

An  
Amish Second  
Christmas

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An  
Amish Second  
Christmas

BETH WISEMAN,  
RUTH REID  
KATHLEEN FULLER,  
TRICIA GOYER, AND



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798

NASHVILLE MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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*When Christmas  
Comes Again*

BETH WISEMAN

*To Karla Hanns and Joan Main*



## GLOSSARY

*ab im kopp*: off in the head; crazy

*ach*: oh

*bruder*: brother

*daadi*: grandfather

*daed*: father

*danki*: thank you

*Pennsylvania Deitsch*: the language spoken by the Amish

*Englisch*: the English language; a non-Amish person

*gut*: good

*kapp*: prayer covering or cap

*kinner*: children

*mamm*: mom

*mammi*: grandmother

*mei*: my

*mudder*: mother

*nee*: no

## GLOSSARY

*Ordnung*: the unwritten rules of the Amish

*rumschpringe*: running around period when a teenager turns sixteen  
years old

*wunderbaar*: wonderful

*ya*: yes



## 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 *kinner* 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.

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*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 she 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 on-going 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 potholders 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 check-out 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

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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 rim 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.”

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“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.” She stormed past Katherine before she could ask Linda 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 *rum-schpringe* began, and Katherine had given in since he seemed to be taking his father’s death the hardest. Posters of hot rods and musicians hung on the wall, a battery-operated radio by the bed, a pair of ear buds 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 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.”

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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!”



## CHAPTER TWO

Mary Carol didn't think she'd ever get tired of kissing Abraham Fisher. She just wished that she didn't feel so guilty about it. Everyone in her house—except maybe Linda—was still mourning the loss of their father. Mary Carol heard her mother crying softly in her room sometimes. Stephen wouldn't say much to anyone. And Gideon had taken to drawing all over the walls, something he'd never done before. Mary Carol missed her father so much it hurt, but she was trying to give herself permission to find happiness again. And she was doing that with Abe. She'd known him all her life, but they'd only been dating for a few months. He'd just recently gotten baptized, something she hoped was the first step in what would lead to a marriage proposal.

Abe kissed her again, then pulled away. "I can tell you're distracted."

"What?" Mary Carol twisted the tie of her *kapp* between her fingers and tried to still her chattering teeth. Now that she was in her *rumbschpringe*, they were spending more time together, but this was

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the first time they'd come to the abandoned farmhouse off Black Horse Road. Mary Carol was afraid the structure might collapse on them, but it was much too cold to sit in the buggy. The battery-operated heater in Abe's buggy had quit working earlier in the day.

Abe reached for her hand and squeezed. "You're feeling bad about being happy."

She'd done her best not to let it show. "Sorry."

"It's okay. I can just tell when your mind goes somewhere else." Abe blew a cold fog as he spoke.

Mary Carol snuggled up against him on the couch. The blue-and-red-checkered fabric was faded, and the cushions sagged in the middle. The house had been vacant for years, but from the looks of things, they hadn't been the only ones seeking privacy and a little relief from the weather.

"I wonder who else is coming here." She pointed to an empty Coke can on a TV tray next to an old tan recliner.

Abe got up and walked to the chair. "Maybe this has been here for a long time." He lifted the can and smelled it. Mary Carol giggled.

"Do you think smelling it will tell you how old it is?" She stood up and walked toward him.

"Ya, maybe, smarty pants." He grinned as he tossed the empty can back and forth, his teeth chattering like hers. "Let's look around."

"Not upstairs," she said quickly. "I'm already worried the second floor is going to fall in on us, or we're going to step on a loose board down here."

"Nah." Abe pushed back the rim of his straw hat. "These old farmhouses were built sturdy, probably by *gut* Amish folks."

Mary Carol hugged herself to keep warm as she followed Abe into the kitchen. "Nee, Mr. Porter lived here until he died, and he wasn't Amish."

“I know, but he was in his seventies. I heard *mei daed* talking about this house once. He was telling *mei mamm* about three men who were staying here, but he stopped talking when he saw me, and I didn’t hear the rest. But I think he said it was about a hundred years old. So, it could have been one of our ancestors who built it before Mr. Porter lived here.” He pointed to an electrical outlet to the right of the sink. “Mr. Porter probably had it wired for electricity.” Abe opened one of the cabinets, which was empty, then he shuffled sideways and opened the rest.

“Ew,” she said when she saw the skeletal remains of a small mouse. She took a step back, and Abe came to her and wrapped his arms around her waist.

“I was warmer when we were on the couch.” He towered over her as he pressed his lips to hers. In thirty years, would kissing Abe still give her this heady feeling?

She eased away from him and shivered. “It’s much colder here in the kitchen.”

Abe pointed to the window above the sink. “When I was looking in the cabinets, I felt the cold air blowing from here. Needs caulking around the panes.” He latched onto her hand and they returned to the living room. The only furniture was the couch, the recliner, and the tray. She wanted to see the second story, but one of the steps was missing a piece of wood, and part of the handrail was broken off about halfway up. They were about to sit when Mary Carol noticed something in the corner of the room.

“Look.” She pointed to a roll of silver wrapping paper, a reel of purple ribbon, a pair of scissors, and some tape. “Someone’s been wrapping Christmas presents.” She sat down beside Abe on the couch. “Maybe we shouldn’t be here.”

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Abe cupped her cheeks in his hands, and she decided not to worry about it. After a few more minutes, she eased away. Abe's breathing was ragged, and she could feel her heart pounding. These were indicators that it was time to stop. She wondered how many other couples—*Englisch* or Amish—had made out on this very couch. "I probably need to get home."

Abe took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. "Ya, probably so." He stood up and offered her his hand. Mary Carol trusted Abe not to go too far with her, but it was getting harder and harder to keep tabs on his roaming hands. Sometimes she was tempted to give herself to him, but she'd made a vow to God that she would wait until she was married. She was only eighteen, but that was a fine marrying age. Mary Carol planned to be baptized soon, so maybe Abe would ask her before too long. Her parents had been eighteen when they got married. But every time she thought about a wedding, she thought about her father. Maybe it was too soon to be thinking about celebrating such things.

A blast of cold air met them when Abe opened the front door, and they rushed to the buggy. Mary Carol had told her mother she'd be home in time to help with supper. She hoped she wasn't late.



Katherine sat down on her bed and stared at the gift. Luckily, Linda had gotten distracted shortly after the package arrived and hadn't pestered her about it.

She turned up the lantern on her bedside table and took a deep breath. What if this man was a threat to her family? It was an additional worry she didn't need.

She slid the purple ribbon from the package, then slowly peeled

back the silver paper to reveal a saltine cracker box. She gave it a gentle shake before she turned it end over end and listened to the contents shift. *A strange choice for a gift box.*

The box opened easily at one end. She peeked inside before she dumped it on her bed. Photographs. Dozens of them. All of Elias. And a few of Katherine and the children.

She tried to blink back the tears that rushed to her eyes. There was a photo of Elias at an auction not long before he died. Another was of Katherine and Elias outside the pizza place. She picked up a snapshot of Elias holding Gideon and could no longer stave off her tears. She brought it closer to her face, and it took her a minute before she realized it had been taken just two days before the accident. She quickly glanced at the rest of the pictures, but fear was catching up with her other emotions. She unfolded a yellow piece of paper that was mixed in with the photographs.

Katherine wiped her eyes and put on her reading glasses. The penmanship was shaky, barely legible.

I know pictures are not allowed, but following the loss of a loved one, photographs can bring much comfort. I think the bishop—and the Lord—would think it's okay for you to have these. I hope they will bring you a little bit of happiness.

I'm leaving this on your front porch because I haven't gotten up the nerve to talk to you. I don't know if you're even going to want to talk to me, but I know you've seen me around. I'm not a stalker or anything. I won't cause you any troubles. I'm just an old man with a borrowed camera that enjoys taking pictures of your family. Or I should say, our family.

I will be at the coffee shop on Tuesday morning at nine

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o'clock if you would like to meet. The coffee shop where you and Elias used to go sometimes.

Katherine held her breath as she reread the last couple of lines.

kindest regards,  
James Zook

Katherine was a little girl the last time she saw James. Even back then, he walked with a limp, although she didn't know why. Like the other Amish men in their community, he'd grown a long beard following marriage, and Katherine remembered him being a deacon in the church. He no longer had a beard, and his dark hair was now long and peppered with gray.

She stood up and paced the length of her bedroom, trying to decide what to do. Part of her wanted to meet Elias's father because it would give her back a piece of her husband. But why had the man disappeared all those years ago? And why was he sneaking around? The thought of him taking pictures of the family was disturbing. And why were so many taken shortly before her husband was hit by a car?

James Zook had abandoned his wife and only son over thirty years ago. And to Katherine's knowledge, no one had heard from him since. Had he been living right here in Paradise?

She sat down on the bed and flipped through each picture again. Whatever his intentions, her father-in-law was right about one thing. Pictures were not allowed by their people, but seeing them made her feel something she hadn't felt in months: comforted.



## CHAPTER THREE

Katherine arrived at the coffee shop early and ordered a black coffee. As she waited at the table, she prayed that the Lord would bless her with the right words today. Elias had rarely talked about his father, but his departure had left scars. Over the years, the pain had been mostly replaced by anger and resentment. She wasn't sure her husband would approve of this meeting. She'd chosen not to say anything to the children. Not yet.

James came in the door and walked directly to her booth. He stood in front of her for a few moments before sliding into the booth across from her.

Katherine cleared her throat. "Hello." She noticed right away that he and Elias both had the same nose, long and narrow. Her husband had also been blessed with incredible blue eyes that he had obviously inherited from his father. The most noticeable difference between Elias and his father were the lines of time feathering across James's face, and whereas Elias had been gifted

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with a lovely set of straight teeth, this man's bottom teeth crossed in the front.

"Am I late? I hate to be late." His eyebrows drew together in an agonized expression, his eyes fixed on her as he waited for her response.

"Uh, *nee*. I—I don't think you're late." Katherine's stomach churned. "Would you like some coffee? You have to order it at the counter."

"I don't drink coffee, but *danki*." He folded his hands on top of the table. Katherine noticed a stain on his wrinkled blue shirt. He wasn't wearing a coat. She studied his face, noticing he looked a bit disheveled and needed a shave.

"Do you still speak Pennsylvania *Deitsch*?" Maybe Elias's father had left his family but resumed his Amish lifestyle within another district.

"I remember a few words." His face split into a wide grin. He was missing a couple of teeth toward the back. "Did you like the pictures?"

Katherine swallowed hard, wishing her stomach would settle down. "Ya, I did. *Danki*."

"I have lots more."

"Mr. Zook . . . why didn't—"

"Just James," he said as he sat taller. "We're family."

Katherine took a deep breath and wondered if Elias was watching from heaven. "Why didn't you make yourself known to Elias before he died? And why the pictures?"

James's eyes darted around the room as he blinked his left eye a few times. Then he locked eyes with her. "I'm being followed, so I can't be too careful."

Katherine looked around the small coffee shop, then back at him. "Who is following you?"

He tapped a finger to the side of his face. "I'm not sure. But I think it's the FBI. That stands for Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Uh, *ya*. I know." She recalled a horrific crime that had occurred in the area when she was very young. Even though her parents had kept the details from Katherine, she remembered hearing that the FBI was in Paradise. She took a sip of her coffee and kept her eyes on him.

"I used to be one of them. That's why I don't drink coffee. Got burned out on it." He leaned back against the booth and folded his arms across his chest. "I'm privy to a lot of top secret information, so they keep a tail on me. But I have no intention of telling them what I know until I'm safely behind the pearly gates." He leaned forward and folded his hands atop the table again. "How old are you?"

Katherine tried to find her voice, relieved that Elias wasn't here to see his father like this. "I'm, uh . . . thirty-eight." She forced a smile. "James, can you tell me why you're taking pictures of my family?"

He sighed, and Katherine got a whiff of his breath. She struggled not to cringe. She prayed that James wasn't dangerous, just crazy.

"I came here to see Elias, but I was nervous to meet all of you." His eye fluttered again before he went on. "I took a bunch of pictures in case Elias sent me packing, figuring I'd at least have pictures to look at sometimes." He shrugged. "But that car hit him not long after I got here." Frowning, he started counting on his fingers. "Six or seven days. No . . . actually it was twelve days after I got here. Possibly a week." He sighed. "It could have been three days."

Katherine wasn't a drinker, but she'd seen Widow Kauffman adding brandy to her coffee on more than one occasion. Katherine didn't think that sounded like a bad idea right now. She took another sip of coffee as she wondered what James had been doing for the past thirty years. "So, are you living here in Paradise?"

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“For now. The Lord sent me here. The same way He sent me to Michigan to work with the FBI.” He hung his head for a few moments before he looked back at her with sad eyes, one of them beginning to twitch again. “We can’t question the Lord.” He shrugged and grinned. “Why would we, right? He’s God.” Then he chuckled. Loudly.

Katherine moved her eyes about the room. Two elderly couples on the other side of the shop chatted, not seeming to notice James’s outburst. Katherine nodded. “Ya, you’re right. We don’t question the Lord’s will.” She paused. “James, did you continue practicing our faith after you left here? Did you live in another Amish community?”

He stared at her with a blank expression. “Of course not.”

“Oh, it just wondered me if you might have.”

Leaning forward, he put his palms flat on the table and spoke to her in a whisper. “They don’t take Amish people at the Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

“Ya. Of course not.” Katherine smoothed the wrinkles from her dress. “James, I need to ask you not to take any more pictures of me or *mei* family. It is very unsettling. And can I ask you to please stop following me? I’m happy to meet you here for coffee from time to time.”

He leaned back again and waved a hand in her direction as he grunted. “No worries. I won’t be here long.” He shook his head. “To tell you the truth, I thought I would have been gone long before now. But our Father extended my stay.”

Katherine hoped she didn’t have to get the *Englisch* authorities involved. “Where are you staying?”

“I’d rather not say.”

Katherine inhaled a slow, steady breath and as she released it, she willed herself to stay calm and sympathetic. She had a great

aunt who was mentally ill. “Okay. But you will stop following me, right?”

“I will.”

Katherine drank the last of her coffee. “I should go now. It was nice to see you after all these years.” *Forgive the lie, Lord.* “I’m sorry you weren’t able to visit with Elias while he was alive.”

“I didn’t really care for that funeral your people threw for my son.”

Katherine’s breath caught in her throat. She tried not to think about the funeral and how difficult it had been to say good-bye to Elias’s earthly body. “You were there?”

“Only at the grave site, and I stayed under the patch of trees at the back of the cemetery. I couldn’t hear what was said.” James frowned. “But it was clear that there wasn’t near enough fanfare for my son. No flowers or music.”

“Have you forgotten that Amish funerals are plain? We don’t do those things.”

James stood up. “I know. I have to go now.” He scanned the room. *Looking for federal agents?* Katherine kept her seat, just in case he tried to hug her. Instead, he put a gentle hand on her shoulder. “I wish that Elias was still here.”

Her eyes clouded. “Me too.” Katherine forced herself to stand.

“Don’t worry. I won’t hug you. I know your people don’t like that.”

She nodded, thankful that he spared her the awkward moment.

“Hey. It’s almost Christmas, huh?” He smiled. “A celebration indeed.” After he looked around the room again, he turned and left. Katherine stood there for a few moments, then she walked out the door and saw him on the sidewalk. *He must be freezing.* She watched him for a few moments and tried to fight the strange feeling settling

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over her. She called out to him. He turned around and walked back to her.

“I can’t stay at your home if that’s what you are going to ask me. And I’m not ready to meet my grandchildren either.”

“I, uh . . .” Katherine stared at him, tongue-tied for a few seconds since neither of those thoughts had crossed her mind. Inviting him to her home was out of the question, but she had a lot of questions for James Zook. “Would you like to meet here next Tuesday?” She could bring him some of Elias’s things. A coat, for starters.

He walked a few steps closer to her, and a smile lit up his face. “I know you’re not going to like this, but . . .”

Katherine tensed when he threw his arms around her, and her initial reaction was to push him away. But then he rubbed her back, the way a parent lovingly rubs a child’s back, and he said, “Elias loved you very much. He talks to me in my dreams sometimes. He understands why I couldn’t be with him when he was growing up. But I gotta say, I sure am excited to go see him after Christmas.” He eased himself away. “He said they are really going to roll out the red carpet when I get there.”

Then he abruptly withdrew from the hug. “See you Tuesday.” He turned and headed down the sidewalk.

Katherine tried to ignore the rush of grief that came over her. And then she made her way slowly toward her buggy.