were crossing the parking lot toward the Bird-in-Hand market. Normally, she would avoid the chatty tourists, but the tall man with the shoulder-length salt-and-pepper hair and a limp was following her again.

“It’s a lovely day, isn’t it?” The middle-aged woman walking next to Katherine was a little thing with short red hair and wore a blue T-shirt with *Paradise, Pennsylvania* on the front. Her friend had on the same T-shirt, but it was red.

“Ya, it is.” Katherine glanced at the dark clouds overhead. There wasn’t anything lovely about the weather. Frigid temperatures, and the snow had just begun to fall again. She picked up the pace and hoped the women would speed up too. She looked over her shoulder, glad they were gaining some distance on the stranger. She’d first seen him a week ago, loitering outside the Gordonville Bookstore, and she hadn’t thought much about it. Then when she saw him at Kauffman’s Fruit Farm and Market, she’d thought it was a coincidence. She’d also spotted him outside Paradiso’s when she’d stopped to pick up a pizza

as a treat for the children. But this was becoming more than a fluke.

Katherine could feel the women staring at her, but she kept her eyes straight ahead and hoped they weren't about to ask a string of questions. *Do you have a telephone? Can I take your picture? Is this where you do your shopping? How many children do you have? Are your people Christians?* And Katherine's personal favorite: *Do you know where I can get an Amish pen pal?*

It wasn't that she held ill will against the curious *Englisch* tourists, but she often wondered what their reactions would be if the situation were reversed. They'd most likely run from her or summon the police.

"Ma'am, can I ask you a quick question?" The redhead spoke loudly, as if Katherine might be hard of hearing, making it impossible to ignore her. She looked over her shoulder again, but she didn't see the man anymore. She stopped a few feet from the entrance when the two women did. "Ya. What can I help you with?"

"I-I was wondering . . ." The woman blushed as her eyes darted back and forth between Katherine and the other lady. "My friend and I were wondering . . ." She pulled her large black purse up on her shoulder. "We—well . . ."

Katherine waited. She was anxious to get in and out of the market, then back on the road. She'd left her two youngest *kin-ner* home alone. Linda was old enough to babysit five-year-old Gideon, but he could be a handful even for Katherine. She pulled her black coat snug, looking forward to a brief reprieve from the weather once she got inside the market.

"Do Amish women shave their legs?" the woman finally asked. Luckily, she hadn't spoken as loudly as before.

This is a first. Katherine closed her gaping mouth and tried to find the words for a response. Before she could, the other *Englischer* spoke up.

“And . . . you know . . .” The woman was a bit taller than her friend with short gray hair that was slightly spiked on the top of her head. She raised one of her arms and with her other hand pointed under her arm. “Do you shave here too?”

The first woman touched Katherine lightly on the arm. “We can’t find the answer to that question online, and it’s been an ongoing argument during our book-club gatherings.” She stood taller and smiled. “We only read Amish books.”

Does that fact make it okay to ask such questions? Katherine considered telling the women that they were very rude, but changed her mind. She folded her hands in front of her and glanced back and forth between the ladies.

“Only when I’ve planned for my husband and me to be alone. But he died six months ago, so . . .” Katherine smiled and shrugged. *That will give you something to tell your book club.* Both of the women’s eyes went round as saucers. “Have a *wunderbaar* day,” Katherine added before she walked into the market. She looked back once to make sure neither of them had fainted. She didn’t know any Amish folks who used the word *wunderbaar*, but the *Englisch* seemed to think they did, so she was happy to throw it in for good measure.

She held her laughter until she was inside the store. On most days, it was a challenge just to get out of bed in the morning, much less to find humor in anything. But as she made her way to the back of the market, she thought about Elias. Her husband would have gotten a chuckle out of Katherine’s response. *I miss you, Elias.*

She dropped off some quilted pot holders for Diana to display in her booth. Katherine tried to make several per week for her *Englisch* friend to sell. The market in Bird-in-Hand catered to tourists mostly, and Diana had a permanent booth. Katherine and a few other local Amish women provided Diana with items to sell. And occasionally, when Katherine had time, she and Diana would sneak away and grab lunch and then split a dessert. They both suffered from an insatiable sweet tooth. But those times were getting more infrequent since she bore the entire responsibility of caring for the family.

Making small craft items used to be more of a hobby for Katherine, but now that money was tight, Linda and Mary Carol had been putting in extra hours sewing, knitting, and crocheting. Katherine hadn't told the children that they might have to sell their house, or at least part of the fifty acres that surrounded their home. That would be a last resort because the land had been in her family for three generations. She grabbed the last thing on her list, and as she made her way to the checkout line, she caught sight of an *Englisch* couple walking hand in hand. She missed having someone to bounce the important decisions off of. Her oldest, Stephen, was sixteen and trying hard to assume the role of head of the household, even though it should have been a time for him to be enjoying his *rumschpringe*.

As she made her way toward the exit, she saw the two women from the parking lot. The ladies actually bumped into each other as they scurried to avoid Katherine, but Katherine smiled and gave a little wave before she walked out the door.

She stuffed her gloved hands into the pockets of her coat. The snow was beginning to accumulate, and the wind was biting. It was colder than usual for December. Somehow, Katherine

and her children had managed to get through Thanksgiving, but this first Christmas without Elias was going to be hard.

When she felt the tears starting to build in her eyes, she forced herself to think about the two *Englisch* women, and it brought a smile to her face. She was going to bottle that memory and pull it out when she felt sad, which was most days.

As she hurried toward her buggy, she tipped the brim of her black bonnet to shield her face from the snow, but every few seconds, she scanned the parking lot for signs of the tall man with the gray hair. Katherine didn't see him.

She stowed her purse on the seat beside her and waited for two cars to pass before she clicked her tongue and pulled back on the reins. She said a silent prayer of thanks when the snow started to let up. John Wayne was an older horse, and like so many others that pulled buggies in Lancaster County, he hadn't fared well at the racetrack. And as a result, he was no longer any use to his owner. Elias had paid a fair price at auction, and John Wayne had been a good horse for a lot of years, but these days the winters took a toll on the animal.

Katherine could still remember when, years ago, she and Elias let Mary Carol name the animal. They'd assumed their oldest daughter must have heard the name on television—maybe at an *Englisch* friend's house. Katherine and Elias had limited visits to the *Englisch* homes when their *kinner* were young since the *Ordnung* encouraged their people to stay as separate as possible from outsiders. But in Lancaster County, it was impossible to avoid the *Englisch* completely. Their district relied on the *Englisch* tourists to supplement their income. With each new generation, there was less land available for farming. More and more, Amish men and women were working outside their homes. The women

in their district enjoyed having a little extra money of their own. “Mad money” was what the *Englisch* called it. Katherine had no idea why. But then, the *Englisch* seemed to get mad about lots of things.

It was several years before Katherine found out that John Wayne was the name of some kind of gunslinger. But by then, it was too late to change it. The name had stuck.

She picked up speed to get ahead of another car in the parking lot, and she was almost to the highway when she caught sight of the strange man again. He was standing beside a blue car, staring at her. A shiver ran up her spine. As she passed by him, she allowed herself a good, long look, tempted to stop and ask him why he was following her. But that wasn't always safe with the *Englisch*. Katherine was wise enough to know that there were good and bad people everywhere—even in her small Amish district—but the bad seemed to settle in around the *Englisch*. It was just simple math. There were more of them.

When Katherine locked eyes with the stranger, he hurried into the blue car. Would he follow her? She didn't know who he was, but something about him was familiar.

She turned around several times during her trip home, double-checking that he wasn't behind her. Thirty minutes later, she pulled into her driveway. She got John Wayne settled in the barn before she hurried into the house. She called out to Linda as soon as she walked into the living room. After she hung her bonnet and coat on the rack by the door, she pulled off her gloves.

“Linda! Gideon!” She edged toward the stairs and was relieved when Linda answered. “Up here, *Mamm*.”

“Is everything okay?” she asked from the landing.

“No!”

Katherine sighed as she started up the stairs. Out of her four children, Linda was what her friend Diana described as dramatic. Since no one was crying, she assumed no one had gotten hurt, always a good thing. “I’m on my way up.”

“You’re not going to be happy!”

Katherine picked up the pace. *I’m already not happy. What now?* She opened the door to Linda’s bedroom, and when no one was there, she moved down the hall to Gideon’s room.

Linda threw her hands up in the air and grunted. “I don’t know what you’re going to do with him.” Linda stormed past Katherine before she could ask her why she hadn’t kept a closer eye on the five-year-old, but right now, she needed to have a talk with her youngest.

She sat down across from Gideon’s bed where the boy was playing with his shoelaces. Stephen disliked having to share a room with little Gideon. He would definitely not approve of these new drawings on the walls. Their home was plain. Everywhere except this room. Stephen had begged for a few luxuries when his *rumschpringe* began, and Katherine had given in since he seemed to be taking his father’s death the hardest. Posters of hot rods and musicians on the wall, a battery-operated radio by the bed, a pair of earbuds on the nightstand, and a magazine with a fancy automobile on the front. Katherine didn’t like all these things being in the same room with Gideon, but she was choosing her battles these days.

“Gideon, we’ve talked about this. You cannot draw on the walls.” Katherine rubbed her forehead as she eyed her son’s artwork and recalled how she’d just repainted this room a month ago. Diana had told her that drawing pictures on the walls was Gideon’s way of expressing his grief. Katherine hadn’t been sure

about that, but today's imagery proved Diana was right. However, this was not a time for scolding. "What made you draw this, Gideon? We talked about where *Daed* went, remember?"

Her son hung his head for a few moments before he looked up at her with his big brown eyes. He brushed his blond bangs out of the way. His hair needed a trim but it would have to wait. Maybe Stephen could do it.

Gideon started talking to her in *Deitsch*, but Katherine interrupted him. "*Nee*, when you're at home, talk to me in *Englisch*." It was Gideon's first year of school, so he'd just started learning *Englisch* as a second language. "It's *gut* practice for you."

"*Daed* is in a box in the dirt. I saw him put there." Her son pointed to his large drawing on the wall. An outsider might not have recognized it as a coffin in the middle of a bunch of stick people, but Katherine did.

"*Nee*." She leaned forward until she was close enough to gently grasp Gideon's chin, lifting his eyes to hers. "*Daed* is in heaven with God and Jesus and your *mammi* and *daadi*." Why was Gideon so fixated on thinking his *daed* was in the ground? From an early age, all of her *kinner* had been schooled about the Lord and taught the ways of the *Ordnung*. "Only *Daed's* body was buried. *Daed's* soul went to heaven."

For the hundredth time, Katherine tried to explain this to her son, frustrated that the other children had accepted this as truth by the time they were Gideon's age. But maybe it had been easier for the others because they didn't have to apply it to the death of their own father.

"Mom!"

Katherine stood up and got to the bedroom door just as

WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES AGAIN

Linda blew into the room carrying a box wrapped in silver paper with a purple bow. Her face was red and her teeth chattered.

“You don’t have to yell.” She touched her daughter’s icy cheek. “Were you outside?” She nodded to the box. “And what’s that?”

“I saw a man in the driveway. By the time I got outside, he was in his car driving away.”

Katherine rushed to the window in time to see a blue car going down the road. She rested a hand on her chest.

Linda joined her at the window. “This was on the rocking chair on the front porch.” She handed the box to Katherine and smiled. “It has your name written on it.” Her daughter bounced up on her toes. “Your first Christmas present!”