

The
STORY *of*
LOVE

AN AMISH BOOKSTORE NOVEL

ZONDERVAN®

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 ZONDERVAN®

ZONDERVAN

The Story of Love

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GLOSSARY

ab im kopp: crazy (lit: addled in the head)

ach: [exclamation]

bruder: brother

daadi haus: small parents' house on property

danki: thanks

Die Kelt is farichderlich den winder: The cold is terrible this winter.

Deitsch: Dutch

dochder: daughter

Englisch: non-Amish folk/English language

Er dutt mir leed: I'm sorry

fraa: wife

Gott: God

grossdaadi: grandfather

gut: good

kaffi: coffee

kinner: children

lieb: love

maedel: young woman

mamm: mom

mei: my

GLOSSARY

mudder: mother

nee: no

Ordnung: the unwritten rules of the Amish

rumschpringe: adolescent rite of passage (lit: jumping around)

schweschder: sister

schweeger: brother-in-law

sohn: son

urgrossvadder: great-grandfather

Wie bischt: Hello/how are you

wunderbar: wonderful

ya: yes



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PROLOGUE

Yvonne locked the door of her house in Houston for the final time, then slipped the key under the mat like she had promised the new owners—a young family with two small children.

She walked down the sidewalk but turned around and stared at the first and only house she'd ever purchased . . . and recently sold.

“Goodbye, house.” There was a sob building in her throat, but she refused to cry. She was starting a new chapter in her life, in a new place far from the city she had always called home.

It was a life overhaul, but when her friends Eva and Jake had mentioned they were looking for someone to run their bookstore, Yvonne had jumped on the opportunity. The need for a change had been niggling her for a while, but prior to the idea of managing the bookstore, she'd been undecided about what she wanted to do. At the time, the decision seemed easy. She loved books and being around people,

Eva and Jake were like family, and a move to the country would allow her to breathe in a slower lifestyle. Now that the move was here, her stomach quaked with a mixture of excitement and anxiety.

Sighing, she hoisted her purse up on her shoulder and walked to the new red SUV she'd bought, complete with four-wheel drive, which she'd been told she would need in southern Indiana. A moving truck was two days ahead of her, and by the time she arrived at her new rental house in Montgomery, her furniture and boxes should be there.

She had three red suitcases in the far back, some fragile items on the seat behind her, and several CDs and audiobooks in the console. It would take two to three days to drive to Montgomery, depending on the weather and if she got tired.

As she pulled out of the driveway, she took a deep breath, determined to keep at bay her anxiety over this big change and instead embrace the new adventure. It had been a year since she'd seen her friends Eva and Jake, but they had kept in contact via snail mail and the occasional phone call. Eva was seven months pregnant and on bed rest due to some early contractions, and Jake's father had taken ill, leaving Jake with sole responsibility for the entire farm. It wasn't a huge homestead, but it was almost more than one man could handle. Jake's father had already been of limited help on the property since he'd hurt his back in a tractor accident. Now, he was also fighting the early stages of pancreatic cancer. Jake was spread too thin running the bookstore, and he wanted to put his family's welfare first.

Yvonne's prior job, searching for rare books, had

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required a lot of travel. It had been almost a year and a half since Trevor's death, and even though her grief had gotten better over time, her fear of flying had not. Every time she got on a plane, she envisioned her fiancé's plane crashing. This had naturally limited her ability to fulfill her job duties.

Now she would be running an Amish bookstore in Montgomery, Indiana. It would be a cultural overhaul in a small town with folks driving around in buggies alongside cars. During her previous times there, she'd learned the Amish weren't as different as people often perceived. Becoming good friends with Jake and Eva had ended up serving her well in a lot of areas. They had helped her learn that a relationship with God could be life changing and introduced her to a world where community meant everything. Yvonne was looking forward to her new life, scary as it seemed sometimes.

Her Aunt Emma—the only relative she was close to who lived nearby—was going to miss her, and Yvonne would feel the void, too, especially since her aunt had raised her. They had promised to visit often, and their last meal together had been Thanksgiving, just the two of them, a few days ago. There had been some tears, but Aunt Emma was happy Yvonne was venturing off on a new journey, something her aunt had thought she needed since Trevor died.

If all of this change wasn't enough, Yvonne would now have to face Abraham Byler—an Amish man who had traded in his suspenders and buggy for a job as a policeman—for the first time in a year. He'd taken a liking to Yvonne at Eva and Jake's wedding and had even written to her in Houston several times. The letters had never

been very long but always sweet. He would ask how she was doing, wish her well, and often include a prayer before closing with “*Blessings to you, Abraham.*” Yvonne had been drawn to Abraham at the wedding, too, and even gone on a walk with him. She’d been surprised how easily they had connected, and their conversation hadn’t felt like just small talk. But she’d felt guilty about being attracted to him only five months after Trevor’s death, so she hadn’t written him back, and his letters stopped coming three months ago.

Maybe, after a year and a half, it was time to jump back into the dating game. Abraham seemed like a kind man—who happened to be incredibly handsome. A tall guy with dark hair and dreamy blue eyes. Her stomach flipped when she thought about the possibility of going out with him, even though she was nervous about having to face him. Surely Eva or Jake had told him she was moving to Montgomery. They were pretty good friends.

Yvonne smiled. Change was in the air, and she prayed hard that this would be a good move for her.

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CHAPTER 1

Yvonne stood behind the counter at the bookstore as Jake stroked his beard and stared at a list of notes he had written down. When he looked up, she smiled. “What?” he asked, grinning.

“I’m still getting used to that beard.” She mimicked his hand by rubbing her chin. “But it totally works for you.” Amish men remained clean-shaven until they were married. Then they never trimmed or cut their facial hair again, except above their lip. No mustaches were allowed.

He chuckled. “Eva says it’s scratchy.”

His forehead creased with concern. “Are you sure you feel comfortable enough to be here on your own? I can stay a little longer if you want me to.”

She shook her head. “Nope, I’m good. You’ve got a sick father and a bedridden wife. Take care of your family, and I’ll see you later for dinner. And remember that I’m bringing pizzas.” Jake had spent three days training her, and in

the evenings she'd joined him and Eva for dinner at their house—"Supper," as they called the evening meal. Jake's mother had been doing most of the cooking since Eva was supposed to rest most of the day. Tonight, Yvonne wanted to treat them. She'd told Eva she would bring enough pizza for Jake's parents too. Eva had told her once that pizza was an indulgence and that they all loved it.

"I will call you if I have any questions or problems." Most of the Amish people in the area, except for some of the elders, had cell phones to be used for business or emergencies, Eva had told her.

"Ya, okay, then." Jake smiled. "We're happy to have you here, and the timing was perfect for you to take the job."

"I'm glad to be here too." She motioned toward the door. "Now go. I'll take good care of the place."

He hesitated but finally moved toward the door. "*Danki*, Yvonne," he said over his shoulder. The bell jingled as he exited the building.

Yvonne pulled her sweater snug around her. There was a nice fire going in the wood-burning stove not far from where she stood, but a blast of cool air had snuck in when Jake opened the door. She glanced up at the skylights, reminding herself there was no electricity in the entire store. It didn't present any real problems, except she missed having a microwave. There was a propane burner on the kitchen counter in the back room, but it wasn't the same as quickly zapping a meal. And the manual credit-card machine was a hinderance.

Still, she was grateful to be here in this new environment. It was only ten o'clock on a Tuesday, and so far, there

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hadn't been any customers, so she decided to peruse the shelves. She loved books—the way they smelled, how they felt in your hands.

She gingerly ran her hand along some titles Jake had just unpacked and put on the shelf. She'd already studied the inventory they had in stock. There was a nice assortment of fiction and nonfiction. Jake had told her all of the books were “clean reads,” but he did carry romance, mysteries, and thrillers along with an assortment of biographies, Bibles, and other religious books. Jake had also told her that his customers were Amish and *Englisch*—their term for non-Amish people.

Yvonne glanced over her shoulder when the bell on the door jingled and a lovely woman about her age walked in. She was tall and thin with rich, glowing auburn hair that hung in graceful curves just past her shoulders. She was wearing a stylish brown pantsuit with tan stilettos. Yvonne eyed her own blue jeans, casual white blouse, and black sweater. She had quickly adapted to a more laidback style since she'd arrived in the country. This woman didn't strike her as a local.

“Hello. Can I help you find anything?” Yvonne walked toward her. “Or do you just want to look around?”

The woman eyed Yvonne up and down, only the hint of a smile on her face. “You must be the new person Jake hired?” She raised a sculpted eyebrow.

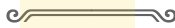
“Yes, I'm Yvonne Wilson.” She extended her hand, and the woman hesitated but eventually made contact, barely. It was one of those tentative handshakes where only her fingers participated.

“I’m Brianna Stone. And I think I’ll just browse if that’s okay.” She spoke softly, a delicacy that matched everything about her. Yvonne wondered what she did for a living.

Yvonne waved an arm around. “Sure. Of course.” She paused. “By the way, I love the name Brianna. I always thought that if I ever had a daughter, I would consider that as a name for her.”

“Thanks.” Brianna strolled toward the gift section. The woman walked like a model on a runway—with grace, her head held high, and an abundance of confidence. She was truly stunning.

Yvonne stepped behind the counter and sat down on the stool as she eyed her clothes again. She might need to step up her game if she planned to date again.



Brianna chose a spot in the gift section of the store where she could catch glimpses of Yvonne as discreetly as possible. The woman was pretty, she supposed. Short, with shoulder-length brown hair, hazel eyes, and a friendly smile.

So, she is my competition. Brianna had only been dating Abraham Byler for three months, but several people had already told her he’d had a huge crush—for lack of a better word—on a friend of Jake and Eva’s. He’d apparently even written to her in Houston after they’d spent time together at Jake and Eva’s wedding. When she’d casually asked Abraham about it one evening, he’d just shrugged and said, “Yeah, we kind of connected, but I never heard back from her.” Brianna had heard regret in his voice, which hadn’t

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really bothered her until she learned that the woman had moved to Montgomery.

Her relationship with Abraham was just starting to get serious, and she didn't need any distractions. Montgomery was a small town with few eligible bachelors. Abraham was a catch for sure, and Brianna had always had a thing for handsome men in uniform.

As she eyed Yvonne again, she surmised that "cute" was the best way to describe her. Not gorgeous but appealing enough to warrant competition. Surely Abraham wouldn't still have interest in a woman he hadn't seen in a year and only spent a few hours with and who'd never returned his phone calls or letters.

Just the same, Brianna wanted Yvonne to know that Abraham was off-limits, and it seemed best to establish that fact early on. She picked up two five-by-seven picture frames with tasteful crystal-like hearts in each corner, then walked toward Yvonne and set them on the counter.

"Those are some of my favorites," Yvonne said as Brianna dug around in her purse, finally pulling out the envelope she'd been searching for.

"Yes, they're lovely." She took out two identical photos from the envelope. "I just want to make sure this picture fits. I'm pretty sure it's a five-by-seven." As she placed the picture atop the frame, she lifted her eyes to Yvonne, not wanting to miss her reaction.

"Is that . . ." Yvonne turned one of the pictures around, then picked it up as she blinked her eyes a few times. "That's Abraham Byler." Her eyes widened.

"Yes." Brianna smiled. "It's one of my favorite photos

of us. We were at dinner in Bloomington, and I asked the waitress to take a picture of us. It was our three-month anniversary—three months that we’ve been dating.” She knew the answer to her next question but wanted to hear what Yvonne would say. “Do you know Abraham?”

Yvonne set the photo down. “Um . . . no, not really. I mean, we met a few times, but I don’t really know him.”

“He’s an amazing man, so kind and thoughtful. On our first date, he brought me a dozen yellow roses and told me how beautiful I looked.” She kept her eyes on Yvonne as a momentary look of discomfort revealed itself in the woman’s expression. “And then we slipped naturally into a relationship and have been going out ever since.”

Yvonne chewed her bottom lip for a few seconds, then attempted to smile. “That’s wonderful. He seemed like a super nice guy the few times I was around him.”

“He’s great.” Brianna handed Yvonne her credit card. “Tonight, he’s coming to my place, and I’m cooking him dinner. I’m going to give him this framed picture of us to keep at his place. And I’ll have one at my house.”



Yvonne was having a hard time hiding her disappointment that Abraham was dating someone, but she forced herself to stop gnawing on her lip and ran Brianna’s card through the antique credit-card machine. She should have expected this, and she shouldn’t be surprised that he’d chosen someone as beautiful as Brianna to go out with. But Yvonne wished more than ever that she would have at least written

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Abraham back. It would have been the polite thing to do, no matter her feelings at the time.

She'd been afraid to face him for the first time, but maybe she didn't need to be since dating him was now off the table. It was silly of her to think he wouldn't have found someone. Brianna had said they'd been dating for three months, right about the time Abraham's letters stopped coming.

Yvonne wrapped the frames with tissue paper as Brianna slipped the photos back into the envelope, then carefully put it in her purse. After Yvonne slipped the gifts into a bag, she handed it to Brianna. "I'm sure he'll love the framed picture."

"Yeah, I think he will. I know I'll love having one at my place."

She took her credit card back and put it in her wallet, which Yvonne noticed was a Louis Vuitton that matched her purse by the same designer. Those bags cost upward of twenty-five hundred dollars, a fact that made Yvonne more curious than ever about what Brianna did for a living. She obviously didn't come from a simple upbringing like Abraham. Or maybe she did but now had a job that afforded her such luxuries. Yvonne thought she'd done well in her career before, but she could have never bought a Louis Vuitton.

"Nice to meet you," Brianna said in her soft voice as she gave a quick wave before she turned to head toward the door.

"You too." Yvonne watched her walk down the sidewalk and get into her Mercedes. What was this seemingly sophisticated woman doing in a small town like Montgomery? Her

curiosity was spiked since, based on her limited knowledge of Abraham, he and Brianna appeared a bit mismatched. Then Yvonne recalled her own attire when she'd blown into town a year and a half ago. She'd probably given off the same impression at the time.

She recalled the walk she'd taken with Abraham the day of Jake and Eva's wedding. Abraham had sensed that Yvonne needed to get away from the hustle and bustle as Amish ladies scurried everywhere, putting food out for the reception. Being at a wedding had rebirthed her grief, and talking about it with Abraham had come easily. She'd found herself sharing about Trevor more than she'd meant to, but Abraham had seemed to genuinely care about her loss. When he'd asked if he could write to her when she left, she'd told him yes. Looking back, she'd been afraid she might actually fall for Abraham. It had felt like it would be a betrayal to Trevor if she corresponded with Abraham.

Yvonne attempted to wrap up her thoughts about Abraham and bask in this new opportunity, but she was frazzled. To distract herself, she scribbled herself a note to remember to pick up the pizzas later, then made a list of things she wanted to accomplish today. Staying busy had a way of keeping random thoughts at bay.



Yvonne arrived with four large pizzas that evening. "There's a plain cheese one, a pepperoni, a meat-lover's, and a supreme," she said as she set the boxes on the table. Eva was already sitting on a kitchen chair. Her friend joined the

family for meals, but Yvonne always excused herself quickly after they ate so Eva could get back in bed.

“This is so nice of you.” Eva eyed the boxes, then looked up at Yvonne. “*Danki* so much for doing this.”

Yvonne chuckled. “Are you kidding me? This is the least I can do for all the meals you’ve shared with me since I got here. I appreciate all your mom’s fabulous cooking.” She pointed to the pizza boxes. “Should I take them a pizza at the *daadi haus*?” It was two of the few words Yvonne knew in Pennsylvania Dutch, referring to the smaller house on the property where parents or grandparents usually retired to when it was time for one of their children to marry and start a family. Jake was the obvious choice to remain in the main house since he was an only child.

“*Mamm* said she’d be over later to pick up some pizza,” Jake said as he loaded a slice from each pie onto his plate. “She said to thank you. *Mei* parents love pizza as much as me and Eva.”

After they all had food on their plates, they bowed their heads in silent prayer.

“So, how did it go at the store today on your first day by yourself?” Jake asked.

Yvonne finished chewing before dabbing her mouth with a napkin. “There weren’t many people, but I remember you said that’s typical for a Tuesday. Everything went fine, though. A few ladies from Illinois came in and bought quite a bit.” She was trying to ease into a conversation about Abraham. They hadn’t brought up his name since she’d arrived. “And I met Abraham Byler’s girlfriend, Brianna.”

Jake and Eva exchanged looks before Jake cleared his

throat. “Uh, *ya*, they’ve been dating about three months. We don’t know much about her. I’ve talked to Abe, so I know he’s been spending a lot of time with her, but we haven’t met Brianna.”

“Before I had to stay in bed most of the day . . .” Eva rolled her eyes. “. . . which I’m so tired of . . . a couple of ladies at a Sister’s Day were talking about his new girlfriend. Abe’s family is still here, and since he grew up Amish, everyone knows who he is.”

“She didn’t seem like his type.” Yvonne regretted the judgmental comment right away.

Jake grinned. “*Ya*, I think he was a little smitten with you, but he understood that it hadn’t been that long since your fiancé passed.”

“But you said he wrote you letters and even tried to call, right?” Eva shifted her weight in her chair, flinching a little. “This *boppli* moves around a lot.”

“She’s just anxious to get here.” Yvonne smiled. “Yes, I believe it to be a girl even though you don’t know that for sure. And, yes, Abraham did try to correspond with me.” She shrugged. “I just felt it was too soon to have a close male friend, but I should have written him back. I feel bad about that.”

They ate quietly for a few minutes.

“Does he know I’m living here now?” Yvonne tried to sound casual and didn’t make eye contact with Jake or Eva.

“*Ya*, he does. I don’t know how serious things are with him and Brianna.” Jake waggled his brows at Yvonne. “Want me to find out?”

Yvonne felt herself blushing. “No. Don’t do that. I don’t

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want to wreck anything he has going on with Brianna, although I don't think that's possible anyway. The woman is knockout gorgeous, which is fitting since he is such a good-looking man."

"Looks aren't everything." Eva grinned, then turned to Jake. "I just happened to have lucked out and married the most handsome man on the planet, who also has a huge heart."

Jake blew her a kiss. "Back atcha, *mei* beautiful *fraa*."

Yvonne smiled. Jake and Eva were cute together. And they had Yvonne starting to think she wanted someone special in her life too. But it didn't look like it was going to be Abraham Byler.



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CHAPTER 2

Abraham sat on Brianna's couch, sinking into the plush cushions colored in hues of blue and turquoise. Brianna had placed a wrapped package on her glass coffee table, which actually seemed too tall for a coffee table and had long, winding silver legs. Everything about Brianna's house was modern and looked like it could be featured in a magazine—a stark contrast to the farmhouse Abraham had redone a couple of years ago. When he sat on his couch at home, he could put his socked feet on top of the coffee table. Not here. Nor did he think he would even if the table were lower. It just felt more formal here.

“I got you something today.” Brianna sat down beside him, smiling. “Open it.”

“And what did I do to deserve this?” Abraham angled around the radio attached to the belt that held up his blue jeans, the volume turned down as low as it would go. He was off duty but on call and hoping it would be a quiet

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night as he reached for the package wrapped in blue paper. It matched the living room, which was decorated in blue and white, along with her kitchen. Shiny white floors flowed throughout. Her bedroom was also decorated in the same colors, with a bedspread covered in large blue-and-white flowers. Not that he had ever been in her bed. Maybe it was his Amish upbringing, but he wanted to reserve that sacred act for marriage.

Brianna seemed to have other ideas about that sometimes and could be hard to resist. She was beautiful, generous almost to a fault, and one of the smartest people he'd ever known. She was a certified public accountant and worked from home, but he was still unclear why she'd packed up her life in New York and moved to the small town of Montgomery. She was evasive every time he brought up the subject. As a cop, he'd had the thought to run a background check on her, but he'd immediately quashed that idea. It was wrong on a lot of levels, including an abuse of his job. He was dating the woman, not investigating her, and an unwillingness to discuss her background didn't make her a criminal.

"It's just a little something." Brianna folded her hands in her lap as she waited for him to unwrap the gift.

He swallowed hard when he saw the photo of them inside a pretty frame with hearts in each corner. His first thought was that it seemed too soon for such a gift. But Brianna was clearly waiting for a response. "It's pretty." He forced a smile. "Thank you."

She snuggled up to him and kissed him on the cheek. "Now, when we're not together, you'll have a picture of us

at your place.” She pointed to a hutch against the wall. “See, I have a photo of us too.”

After nodding to acknowledge her identical frame and picture, he said, “Thank you,” again. “I appreciate the gift and . . .” He breathed in the scent of something heavenly coming from the kitchen. Everything about Brianna’s place was lavish and made him uncomfortable, but her cooking skills were top-notch. “What’s that I smell cooking?”

“It’s a *tartiflette*, which is a fancy word for a cheese-and-potato bake. It’s French. I think you’ll like it.” She leaned around and kissed him on the mouth, the aroma of her floral perfume filling his nostrils and tempting him to follow her lead, but he gently eased her away.

“I’m starving,” he said and smiled before he gave her a quick peck.

She stood, motioning for him to do the same. “The table is set, and I have a fresh pitcher of sweet tea ready for you.”

Abraham followed her into the kitchen, which was almost as big as his living room. He inhaled again as his stomach growled, then helped her finish prepping the food. In minutes, the main dish, a salad, and bread sat waiting on the white table. As usual, Brianna had a glass of red wine by her plate. Abraham reached across the table for her hand and thanked God for the food and an abundance of blessings.

“Amen,” they both said. He wasn’t sure where Brianna’s faith stood, but she had participated in prayer ever since he had offered to say the blessing before their first meal together.

The food was incredible, and he’d told her so at least three times when she finally cleared her throat and said, “I

went into Jake Lantz's bookstore today. That's where I got the frames."

Abraham nodded as he reached for another slice of bread. It wasn't like his mother made, but it was from a local bakery and pretty tasty. "They're good people, Jake and Eva. I heard she's on bed rest until the baby is born. And Jake's father is ill. Last I heard he was going to hire someone to run the bookstore." Abraham had been anxious about Yvonne's arrival ever since Jake told him she would be moving to Indiana.

"He did." Brianna was soft-spoken most of the time, but her voice rose a little louder now. "A woman named Yvonne who moved here from Texas."

Abraham couldn't recall mentioning Yvonne to Brianna, but it was a small town, and she could have heard the news from anyone. Or maybe Yvonne had told her.

"Do you know her?" Brianna raised an eyebrow.

Abraham knew better than to react with much excitement even though he was instantly elated on the inside. He hadn't known Yvonne was already here. He also didn't know exactly how much Brianna knew about his prior interactions with Yvonne, limited as they were.

He nodded, finished chewing. "I met her a couple of times." *And I've never stopped thinking about her.* "But I don't really know her." He recalled the letters he'd sent her and how she never wrote back or answered his call. He'd been disappointed at the time, but he understood. It had been too soon for her to acknowledge an attraction between them. He was sure she'd felt it too; they had just clicked naturally. But the timing was off.

And now she was living here, and the timing felt off again.

“She seemed very nice.” Brianna beamed, and Abraham wondered if the two women would become friends, which felt odd for some reason. “Didn’t you say that new officer you introduced me to is single and looking to meet someone? Maybe you should connect the two of them.”

“Bruce? Yeah, he’s looking to meet someone, but I don’t think they’d be a good fit.” Abraham didn’t like the idea of anyone he knew dating Yvonne. He had been so enchanted with her at the time, he didn’t think he’d like seeing her involved with one of his friends or associates.

“Why not?” Brianna had set her fork down and seemed genuinely interested. Or jealous. There were a few people in town who knew Abraham had written to Yvonne. Again, he wondered how much Brianna knew.

He shrugged. “I don’t know either one very well, but I can’t really picture them together.”

“Hmm . . .” Yvonne wiped her mouth with her napkin. Abraham waited for more, but she was quiet. They both were until the static of his radio broke the silence.

Abraham responded to the call before he looked across the table at Brianna. “I’m so sorry.”

She sighed. “I know. I know. You’ve got to go. Duty calls.” She stood when he did, then walked around the corner of the table and kissed him passionately. “I’ll be up late if you want to come back after you go take care of the bad guys.”

He sighed. “Maureen and Will Robertson aren’t exactly bad guys, but they act like it when they fight. This is the

third domestic-violence call that's come in on them." He kissed her before he moved toward the door, stopping with his hand on the knob and turning to face her as she approached him. "That was a wonderful dinner. Thank you."

"Of course." She gazed into his eyes. "Remember, I'm here if you want to come back."

"I'll call you," he said before giving her one final kiss and dashing out the door.

There wasn't much crime in Montgomery. Mostly domestic issues, the occasional robbery, and too many car and buggy accidents. At least that's how it had been since he joined the force well over a decade ago. Leaving his Amish upbringing had been a tough call and particularly hard on his family since he'd spent nineteen years living the Amish ways. But since he hadn't been baptized, he was free to make that choice without being shunned.

Now, at thirty-seven, he usually didn't have any regrets. Sometimes he missed the closeness of the community. He was still welcomed among them, but he was looking in from the outside now. He'd prayed hard about it for a lot of years, but even as a teenager, his decision not to be baptized had been backed up by the fact that he'd always thought he would eventually choose a lifestyle that didn't include the Amish ways. A friend's legal mishap had sparked his decision to leave, and it only gained fuel as he got older.

When he'd joined the police force, members of the community had been shocked since the Amish were passive, and being a cop crossed that line repeatedly. But even though he'd overhauled his life, he'd held tightly to his Christian

faith. And over the years his family and friends had grown at least more accustomed to his career.

When he showed up at Maureen and Will Robertson's house, Maureen was on the porch holding her cell phone and crying. Even in the dim light, Abraham could see her swollen eye, which would eventually turn black—like the other times. She had a cut on her lip.

“Are you ready to press charges now?” He handed Maureen a handkerchief to press against her mouth, which was bleeding.

“He doesn't mean to get like this. I know he had a bad day at work, and I probably shouldn't have called 911.” Maureen hung her head. She was a young gal, early twenties. Abraham had told her before that she needed to break this pattern unless she wanted to live this way the rest of her life.

“But you did call.” Abraham moved past her. “Will! Get out here,” he yelled over Maureen's shoulder.

Will was older than Maureen by over a decade. He was Abraham's age, and they'd lived here all their lives. As kids, they hadn't gone to school together since Abraham had attended school only through the eighth grade, as required in his district. Later, he'd pursued his education to get into law enforcement. But he remembered Will had been a bully even when they were younger, and as an adult he'd always seemed to hook up with younger, naïve women. The only reason Abraham knew Maureen was because of these frequent phone calls.

“I just want to take back the call.” Maureen sniffled

with the handkerchief still pressed to her mouth. “I’m not pressing any charges.”

Abraham turned his attention to Will as the man stumbled onto the front porch. “Hear that? No charges,” Will slurred.

“Maureen, this isn’t going to stop until you do something.” Abraham put a hand on his holster when Will pushed her out of the way and moved toward him. He’d never had to pull his weapon, and he hoped he never had to, but he was trained to be prepared.

“She ain’t pressing any charges, so get off my property.” Will staggered closer, then turned to Maureen. “Go on back in the house, sweetie.”

Abraham shook his head. Legally, he could take Will in, but it would all be for nothing. Maureen was too afraid of Will to press charges. Even if Abraham did go ahead and arrest Will, it would probably make things worse for Maureen when he got out of jail.

“You’re a bully, Will. Always have been, and I guess that will never change.” He pointed a finger at him. “But I’ll be hoping for Maureen’s sake that she wises up and gives you the boot.”

Abraham turned to leave, and before he’d gotten back in his patrol car, Will had gone inside and slammed the door. Abraham sat for a few minutes and prayed for the couple, especially for Maureen. After he prayed, he decided to go home instead of back to Brianna’s. Hearing Yvonne was in town—to stay—had rocked his world a little, which made him feel both exhilarated and guilty. Brianna was great, and he was lucky to be with her. But he couldn’t forget the short

time he'd spent with Yvonne. There was something about her that had kept him up nights.



Wednesday morning, Yvonne flipped through a catalog of books. Jake had asked her to pick out a few authors that he didn't typically stock—to try something new—but to keep it clean. She'd found four new authors that she thought would make good additions to his inventory. She was still browsing when her first customer of the day walked in the door.

She could feel the blush in her face before either of them said anything. “Hi, Abraham.” He looked exactly as she remembered, except even more handsome and somehow taller.

“I heard you were in town.” He slowly approached the counter. “Nice to see you again.”

Yvonne sighed. “It's nice to see you too. I'm sorry I didn't return your letters or call. I was, um . . . in a bad place at the time.”

“It's okay. Really. I understand.” He edged closer to the counter. “You seem to be doing well. Do you like living here so far?”

“Well, it's only been a few days, but I'm definitely enjoying the slower pace. And everyone has been really nice.” She took a deep breath. “I met your girlfriend, Brianna, yesterday. She's absolutely gorgeous.”

Now it was Abraham whose face reddened. “Yeah, we've been seeing each other about three months.”

“That's what she said.” Yvonne nervously tucked her

hair behind her ears. “What does she do for a living, if you don’t mind me asking? She dressed as if she had a professional job, and it’s such a small town, and . . .” She shrugged. “I was just wondering.”

Abraham walked even closer to the counter, near enough that Yvonne caught a whiff of his cologne, which took her back to the day they’d shared a walk at Jake and Eva’s wedding.

“She’s a certified public account, a CPA, and she works from home.” He chuckled a little. “She dresses like that every time she leaves the house. I always tell her it’s a lot more casual here than in New York.”

Yvonne thought about Trevor and how much he’d loved his trips to the Big Apple. Even though it had been a year and a half since her fiancé had died, there were still triggers that brought back memories.

“Well, she’s lovely.” She paused, tipped her head to one side. “What made her move here from New York?” Cringing, she added, “I hope I’m not being too nosy. I mean, I made the move from Houston. Similar situation, I guess. But I would think that moving here from New York would be even more of a culture shock. Did she live in New York City?”

Abraham nodded. “*Ya*, she did. And to tell you the truth, I’m not sure exactly why she packed up and left.” He scratched his clean-shaven chin. “She never wants to talk about it, so I haven’t pushed too much.”

Yvonne smiled. “I can still hear your Amish accent when you say certain words.”

“I get that a lot. I spoke the dialect for so long, I guess

part of it will always be with me. Kind of like the religion itself, it still lingers in my heart.”

“On our walk all that time ago, you said that an injustice was done to a friend of yours when you were young, and that’s why you chose to pursue a field in law enforcement.” He’d told her that an Amish boy had been unfairly jailed and ridiculed and that he’d wanted to be a voice for his people. “Do you ever regret leaving your roots?”

“Well, I didn’t go very far.” He grinned, which caused Yvonne’s stomach to flip. Abraham was definitely more handsome than she’d remembered. “I purposely stayed here in Montgomery as kind of a voice for the Amish folks. And my family is here.” He scratched his cheek. “As for regrets? Yeah, sometimes I have regrets, but they are few and far between.”

He seemed intentional with his use of “yeah” instead of “ya.” Yvonne wondered what his regrets were, but she didn’t want to be too pushy. She was already asking a lot of questions.

An awkward silence ensued. Yvonne cleared her throat. “Well, is there anything I can help you with today? Looking for anything special?”



Abraham should probably lie right now, but he hadn’t been brought up that way. “No. I just came to say hello and to wish you well in this new venture.” She blushed a little. “I’m sure Jake was thrilled that you were willing to make the move. The poor guy has been running himself ragged trying

to keep up with the bookstore and the farm. His dad isn't able to help at all, and of course Eva can't do much right now either."

"I know. I feel bad for them, and I plan to do some cooking—frozen meals they can just heat up. Jake's mother has been doing most of the cooking, and they fed me several nights. I took pizza for everyone last night, but maybe over the weekend I can prepare some meals in between unpacking."

"I wouldn't worry about it too much if you don't have time to cook for them. Members of the community have been taking them lots of food. His mother enjoys cooking, so she probably insisted on cooking for you upon your arrival."

Abraham was having a hard time taking his eyes off her or making a move to leave. Her brown hair was still just above her shoulders, and her hazel eyes and sweeping lashes always captured him. He'd been wildly attracted to her from the first time he saw her, here in the bookstore, even though the circumstances could have been better. Someone had broken in, and Abraham had responded to the call.

She grinned, which sent his senses reeling. "I'm quite sure everyone in this community cooks better than I do. I've never had a meal here that I didn't love—and I'm a pretty picky eater. But I'll find ways to help Eva and Jake."

He waved an arm around the store. "It looks like you already have by accepting Jake's job offer."

She laughed, which he'd never heard before, and joy shone in her eyes. Perhaps time really did heal, and her grief was becoming more distant.

“He didn’t exactly *offer* me the job. I kinda begged. I was desperate for a change. But I do think he was glad to have someone he knows, and who loves books, to run the store.”

“Someone he trusts too.” Abraham felt warmth flow through him in her presence. It had been that way before and had resurfaced just seeing her.

Brianna. A pang of guilt punched him in the gut. “I guess I should go. I just wanted to stop by and wish you well.”

“I’m glad you did.”

He stared at her and knew he’d analyze those four words the rest of the day. Did *she mean* to sound as sultry as she did? Had he imagined it?

Abraham gave a quick wave and turned to leave. As the bell on the door jingled behind him, he walked the short distance to his patrol car. *What was it about Yvonne Wilson* that caused his heart to flutter? And how was he going to make it stop? Montgomery was a small town, and they were going to run into each other. The problem was two-fold: Abraham didn’t want the heady sensation to stop, but he had a girlfriend. He wasn’t going to do anything to hurt Brianna. She’d been great.



Brianna stayed far enough off the dirt side road, her car parked behind a cluster of trees, that Abraham couldn’t see her. She didn’t like being this person—a spy on her boyfriend—but she’d had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach the night before that Abraham might go see Yvonne.

And her boyfriend—a term that now felt threatened—hadn't even waited twenty-four hours before making contact with his former infatuation.

She waited until he pulled out of the bookstore parking lot and was on the main road before she called him. The call went straight to voice mail. “Hey, you.” She tried to sound chipper even though her emotions were going in another direction. “I just called to say good morning and to wish you a good day.” She decided not to ask him to call her, to wait and see if he would, even just to return the good-day wishes.

After she'd sat in her car thinking for a few minutes, she finally started it up and left her hiding place. She was drawn like a magnet to the bookstore, desperate to tell Yvonne Wilson to keep her claws away from Abraham, but that was crazy behavior, and she wasn't going there. Instead, she carried on with her plans for the day: to drive to Bloomington for a day of spa treatments—massage, pedicure, and manicure. The hour-long drive would give her time to think. She didn't want to make the same mistakes she'd made in New York with Mitch.

When her cell phone rang, Abraham's name flashed across the screen on her console, and she pushed the button on her steering wheel to answer. Her clenched stomach relaxed. He'd called her back within only a few minutes.

“Hi, there.” She did her best to sound casual and unaffected by his actions this morning.

“Sorry I missed your call. I'm going to do my best to have a good day even though it's going to be a long day. We've got a training session tonight, a mandatory thing. They've brought in some guy from Indianapolis that specializes in

when to draw your gun and when not to. It sounds repetitive, like other training sessions.”

“Aw, that sounds like we won’t be able to see each other tonight.” She wondered briefly if he was telling the truth but reminded herself that Abraham didn’t condone lying, no matter what. He’d said so more than once.

They’d been spending most of their evenings together even though Abraham wouldn’t spend the night. Brianna had done everything to seduce him into her bed, but she’d finally given up and promised herself she would respect his boundaries, no matter how archaic they were.

“I’m afraid not. Sorry about that. But I wanted to call and tell you to have a good day. Hope you enjoy your ‘day of maintenance,’ as you call it.” He chuckled, which was nice to hear. Everything sounded normal.

“Thank you, and I’m planning to make it a good day. How can I go wrong with a little pampering?” She paused. “So, how’s your morning been so far? Any calls?” Biting her bottom lip, she waited to see if he would tell her he’d been to the bookstore.

“Nope. No calls yet today. And that’s fine by me.”

She waited to see if he would offer up more. When he didn’t, she asked, “So what have you been up to then? Just riding around and keeping the community safe?” It was an effort to keep up this cheerful attitude when her chest felt so tight.

“That’s it. Just driving around and making sure the people in Montgomery are safe.” He didn’t sound like a man who was hiding something. She was going to have to ask him a direct question. “Well, I know I feel safe just

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knowing you're out there. So, no stops at the bakery this morning or anywhere else?"

"No, I ate a little something before I left home, so I didn't stop for donuts." He laughed. "Cops and donuts. Seems to be the running joke."

Brianna tightened her grip on the on steering wheel. He wasn't lying, but he wasn't offering up information about stopping at the bookstore. She was going to give it one more shot. "Well, I know when it's slow in the morning, you like to stop and visit with people or get some breakfast."

"Just cruising the streets. But I'll check in with you later to see how your spa day went."

Her heart pounded against her chest like a base drum. Still not lying but definitely covering up the fact that he'd gone to see Yvonne this morning. She was going to need to keep a close eye on his whereabouts, which was exhausting. But she wasn't going to lose Abraham. She couldn't. She was in love with him even if she hadn't told him yet.

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