

HOPEFULLY  
*EVER*  
AFTER

AN AMISH BOOKSTORE NOVEL

BETH WISEMAN

 ZONDERVAN®

ZONDERVAN

*Hopefully Ever After*

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*Printed in the United States of America*

23 24 25 26 27 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## GLOSSARY

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

*ach*: [exclamation]

*boppli*: baby

*bruder*: brother

*daadi*: father

*daadi haus*: small parents’ house on property

*danki*: thanks

*Die Kelt is farichderlich den winder*: The cold is terrible this winter. (Kelt is capped.)

*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*: girl, young woman

## GLOSSARY

*maed*: girls, young women

*mamm*: mom

*mei*: my

*mudder*: mother

*nee*: no

*onkul*: uncle

*Ordnung*: the unwritten rules of the Amish

*rumschprunge*: adolescent rite of passage (lit: “jumping around”)

*schweschder/schweschdere*: sister/sisters

*schweeger*: brother-in-law

*sohn*: son

*urgrossvadder*: great-grandfather

*Wie bischt*: Hello/how are you

*wunderbar*: wonderful

*ya*: yes

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## CHAPTER 1

Eden checked her text messages as she slouched into the back seat of the cab, hoping Emma had given her enough cash to pay for this long ride to her new home for a month. She'd already been in the car over an hour, but her cousin certainly couldn't have picked her up at the airport in a horse and buggy.

She felt an air of excitement about visiting a new place, although as the scenery became more and more rural, she wondered what teenagers did for fun here. Farms lined the two-lane road they now drove on, and she hadn't seen a Walmart in at least forty miles.

"Sir, can you tell me how much farther?" She straightened, leaning closer to the front seat.

"Only about five minutes." The older taxi driver cocked his head to one side. "Maybe a little longer. It's been a good while since I've been out this way, but the GPS seems to think it's only five minutes."

Eden took a deep breath as she glanced at the butterfly tattoo on her left hand. It was significant and meant something to her, but she suspected her cousin wouldn't approve.

She'd removed her nose ring at Emma's insistence. And she'd changed out of shorts and a tank top—also at her cousin's recommendation—before she'd left. Now she wore jeans, a short-sleeved red shirt, and flip-flops. It was July. Too hot for jeans, but apparently the Amish were conservative, and Emma wanted her to make a good impression.

She would only be here for a month. Did it really matter what these people thought of her?

Somehow it did, she decided, even if only a little. Eden wondered how much Emma had told Yvonne and her husband about her mother and about Eden's own problems with the law. She'd probably told her everything.

Eden sighed. How cool it would be to go somewhere where no one knew anything about her, a place where her background didn't shadow her like a bad dream she couldn't wake up from.

Her pulse picked up when the driver pulled onto a gravel driveway that led to a farmhouse. She could tell it was old—the way the front porch wrapped around it, the shutters on the windows, the general look of it, like old farms she'd seen in movies. It was beautiful. Sunlight reflected off the plush green grass in the yard, and the flowerbeds were filled with colorful blooms. When she stepped out of the cab, the smell of freshly cut grass wafted up her nose and took her back to a time in her life when she'd been a little girl. And happy.

There were no neighbors that she could see. A big red barn stood off to one side of the white house with shutters the same color as the barn. Eden had never ridden a horse, but she could see a tail swishing back and forth inside the red structure. Two buggies sat parked close to the white

picket fence. This might as well have been another planet in comparison to where she was from.

Her cousin and her husband came out of the house wearing the kind of clothes Eden had looked up on the internet—a big baggy dress for Yvonne with a bonnet on her head and a funky haircut with cropped bangs, along with suspenders, for her husband. Their attire didn't surprise her. But Yvonne's overall appearance did. Even at a distance, and without any makeup, her cousin was pretty for someone older, in her thirties.

Eden paid the driver and tried to ignore his scowl. The ride had been more than Emma had estimated, which left only enough for a two-dollar tip. The guy spun his wheels a little as he backed out of the driveway, sending a whirlwind of dust everywhere. Eden waved her hand in front of her face, picked up her bulky red suitcase, and headed across the yard.

"I've got that." Abraham met her in the yard and eased the luggage from her hand. Eden had been worried more about him than Yvonne, but his blue eyes brimmed with kindness. At least that was Eden's initial impression. Maybe he'd be okay. She believed you could tell a lot by a person's eyes. Max's eyes always blazed with icy contempt when he was angry, which was a lot. His glare grew more brazen when he was in a bad mood. Eden's insides braided into knots each time, just before he smacked her across the face—for back talking, as he called it.

After a slight shiver, she pushed the thought aside, opting to believe that Abraham was a nice guy. *Aren't all Amish good people?*

“Thanks,” she said to Abraham as they walked across the yard toward the steps to the porch, where Yvonne stood waiting. “Thank you for having me,” she added almost inaudibly to the stranger by her side, and Abraham smiled, nodding. She wasn’t shy, but her voice had abandoned her, and she was more nervous than she’d thought she would be, realizing she really did want to make a good impression—more than a little. Maybe this trip could be practice to be the kind of person she wanted people to see. Plus, she didn’t need Emma on her case when she got back. They’d had a few run-ins since she’d come to stay with her, mostly because Eden didn’t always get home when she was supposed to, and once for sneaking out in Emma’s car. But it had been for an important reason the day she did that.

It probably wouldn’t be an issue here. There likely wasn’t anywhere to go or anything to do. Except maybe ride a horse. That interested her. Maybe she could even go for a drive in one of those buggies.

She extended her hand to Yvonne, but her cousin pulled her into a hug instead, which was nice, kind of like a real hug. Emma tended to barely hug, mostly a light embrace with a pat on the back. But Yvonne squeezed her, almost too much.

“Welcome to our home, Eden. We’re thrilled to have you staying with us.”

If Yvonne didn’t mean it, Eden would never be able to tell. Her cousin’s smile looked as real as her hug felt, and she was even prettier up close, with straight white teeth and a flawless complexion. She had a few of those feathery lines by her eyes, but Eden thought that must be because she



smiled so broadly. Eden knew from experience that pretty people on the outside didn't mean they were always pretty on the inside. But until Yvonne did something to prove otherwise, she was going to take the same stance as she had with Abraham—nice people. It was part of her “new me” attitude that she'd brought with her for this trip.

*I am not my mother. I am not my mother. I am not my mother.* She would continue to say it in her mind, and out loud when she could, until she fully believed that she was different.

“Thank you for having me,” she said to Yvonne after her cousin released her from the mega bear hug. She felt sweat already pooling at her temples from the short walk across the yard.

“Come in, come in.” Yvonne pushed open a screen door, and Eden waited for a burst of cool air to hit her. Then she remembered.

*No air conditioning.* Or electricity. Or television. Or internet.

She glanced at the phone in her hand. Only one bar of service. But even as she dripped with sweat, an amazing aroma greeted her, causing her to momentarily forget she stood in a furnace. Something smelled awesome, like cookies or bread baking, and maybe something stewing on a burner. She hadn't realized how hungry she was until now.

Inside, a black dog with patches of white lay on a rug in front of the fireplace. Eden loved dogs and squatted down to scratch the animal behind his ears.

“*Ach*, wait!” Yvonne stiffened. “He's not always friendly to strangers.”

“I think he’s great.” Eden continued to love on the dog, who had his paws crossed in front of him. He casually rolled onto his back for some petting on his tummy.

“Wow. His name is Blue, and he sure seems to like you.” Yvonne grinned as she rested her hands on her hips. “They say dogs have a sixth sense about people.”

“I don’t know about that, but he sure likes his tummy rubbed.”

Yvonne chuckled. “Indeed, he does. Oh, and I asked Aunt Emma if there was anything you didn’t eat, and she said there wasn’t.” Yvonne chuckled. “So, hopefully she wasn’t holding back. We’ve got a feast in the kitchen to welcome you.” She pointed to the hallway. “But first, if you want to get situated, Abraham can carry your suitcase to your bedroom.”

“Sure, okay.” Eden was starving, but she was anxious to see where she’d be staying for the next month as she followed Abraham around the corner.

“It’s nothing fancy, and I promise it will cool down in the evening,” Abraham said as he set her suitcase down on the wood floor just inside the bedroom door. He pointed over his shoulder. “The bathroom is at the end of the hall, and let us know if you need anything.” Then he nodded to a small fan on the bedside table. “That works using batteries, but it puts out a *gut* burst of air.” It was blowing at what appeared to be full speed. There was also a lantern on the nightstand.

“That’s a pretty quilt on the bed.” Eden ran her hand along the pastel colors within the diamond shapes.

Abraham smiled. “*Ya*, glad you like it. *Mei mamma*

made it.” He ran a hand through cropped bangs that stood almost straight up after he did so—from sweat, she supposed. “Get settled, and we’ll see you shortly for dinner.”

“Okay, thank you.”

*Dinner?* It was only one-thirty. Then she recalled the little bit of research she’d done about the Plain people. The Amish referred to lunch as *dinner*, and the evening meal was called *supper*. No matter the term, the flavorful smells had followed her to her bedroom, and she couldn’t wait to dig in.

After Abraham left, she made a further inspection of her bedroom. Her stomach growled as she eyed the colorful bed covering again. From Abraham’s wording, Eden wasn’t sure if his mother or grandmother had made the quilt. At Emma’s encouragement she’d tried to familiarize herself with some of the dialect the Amish spoke, but her cousin had also said they spoke fluent English, so Eden hadn’t bothered with learning much Pennsylvania Dutch. ®

There was a plain wooden desk with one drawer against the far wall, along with a small, inornate chair. She gingerly ran her hand along the top of the desk before easing open the drawer. Inside sat a spiral notebook, two pencils, a pen, and a few envelopes. There was even a book of stamps. Eden couldn’t think of anyone she wanted to correspond with. Emma had said she would send postcards, but Eden knew how long international mail could take. She’d had a pen pal in Switzerland when she was around ten. It didn’t last. Most of Eden’s relationships, even domestically, didn’t. Her mother either moved them from apartment to apartment, forcing Eden to change schools, or she was cast out

among her peers as a mini mold of her mother and not considered good friendship material by their parents.

She'd been placed in foster care when her mother went to jail, before Emma had taken her in. Surprisingly, she'd managed to make a few semi-friends but was yanked from that environment after two months. She had liked her foster parents—they were nice to her—but Emma was family, and it was decided she should live with her, which was mostly okay.

Eden had a few girls she ran around with in the neighborhood where she'd lived with her mother and her mother's boyfriend, Max. But they had stopped returning her calls a long time ago. She was sure word had spread quickly about her mother being sentenced to three years in prison. Max only got six months, which seemed unfair since he was the one who'd gotten her mother involved in their nonlucrative drug business. Eden was sure most of their profit was injected into their arms.

Maybe she would write her mother a letter. Or maybe not. In the beginning, all her mother had done was try to call her collect, knowing Eden didn't have the money to pay for the calls. She took the first few, but when she got a seventy-five-dollar bill, she quit answering. Besides, all her mother did was cry, which caused Eden to cry.

Over the months since she'd been living with Emma, the hurt she'd felt about her situation had morphed into anger. Emma was good to her, but she was old, and they didn't have much in common. Eden didn't even try to make friends at school these days. What was the point? They'd eventually

find out her mother was in prison—a fact that seemed to define Eden, whether it was fair or not.

She sat on the queen bed and bounced up and down. It was comfy enough. There was a Bible in the drawer of the nightstand, which Eden had already read, but no novels or other reading material. Eden had learned to bury herself in books a long time ago. She'd been excited when she learned that Yvonne worked at a bookstore. Maybe she could use the little bit of spending money she had to purchase some novels.

She turned the fan toward her until it blew right into her face, and hoped that Abraham was right that it would cool down in the evening.

Her thoughts jumbled as she considered her options. She'd had a month to think about this trip. Emma had been kind when she explained about her planned trip to Europe, and Eden didn't feel like she was being dumped somewhere. Her cousin, Yvonne, and her husband seemed nice based on the brief introduction. They were younger than Emma but old enough that they probably couldn't relate to a sixteen-year-old, and they didn't have any children. Eden doubted they would become close. She would only be here a month, and she wasn't sure how much of her past she was willing to share—things that Emma probably suspected but that Eden had never confirmed. She still shivered when she thought about the way Max always tried to touch her when her mother wasn't around.

She found herself swallowing back sobs in her throat daily. She could either choose to be a victim—life surely

hadn't treated her fairly—or let go of the past and commit to being the best person she could be.

Eden chose the latter, but it wasn't without a struggle.



Yvonne twisted her hands in front of her as she stared at the kitchen table. She'd given up her rental property and moved into Abraham's farmhouse when they'd gotten married, but it didn't have a separate dining area. The kitchen was spacious enough for a table that could seat six, and Yvonne had filled it to capacity with food.

"It's just one sixteen-year-old girl," Abraham said as he came up behind her and slipped his arms around her waist. "You've made plenty, if that's what you're looking so worried about."

She spun around to face him, then shrugged. "Who says I'm worried?"

He kissed her on the forehead. "I know that look."

"I just want everything to be perfect."

Yvonne's warped way of thinking had gotten under her own skin. She'd found herself thinking that if Eden liked them and was happy during her stay, she wouldn't get in any trouble while she was here or cause any problems. It was judgmental and wrong to assume there'd be an issue, but Yvonne was proud that she at least recognized it for what it was so she could make a conscious effort not to be this way.

"Wow." Eden walked into the room, and Abraham instantly removed his arms from around Yvonne's waist. "Everything looks awesome."

“I tried to make a variety. A couple of dishes are things I learned to cook when I lived in Texas, and others are recipes Abraham’s mother shared with me.”

“Yeah, I heard you haven’t been Amish for long.” She nodded at Abraham. “He has more of an, um . . . Amish accent? Is that what you’d call it?”

“I guess so.” Abraham chuckled, then waved an arm over the table. “Pick a seat.”

Eden glanced back and forth between them. “Do you have certain places you sit?”

Yvonne chewed her bottom lip for a moment and decided to be honest. “I usually sit there.” She pointed to one of the side chairs. “And Abraham usually sits beside me at the head of the table.”

“Okay.” Eden pulled out the chair right across from where Yvonne always sat. Maybe that was a good sign. She hadn’t chosen a chair at the opposite end of the table.

After they were seated, Yvonne folded her hands together, but before she lowered her head, she said, “I know in the *Englisch* world, most people say their prayers aloud. We usually pray silently.” She paused, waiting for a reaction from Eden. When there wasn’t one, she said, “Do you have a preference?”

Eden tipped her head to one side. “The *Englisch* world?”

Yvonne cringed. “Sorry. That’s a term for people who aren’t Amish.”

“Oh.” Eden smiled. “I tried to learn some of your dialect, but I guess I missed that. As for the prayer, it doesn’t matter to me either way.”

Yvonne glanced at Abraham. Her husband was eyeing

the food and probably ready to dive in. “We’ll just pray silently.” She lowered her head, said her prayers quickly, and raised her head to see if Eden had even lowered hers. The girl still had her head down. Abraham lifted his eyes to Yvonne’s, and Eden still hadn’t raised her head. They waited. Yvonne wondered if she had that much to say to God or if she was trying to make a good impression.

*Judgmental*, she reminded herself.

When Eden lifted her head, she smiled again. She was a beautiful girl with long blonde hair that was pulled back in a ponytail and gorgeous green eyes. Yvonne had noticed earlier that she was about as tall as her, which wasn’t saying either of them were very tall at five four. Eden was well proportioned—not too thin, not too heavy. Yvonne could recall her own figure at that age, back when she could eat anything she wanted and not gain weight. Now that she was in her thirties, she tried to watch what she ate to keep off any extra pounds. Pride and vanity weren’t something the Amish favored, but some of Yvonne’s old mindsets had stuck.

After they’d filled their plates, Yvonne hesitated. She longed to know more about their houseguest, but she didn’t want to seem too pushy. “So, you said you did a little research about our dialect. Did you look up Montgomery on the internet and see anything you might like to do? I’m afraid things are different here than what you’re used to. Emma has a lovely home, but it’s right in the middle of a subdivision.” She paused. “Um, is that how your house was in California too? In a neighborhood?”

“We mostly lived in apartments.” Eden plunged a



heaping forkful of roast into her mouth. After she swallowed, she said, “I knew it would be different in Indiana, but I didn’t realize how many farms there are. I saw lots on the way here, once we got out of the city.”

“*Ya*, farming is a big way of life here,” Abraham chimed in. “But I bet we can find you some fun things to do while you’re here.”

Eden halted another bite of roast and set her fork down. “There is one thing I’d like to do.”

Yvonne smiled. “Sure. Anything.” Then she chastised herself for reacting with such excitement. *Calm down.*

“I’ve never ridden a horse.” Eden blushed. “And I’d like to ride in one of those buggies.”

“Not at the same time, I hope.” Abraham laughed. So did Yvonne after Eden let out a chuckle. “I’m pretty sure we can make both of those things happen.”

Eden grinned and sat taller. “Cool. I’d love that.”

Yvonne started to wonder if she had worried for nothing. Eden seemed like a good kid, even though she hadn’t been with them for an hour yet. Just because the girl had been through a lot, it didn’t mean she wasn’t a good person.

Yvonne realized she was talking herself into believing what she wanted to believe. She changed tack. “You might already know this, but we only have church service every other Sunday. This is an off weekend, but tomorrow I was planning to deliver some meals to a few shut-ins who live nearby.” She dabbed at the sweat on her forehead—mostly from the heat, but possibly her nervousness was in play. “Maybe you would want to go and even learn to drive the buggy?”

Right away, she recalled her aunt telling her that Eden had once snuck out of the house and taken her car. Maybe Yvonne shouldn't have made that offer.

"Really? That would be so fun." Eden took another bite. The girl ate like she hadn't had anything in days, and there didn't seem to be anything on the table she hadn't piled on her plate—roast, potatoes with gravy, carrots, peas, corn on the cob, and buttered bread.

Yvonne glanced at her own plate with a small portion of roast, only a spoonful of peas, and one slice of bread. *Those were the days*, she thought as she watched Eden eat.

"But when it comes to actually riding the horses . . ." Yvonne pointed her fork at Abraham. "There's your teacher. I can ride, but I am not an expert, and I don't go fast."

Abraham snickered. "That's an understatement." He looked directly at Eden. "She rides slower than slow."

"I'd love to be able to ride really fast across an open field, like you see people in the movies doing." Eden used her napkin to clear sweat from her face. It had been dribbling from her temples since she'd sat down. Yvonne remembered how hard it had been for her to get used to no electricity, particularly no air conditioning.

"Abraham is a *gut* teacher." Yvonne smiled at her husband.

"I heard your accent a little just then." Eden smiled. "It's cute."

"Aw, *danki* . . ." Yvonne chuckled. "That means 'thank you.'"

"I actually knew that one!" Eden giggled. "Maybe I'll learn some more while I'm here."

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“I’m sure you will,” Abraham said as he reached for a slice of bread.

Yvonne’s stomach settled as she began to feel more at ease. *I’ve got this.* Eden was likeable and glad to be with them. What could possibly go wrong?



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## CHAPTER 2

Eden's heart raced as she sat in the driver's seat of an Amish buggy for the first time. Abraham and Yvonne had three buggies. Two of them were enclosed, but Yvonne had chosen the topless one they were in due to the heat inside the other rides. Luckily the sun was behind the clouds. Eden hoped it stayed that way, or this might be hotter than the other buggies. Either way, she was still thrilled to be having her first adventure.

"That's it. Just a gentle tap," Yvonne instructed, pointing to the reins in Eden's trembling hands.

Her cousin had driven them to several houses and delivered baskets of food to elderly people who weren't able to get out much. She'd given Eden driving instructions throughout the journey. Now it was Eden who would get them home, hopefully without any problems.

"Wow. This is so cool." Eden didn't think she could wipe the smile off her face if she tried. She felt like a pioneer woman on the back roads in some foreign land. It was actually an unpaved dirt road that Yvonne had turned onto, saying it would be a good place for Eden to practice.

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“There.” Yvonne smiled back at her. “Just keep us in a steady trot. You’re doing great.” Her cousin tucked loose strands of hair beneath her prayer covering, then blotted her face with a handkerchief. It was unbearably hot when they were stopped, but once they were moving, the breeze blew the sweat beads from their faces.

“Uh-oh. There’s another buggy coming toward us, and it’s going fast.” Eden’s pulse picked up even more as she glanced at Yvonne before refocusing on the road that was barely wide enough for two buggies to squeeze by each other. Dust blew in plumes around the oncoming buggy, also one without a top.

“It’s okay. Don’t panic. Just gently pull back on the reins to slow Clyde down a little bit.” Yvonne had told her there used to be a horse named Bonnie too—Bonnie and Clyde. It seemed weird to Eden that Amish people would name their horses after criminals, but she hadn’t questioned her cousin about it. “Clyde knows what to do. He will naturally move over to the far-right side of the road. And that’s probably Leroy, Abraham’s *bruder*. He and his family live on this road.”

“Okay.” Eden relaxed her shoulders and let out the breath she was holding. “I didn’t want to have a head-on buggy collision my first time driving.”

Clyde moved to the right, like Yvonne said he would, and the horse slowed to a walk, not really even a trot.

“Pull back a little on the reins and tell Clyde to stop. I want you to meet . . . uh . . . Oh, wait. That’s not Leroy, but it’s his son, Samuel.”

Eden was able to get Clyde to halt, and the guy driving the buggy slowed down, then came to a stop beside them.

“*Wie bischt*, Yvonne?” The good-looking Amish guy with sun-kissed blond hair, a beachy tan, and black sunglasses was dressed the way all their people did, but he was working the look. The wind had blown his cropped bangs to the side, and if not for the suspenders and straw hat, he could have passed for a regular guy. He wore a short-sleeved dark-blue shirt and black slacks.

Yvonne leaned forward around Eden. “We’re *gut*, Samuel.” She nodded to Eden. “This is *mei* cousin, Eden, and she’ll be staying with us for a month while *mei* aunt is traveling with some friends in Europe.”

“*Ya, Daed* mentioned something about that.” He flashed Eden a crooked smile, and she noted his dimples. “Nice to meet you, Eden.” He scratched his clean-shaven face, still grinning. “As in the garden of Eden?”

If she had a dime for every time someone had said that . . . “Yep, just like the garden. Nice to meet you too.”

Samuel chuckled as Clyde began to do his business, and Yvonne and Eden both pinched their nostrils closed. “Ew,” Eden said.

“All in God’s perfect timing.” Samuel laughed again.

“This is Eden’s first time to drive a buggy.” Yvonne lowered her hand from her nose. “I should have warned her this is an occupational hazard. Next, she wants to learn how to ride one of the horses. I told her Abraham is a *gut* teacher.”

“I want to ride fast across an open pasture,” Eden said as she pushed back strands of hair that had flown free of her ponytail and were stuck to her sweaty face.

Samuel noticed. “Next month will be worse. August is miserable,” he said before rolling his eyes.

At least her first night’s sleep had been decent the night before. Abraham had been right that it cooled down. “Can’t wait.” Eden rolled her eyes back at him, and he smiled again.

“I’ve got the perfect horse for you.” He winked at her, which caught Eden a little off guard, and she swallowed hard. She supposed Amish guys could flirt just as well as regular guys—and winking was flirting in Eden’s book.

“Really? How so?” She tipped her head to one side.

“She’s an old mare that is gentle as can be, but she’s still got it in her to run like the wind.” He whistled as his eyes rounded. “If you want to go fast, she’s your gal. And I just finished plowing the back pasture, so it’s ready for a good run.” He caught Yvonne’s eye. “If it’s okay with you and Abraham, I could easily have her up and riding on Bessie.”

Eden wanted to say Bessie sounded like a cow’s name, but she turned to Yvonne, who was chewing her bottom lip. “Um, *ya*, I guess that would be okay,” Yvonne said with hesitance.

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep her safe.” Samuel smiled again, and Eden’s stomach flip-flopped at the thought of learning to ride a horse—and spending time with her first acquaintance outside of Yvonne and Abraham, who just happened to be a hot Amish guy.

Her cousin nodded, but based on the way she kept gnawing on her bottom lip, Eden didn’t think Yvonne was a hundred percent on board.

“I’ll be super careful,” Eden said as she held up a palm

in Yvonne's direction. "I promise not to get hurt on your watch."

Yvonne finally smiled as she pointed a finger at Samuel. "Actually, it'll be *his* watch. And I'm trusting you, Samuel, to take it slow with her."

He put a hand on his chest as he sat taller. "It'll be *mei* watch, and she'll be fine."

"Well, okay, then." Yvonne sighed, then nodded.

"Wednesday is *mei* day off from work." He took off his sunglasses and blinked the sweat from his eyes, which were a tawny shade of brown. Eden tried to study them to see what they revealed, but he caught her staring and grinned. She felt herself blushing as she looked away.

"Are you still working for Ben Lantz?" Yvonne asked as she put a hand up to block the sun in her eyes.

"*Ya, ya.*" He looked at Eden. "We build decks, things like that." His eyes shifted to Yvonne. "Do you want me to pick her up, or . . . ?"

"*Nee*, I'll bring her over Wednesday on the way to the bookstore."

They settled on eight in the morning, said their good-byes, and Eden was soon back on the road. She had something to look forward to on Wednesday.



That evening at supper, Eden was bubbly and excited to tell Abraham about driving the buggy. He had been gone all day helping his younger brother, Daniel, repair a broken water



line. Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest, but not having water was reason enough to bend the rules.

Eden was animated and fun to watch. Yvonne smiled, and her husband laughed out loud several times when she detailed her time driving the buggy. The girl even had Blue's undivided attention from where he lay on the floor nearby, the dog's eyes wide as he watched Eden.

"I was so nervous at first." Eden shook her head, grinning, before she looked across the table at Yvonne. "But you were a good—*gut*—teacher."

"You might be fluent in Pennsylvania *Deutsch* by the time you go home," Abraham said.

Yvonne was happy the two of them were getting along. And things had gone well between Yvonne and Eden the rest of the day following their buggy ride. Yvonne hadn't learned much about her younger cousin, but she was also trying not to pry. They'd each taken a nap earlier, but something was niggling at Yvonne when she woke up. She wanted to talk to Abraham about it before Eden spilled about her plans for Wednesday, but she doubted the girl would hold back. Yvonne decided it might be better for her to ease into the conversation.

"We ran into Samuel today, and he said he has the perfect horse for Eden to ride. He said he would teach her. We set a date for Wednesday." Yvonne wished she had chosen another word besides date. She waited for Abraham to react.

"That's great," he said but kept his eyes cast down. Yvonne knew why, and she wondered if she should have come up with a reason to deny Samuel's kind offer. They

all knew Leroy was overly protective with his children, especially his three girls, but also with his only son. He was stricter than most Amish parents when it came to allowing his children to mingle with outsiders. He'd practically denied Samuel, the oldest, a *rumschpringe*. It was considered a given that when a child reached the age of sixteen, they were allowed to venture out on their own and experience the world. Nothing too major. Maybe see a movie, dress like outsiders, even if on the sly. Parents had an unspoken rule that they would look the other way during this time to allow their teenagers to choose baptism on their own. Almost all of them did. It had been almost a year since Samuel had turned sixteen, and Yvonne had heard plenty of stories about Leroy being too strict—that he would run his children off by doing that.

Leroy was good as gold, and Yvonne thought of him like a brother, but she didn't think he was going to approve of Samuel hanging out with Eden. Based on her husband's quiet reaction, Abraham didn't think it was going to go over well either.

"I'm sorry I didn't help you clean the kitchen last night. I was so tired," Eden said after she'd cleaned her plate and finished the last of her tea. "But I will tonight."

"*Nee*, that's not necessary. Really. You're our guest, and Abraham and I do that together. I wash, and he dries." Yvonne stood up and began clearing the table.

Eden slouched in her chair. "But I want to do something to help out while I'm here."

Yvonne continued to be impressed by the girl. She was polite, and so far she seemed quite genuine. A person

would have never known what she'd been through with her mother, foster care, and legal issues. Still, Yvonne suspected she didn't have all the facts. Despite outward appearances, there was still a part of Yvonne that had her guard up when it came to Eden, and she could see an explosive situation brewing between Eden and Samuel.

"Well . . ." Yvonne tapped a finger to her chin. "How do you feel about collecting eggs in the morning? And if you want to, you could top off the feed for the horses and make sure they have plenty of water in the trough."

"Sure." Eden's expression brightened. "Anything else?"

Abraham had cut himself a slice of apple pie and was busy adding a scoop of ice cream he'd retrieved from the freezer. Eden had passed on dessert, and so had Yvonne.

"There is one thing. We didn't mention it last night since it was your first night here, but we normally have devotions in the living room after supper each night." Yvonne stood holding a stack of plates as she waited for Eden to bow out. Yvonne doubted Eden's mother or foster parents had introduced her to religion any more than Aunt Emma.

No. That was an unfair assumption since Yvonne didn't know the people from Eden's past. Yvonne chastised herself again for letting judgment slip into her thoughts. But Aunt Emma wasn't a Christian, and she'd raised Yvonne to believe there was no heaven. It was likely she wasn't pushing religion with Eden.

"It's perfectly fine for you to choose not to participate. A person's faith journey is a personal choice." Yvonne said a quick prayer that Eden would open her heart to the opportunity to learn about God while she was staying with them.

Eden sighed dreamily. “Oh, wow. I would love that.” She paused, frowning. “I know Emma raised you and that you weren’t brought up as a Christian since Emma doesn’t believe Jesus died on the cross to save us. She told me that you were called to go on your own spiritual journey later in life, which is super cool. I guess I’ve had a similar experience.” She paused, smiled briefly, then crinkled her nose. “I wish Emma felt differently, but to each his own, and I think we have to respect that.”

Yvonne realized her jaw had dropped, so she quickly closed her mouth. This was either the most mature sixteen-year-old she’d ever known—and granted, she hadn’t known many on a personal level—or Eden was trying to impress them.

“Um, great.” Yvonne set the dishes she’d been holding on the kitchen counter. “If you want to go bathe, Abraham and I will get the kitchen cleaned up and meet you in the living room.”

“Sure.” Eden stood up. “*Danki* for a *gut* meal.” She smiled before she walked away.

“Bravo!” Abraham shouted as Eden hit the stairs, and they heard her giggle on her way up.

Yvonne waited until Eden was out of earshot. “Do you think she’s too *gut* to be true? I mean, Emma made it sound like she’s been through a lot. Even though I’m sure I don’t know everything, it seems like she would have scars, or at the least not be the perfectly sweet girl she appears to be.” She squeezed her eyes closed and cringed. “Abraham, I feel bad that I voiced those thoughts out loud.”

He shrugged, waited for her to ease the dishes into the

sink, then pulled her close and kissed her. “If you can’t vent to your husband, then who? Let’s give her a chance. She’s barely been here a day and a half.”

Yvonne pressed her lips into a thin line and thought about what she was going to say. “And something else is bothering me. I have concerns about Eden spending time with Samuel, but it was his idea to teach her to ride.” She paused when her husband flinched a little. “It worries you, too, doesn’t it? We both know that Leroy would prefer his children not to hang out with people who aren’t Amish. I think Anna might have even stronger feelings about it.”

“I did think about that, but it sounds innocent enough.” Abraham eased away from her and picked up a kitchen towel.

Yvonne began filling the sink with soapy water. “I don’t know about that.” She turned to face him. “There was no denying the attraction those kids had for each other. Eden couldn’t stop smiling, and Samuel . . . Well, he winked at her.”

Abraham grinned. “I remember being that age.”

“Me too.” Yvonne shook her head but eventually smiled. “I guess we shouldn’t borrow trouble. Eden wants to learn how to ride a horse, and hopefully that’s all their time together will amount to.”

“Agreed. We won’t borrow trouble.”

After they’d finished the dishes, they heard footsteps coming down the hallway. Yvonne handed Abraham the last dish, and after he dried it and put it in the cabinet, they met Eden in the living room. She was sitting in a rocking chair on the other side of the coffee table. Yvonne and

Abraham took a seat next to each other on the couch. Blue lay on his bed near the fireplace snoring lightly.

Eden's long, wet hair fell well past her shoulders, blowing slightly from the two fans they had near the opened windows. She wore white knee-length tattered shorts—the style for a girl her age—and a pink T-shirt with matching flip-flops.

“I hope it's okay to dress like this while I'm at your house.” Eden blushed, and Yvonne realized she must have been staring.

“*Ya*, sure. Of course.” Yvonne recalled the way she used to dress before she'd been baptized into the Amish faith. She missed it sometimes, especially in the summer heat.

“So, how does this work?” Eden cupped her chin as she glanced back and forth between Yvonne and Abraham. When neither of them answered right away, Eden said, “We're together, so I'm guessing we don't pray silently?” She grinned as she lowered her hand and looked at each of them again.

Yvonne waited for Abraham to speak, but her husband stayed quiet. “Well . . .” Yvonne cleared her throat. “As you said, Aunt Emma didn't raise me as a Christian, but once I found *mei* way to Him, it's been the most glorious experience. Having a relationship with *Gott* is a beautiful thing. And even though the journey is a personal one, sometimes knowledge of the Lord's Word, combined with educating yourself, can lead you on the path you were meant to be on.”

Eden stared at Yvonne as if she'd spoken to her in a language she didn't understand. Yvonne assumed she was going about this the wrong way, but as she glanced at Abraham,

her husband merely raised an eyebrow as if he expected her to keep going.

“We’d just like to help you have a relationship with *Gott*. That’s all.”



Eden fought the sob building in her throat, but she swallowed it back. Didn’t Yvonne hear her? Once again, her past was shadowing her. *The poor girl whose mother is in prison, who doesn’t have a dad, has been in foster care, and had some legal issues, couldn’t possibly be close to God.*

“I know God, and I have a good relationship with Him. I’m never opposed to learning more about God, but I *know* Him,” she said firmly as she raised her chin, resentful that Yvonne would assume her *faith* was stronger than Eden’s. “As you said, it’s a personal journey and one that I’ve been on for a while.” She paused to take a deep breath, recalling the fun day she’d had and how nice Yvonne and Abraham had been to her. “When I asked how it worked, I meant, do you choose a scripture and discuss it? Or do you say a series of prayers? I guess I wanted to know if there was an agenda for your devotion time.”

Yvonne’s mouth was opened slightly, and her cousin seemed at a loss for words. Eden hadn’t meant to sound snappy, but she’d been looking forward to having people to pray with. Most of her life, she’d had no way to get to church. Emma had taken her a few times, but Emma preferred to sleep late on Sundays and wasn’t interested in

attending herself, so Eden hadn't pushed the issue since she'd been living there.

"I'm sure Amish families, and non-Amish families, have their own way of settling into devotions in the evenings." Abraham spoke with tenderness as Yvonne stared at her lap. "Yvonne and I adopted traditions that I grew up with. We usually begin by thanking God for His many blessings. We ask for forgiveness of our sins, and we pray for those who are sick or hurting in some way—specifically naming those people. From there, we take turns choosing a scripture from the Bible, and we discuss it, what it means to us, and how we incorporate it into our lives." He paused, glanced at Yvonne, then reached for his wife's hand. "So, we can follow that line of thinking tonight, if you'd like, and you can choose a scripture if you want to. If not, that's okay too. How does that sound?"

Eden was reactive. She recognized the fault. People were so quick to judge her that she sometimes went on the defensive before it was warranted. Yvonne hadn't meant any harm, and Eden shouldn't have sounded so snippy. "If it's okay, I'd like to choose a scripture when it's time," she said as she attempted to infuse her comment with the tenderness Abraham had voiced so well.

"That would be great." Yvonne glanced briefly at Eden but then gazed at her husband, and Eden saw her squeeze his hand. She loved the way Yvonne and Abraham looked at each other, like they were truly in love. And, just now, Abraham had his wife's back when Yvonne became upset.

*Argh.* Eden made a mental note not to be so defensive. She



would be with Yvonne and Abraham for a month, and she wanted it to be a good experience for all of them.

For the next fifteen minutes, they followed the prayer schedule Abraham had laid out, and Eden could feel the Holy Spirit in the room. She recalled the first time she'd made what she thought was a real connection with God. She'd been twelve. Her mother was in the hospital from a presumed drug overdose, and Child Protective Services stayed outside the room while Eden stood by her mother's side, watching her trying to breathe. Her face was pale, and she'd had dark circles underneath her eyes. Eden didn't know God at the time, but she had squeezed her eyes closed and begged Him not to let her mother die and to please not send her to foster care. At that point, she'd never been removed from her mother.

When she opened her eyes, there was a man standing next to her. He was dressed in white, had gray hair, and had a stethoscope hanging around his neck. She hadn't heard him enter the room, but when she looked up at him, he told her everything was going to be fine. Her mother had had a reaction to an antibiotic, and they hadn't found any illegal drugs in her system.

Eden could recall how relieved she'd felt. But even more so, she remembered the doctor's eyes, the way he looked at her, and the all-knowing feeling that he was her guardian angel.

Looking back, maybe he had been. Or maybe he was just a nice man Eden had connected with, a person who had delivered good news with kindness.

It wasn't until a year ago that she was introduced to

God through a girl who lived in her apartment complex. The friendship hadn't lasted, but her trips to church with the girl's family had set her on a journey toward understanding more about God. She had devoured the Bible, and with every page she had felt a closeness that she relied on above everything else.

Abraham cleared his throat again, snapping her back to the present. "Do you have a scripture in mind that you'd like for us to focus on?" he asked, smiling.

"I do." Eden considered quoting Romans 2:1—"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things"—but it would almost seem like a dig at Yvonne, and Eden didn't want to do that. She chose another one she had memorized and repeated daily. "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," she said barely above a whisper.

Yvonne blinked her eyes a few times, then pressed her lips together. Eden realized that her cousin might be inserting herself into this scenario, but she couldn't be more wrong. There was only one person Eden couldn't forgive. Maybe two, but Max wasn't worth the effort—which wasn't right in the eyes of God, she knew. There was only one person she wanted to truly forgive. Her mother.

Suddenly, it felt too personal to discuss with people she didn't even know.

"Is there someone you are struggling to forgive, Eden?" Yvonne spoke to her with the same tenderness Abraham had

## HOPEFULLY EVER AFTER

voiced earlier. So much so that Eden felt her throat swelling again, and she didn't want to cry.

“No.” She tried to smile. Abraham and Yvonne probably saw through her, and she would apologize to God for the lie later.

From there, a general discussion about forgiveness ensued, and Eden participated in a generic sort of way, not identifying anyone in particular. It wasn't that she simply couldn't forgive her mother—she hated her.



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## CHAPTER 3

Yvonne sat on the side of the bed brushing out her wet hair, surprised by how much it had grown over the past eight months she'd been married to Abraham. She wondered how long it would get since Amish women never cut their hair. Her husband was reading, and Yvonne kept her back to him for the time being, rubbing Blue's belly with her foot. She wanted to think.

"You're being too hard on yourself," Abraham said, and Yvonne heard him close his book.

Sighing, she turned around. "What?"

"You've been quiet ever since we came to bed. Usually, you're chatty." He reached out to her and laid a gentle hand on her back. "You had no way to know that Eden had a solid faith, if that's what is bothering you."

"That's not true. She was excited about the idea of having devotions with us, and she even said she'd had a similar experience to mine. But I stuck with my assumptions that she probably didn't know God, and I didn't really listen to what she said. After her reaction, I knew right away that it was wrong of me to presume she didn't have a relationship

with God or to insinuate that I knew God better than she did. I don't blame her for being defensive." She inched farther onto the bed, wearing one of the white gowns she wore every night, and kept her feet atop the light top sheet. Both fans whirled, and a rain shower earlier had cooled things off a little more than usual.

"She got over it quickly. Don't dwell on it." Abraham rolled onto his side and propped his head up on his hand.

Yvonne groaned. "I have got to let go of any preconceived notions that Eden is hauling around a bunch of baggage from her past. Even if she is, we both know that God can help you get through anything. Eden couldn't be any sweeter, and she seems incredibly smart. I know women in their twenties who don't have the maturity she has."

"Then just be grateful for that. Teenage years are hard, with or without a history like Eden has. She's obviously put her past behind her. Or she doesn't plan to let it ruin her life, anyway. That's admirable. And you're right—a sign of maturity."

"I'm still a little concerned about what Leroy is going to think about Eden and Samuel spending time together on Wednesday." Yvonne fluffed her pillow just as Abraham straightened his arm in time for her to rest her head in the nook of his shoulder.

"It's a horse-riding lesson. That's all. Remember, we're not going to borrow trouble." Abraham kissed her on the forehead.

"I know, but I saw a spark between those two. I didn't imagine it."



Samuel stood from the bed, yawned, then stuffed what he'd been reading between the mattresses. After a couple of seconds, he retrieved the travel magazine, remembering that Monday was wash day. One of his sisters would strip the beds tomorrow, might find it, and possibly rat him out to their mother—or worse, their father. Samuel had written notes in the magazine, marking the places he wanted to visit someday. His parents wouldn't approve of his desire to see the world or, at the least, travel beyond the only life he'd ever known.

He kneeled on the floor and pulled out a box under his bed, then stashed the magazine with the others he didn't necessarily want anyone to find.

After he shoved the box back in place, he stood, lowered the flame on his lantern, then slid back onto the bed and watched the shadows dancing overhead, flickering and swirling like his thoughts. He latched his hands behind his head and fell back on his pillow. He couldn't wait for Wednesday to arrive. Eden was the most beautiful girl he'd ever met. She obviously wasn't girlfriend material, and she'd only be here for four weeks, but he would enjoy getting to know someone from the outside world. Especially someone so easy on the eyes.

He'd overheard his parents talking about Eden, how she would only be here for a month, and how they thought it was a mistake for Abraham and Yvonne to take her in. Samuel's mother and father were stricter than other parents

in their district, and they were against too much socialization with the English. He was pretty sure they wouldn't approve of him teaching Eden to ride, but until they forbid him to see her, he planned to spend as much time as he could with her. Unless they didn't click at all. But, based on several looks they had exchanged, Samuel thought she might want to be friends as much as he did.

He extinguished the lantern, but even as he fluffed his pillow and settled in, he couldn't stop thinking about Eden. She probably had a cell phone. He wished he could call her, but his family had only one mobile phone, and it stayed stored in a kitchen drawer for emergencies. Mostly. His mother thought that checking on her sister in Ohio was an emergency sometimes. It mostly sounded like chitchat to him.

Once a week, someone would go into town and charge the phone, and his mother had a portable battery she would charge also. Maybe, if he could get Eden's phone number, he could sneak the phone into his room to talk to her.

He quickly dismissed the idea since he didn't know if the calls would show up on the bill. He closed his eyes, but it was Eden's face he saw before he drifted to sleep. He had so many questions for someone who had experienced a life outside of anything he had known. He would need to play it cool with his parents.



Eden walked into the store with Yvonne Monday morning and breathed in the aroma of books. She was reminded of

the one apartment she and her mother had lived in close enough for her to walk to the library. “I love the smell of books.”

Yvonne set her purse behind the small counter to the right of the entrance, and a bell jingled as the door closed behind Eden.

“Me too.” Yvonne smiled as she began to take money from a small bag and load the cash-register drawer. She glanced at Eden. “So, you mentioned that you liked to read. Any particular genre your favorite?”

“Romance,” she said without hesitation, but then felt herself blush. “Not the nasty kind or anything. I just like happily-ever-after stories. And a little adventure is always good.”

“Well, you’re in luck.” Yvonne counted out some one-dollar bills before she looked at Eden. “You won’t find any *nasty* books in here. All the romances are sweet and wholesome, and some of the romantic suspense novels might give you that sense of adventure you mentioned.” She counted out more money as Eden took in her surroundings.

“Go walk around,” Yvonne said. “It’s not a huge store, but . . .” She nodded to her right. “Aside from the obvious books to your left, over there are a bunch of gift items.”

Eden veered toward the rows of books, perusing the categories until she came to the romance section. Her eyes, then hands, gravitated to a book with a handsome cowboy on the front cover. She thought about Samuel. He wouldn’t be wearing traditional cowboy clothes, but on Wednesday he’d be on a horse.

Yvonne moseyed toward her. “That’s a really *gut* book.



It's got plenty of romance, a good dose of adventure, and a happy ending."

Eden mentally calculated how much money she had, then eased the book back onto the shelf. "I—I better wait. I probably need to pace myself with the money I brought."

Yvonne folded her hands in front of her. "Listen, I do this job because I love it, not because I make a lot of money. So, I can't really pay you to work. But if you want to help me out around here a little, we can certainly make sure you go home with some books. I can buy them at a huge discount."

"Really?" Eden stared at the book, then sighed. "You're housing me and feeding me. I should work for free."

Yvonne took the book from the shelf. "Nonsense. You're our guest." She smiled. "And *mei* cousin I've never known." She pushed the book toward Eden. "You can help me shelve a shipment of books that came in last Friday. How's that?"

"Sounds great." Eden flipped through the pages of the book, then followed Yvonne back to the counter, where she stowed her purse and new book behind the counter with her cousin's.

Yvonne smiled. "I'm happy you're here. When there aren't a lot of customers, it gets lonely. I like reading, too, but it will be nice to have another person around some of the time." She paused. "But please don't feel like you must come with me every day to the store. I just thought you might want to check it out today."

"I like it here, and I don't mind helping at all." Eden couldn't stifle the smile coming on. "Except Wednesday, I'll be with Samuel and learning to ride a horse. I am so excited about that."

“Samuel’s a *gut* kid.” Yvonne tucked some loose strands of hair beneath her prayer covering.

Eden stared at her for a few seconds, at her dark-green dress and black apron. “Was it hard for you? I mean, you know . . . becoming an Amish person?” Her cousin’s use of Pennsylvania Dutch sounded different from Samuel and even Abraham, both of whom seemed to have an accent.

Yvonne shook her head. “*Nee*, I already felt Amish on the inside, so getting baptized into the faith and changing certain things wasn’t that hard.” She chuckled. “Okay, to be honest, I really miss air conditioning, especially in August. Next month will be brutal. And it was a little hard to give up *mei* car.” Shrugging, she smiled. “But I don’t have any regrets.”

“That’s a big life overhaul.” Eden couldn’t imagine. “But you look . . . really pretty. Even without any makeup.” Eden didn’t wear a lot of makeup herself, but she did have on mascara and lip gloss.

Yvonne pointed a playful finger at her. “You’re sweet, but if I’m still being honest, I miss makeup sometimes.” She touched the corners of her eyes. “I used to be able to cover up these feathery lines.”

“My great-grandmother used to say that wrinkles, especially laugh lines, were a sign of a life well lived.” She avoided Yvonne’s eyes, unsure how much to say about any of her family—which was technically Yvonne’s family, too, she supposed. Although she wasn’t sure how they all fit together. But she’d loved her great-grandmother.

When she finally looked up at Yvonne, she studied her face. “You’re young. I don’t really see any wrinkles.”

Yvonne batted her eyes and put a hand to her chest. “You are becoming *mei* new best friend. *Danki* for saying that, but I’m thirty-four and just starting to notice things like that.” She held up a finger. “However, pride and vanity are looked down upon when you’re living an Amish life. So, I get a free pass on wrinkles, I guess.” She laughed, and so did Eden.

“We’ve got coffee and tea in the back,” Yvonne said. “And that’s where the new books are. Why don’t we get something to drink, then we’ll bring the shipment up front and get them on the shelves.”

“Sure.” Eden followed Yvonne to the back of the store, passing the gift section on their left, which consisted of about four rows filled with various knickknacks. On the right was a big door with a deadbolt lock on it. She wanted to ask why it was locked, and she must have slowed her stride enough for Yvonne to notice.

“That door leads to the basement. Jake’s grandfather always kept it locked since he caught two kids down there making out one time. And Jake’s also got some personal things down there. It’s not much to see.”

Eden nodded, then looked down at her feet when a board beneath her groaned. “This is an old building, isn’t it?”

“*Ya*, it is,” Yvonne said over her shoulder as she walked. “I *lieb* this place, but for all the quaintness, it needs a lot of repairs.” She stopped, turned to face Eden, and pointed to the ceiling. “When we have a hard rain, there are several places where the roof leaks. I’m usually running around like a crazy person putting buckets and pots everywhere. It

doesn't happen every time it rains, but Jake definitely needs a new roof on this place.

She gently took a few steps to her left and pushed down on a board with her foot. "See how this plank gives way? Be careful of the wood floors near the walls. They give a little, which to me means the building is shifting." She shrugged. "I could be wrong, but it's easy enough to tell that it needs leveling." She waved an arm before she started walking again. "There's more. Plenty more. But the kind of repairs this place needs takes a big chunk of money, and it's just not in Jake's budget."

As they entered the small kitchen area, Eden eyed the small gas oven and tiny refrigerator that had a propane tank next to it. No microwave, of course. There were skylights everywhere, even in the kitchen.

"But this place is also steeped with mystery, which adds to its charm." Yvonne took two cups from the small cabinet above the sink, then looked over her shoulder at Eden and grinned.

"Really? How so?" Eden took a filled cup of coffee from Yvonne. She'd never been much of a coffee drinker, but the few times she had, she'd felt older.

"Sugar is there, and there's milk in the fridge if you need some." Yvonne sat down at the table.

Eden thought the coffee might taste better with something added, but she followed her cousin's lead and sat down across from her without adding anything to the cup.

"Supposedly . . ." Yvonne took a deep breath. "There are old coins hidden somewhere in the building . . . *If* you believe the stories the old man who used to own the building

told. He ran a general store here, and the locals say he was a bit off in the head, but he swore that he had hidden a collection of rare coins somewhere in the walls.”

Eden sat taller, knowing her eyes had widened. “Wow. That is super cool. Do you think there’s any truth to the story?”

Yvonne took a sip of coffee. Eden did the same, trying to hide her reaction to the bitter taste.

“Before I changed *mei* life, I was a book broker of sorts. I tracked down rare books for clients. It’s how I met Jake, his wife, Eva, and even Abraham. I was on the hunt for a book that Jake had but refused to sell due to a promise he made to his grandfather.” Yvonne paused. “I never did convince him to sell the book, and that’s another story, but *mei* point is that old things like that have always interested me. So, when I first heard about the coins, I was intrigued even though Jake and others were sure it was an old man spinning tales.” She smiled. “Then I found something.”

She got up and went to a kitchen drawer, pulled it out as far as it would go, then took out a small white bag, like something you might put a piece of jewelry in. She sat again, undid the short string holding the bag closed, and turned it upside down. An old coin fell out onto the table.

“I found this in between the floorboards up front.”

Eden set her cup down and picked up the coin. “Wow. That kind of thing intrigues me too. When I was little, I loved shows about treasure hunts or discovering anything old and mysterious.” She glanced up at her cousin. “Is it worth anything?”

“Apparently so. It has a face value of five cents, but

when I took it to an appraiser, he said it would likely pull in over five hundred dollars at a coin auction.”

“Wow,” Eden said again as she turned the silver coin over and over between her fingers. “If there were a bunch of these . . .” She raised an eyebrow and looked at Yvonne, who smiled.

“Exactly. Jake could be sitting on a fortune buried somewhere within these walls.” She waved her hands around, then chuckled. “If only these walls could talk and point us to where the supposed treasure is. If Jake had enough valuable coins, he could get a lot of the repairs done, but it’s just too big a risk to start tearing out walls that he can’t afford to replace. Not to mention there are a lot of rules when you own an historical building. You might have seen the plaque out front? Any repairs must be approved to maintain the historical status.”

“Yeah, I did see the plaque.” Eden set the coin atop the white pouch. “But overall, the Amish don’t care about money, right?”

Yvonne sort of laughed, but it was more like a grunt. “*Ach, ya*. They care. They aren’t materialistic, but money buys wood to build homes, barns, and make repairs. It buys farming equipment. And it buys food essentials that not all Amish grow on their farms. Money buys horses, buggies, and livestock. It buys material to make clothes. See where I’m going? It still takes money to live, even if you’re Amish.”

“Just not as much money, I guess?”

“Correct. We don’t buy expensive cars, have to pay for electricity, or wear ourselves out trying to keep up with or outdo our neighbors.”

“There must be a certain freedom in that.” Eden thought about all the times she’d been forced to go to school in clothes her mother had picked up at second-hand stores and how self-conscious she’d felt. The popular girls in their designer clothes had looked down on her.

“You’re right,” Yvonne said softly. “But pride and vanity are still present. Amish people are human. I’ve seen women competing, especially in the baking arena. But when you consider that no one worries about clothes, dying their hair—things like that—it does make for a simpler life with a lot less stress.”

Eden forced another sip of coffee, pondering what her cousin had said. Would those same popular girls have taken her into their circle if she’d dressed the way they did? All the girls here dressed alike, so it wasn’t an issue.

After they finished their coffee, Eden helped Yvonne load three boxes onto a dolly, then her cousin pushed the boxes to the front of the store.

“These are all fiction, and they are shelved alphabetically.” Yvonne took a utility knife from the pocket of her apron and opened the first box. They were quiet as they sorted the books.

Eden wondered again how much Yvonne knew about her background. Probably a lot. Emma had surely told her that Eden’s mother was in prison. Had she told her about the one night she’d snuck out? Or the one time she’d shop-lifted? She cringed on the inside. She wanted Yvonne to like her. And so far, Eden liked her cousin. It had hurt her feelings when Yvonne seemed to question her faith, but that

was forgivable. Eden probably didn't strike her cousin as the religious type.

What did that mean anyway? "Religious type"? She didn't think there was a certain look that was needed to have a relationship with God.

She glanced down at the butterfly on the top of her hand, surprised that Yvonne or Abraham hadn't questioned her about it. She'd caught them both looking at it at different times since she had arrived. Eden would be happy to tell them why she got it if they asked.

"Someone's here." Yvonne turned an ear. "In a buggy." She smiled at Eden. "I can always tell the way the buggy wheels crunch against the gravel parking lot."

"I can finish this if you want to go help whoever it is." Eden stayed parked on the floor, enjoying the feel and smell of the books.

Yvonne lifted herself from her knees, smoothed the wrinkles from her black apron, and headed to the front of the store just as the bell jingled.

Eden kept alphabetizing the books, but when she heard her name, she stopped and stood up. When she heard it again, she eased her way around the tall shelf until she was in view of Yvonne and an Amish woman who didn't look much older than her cousin.

"Hey, Eden." Yvonne motioned for her to come closer. "This is *mei* sister-in-law, Anna. She's married to Abraham's *bruder*, Leroy."

Eden wasn't sure what proper protocol was. Emma had told her that the Amish weren't openly affectionate, but she



held out her hand, and the woman extended hers. “Nice to meet you, Anna.”

The woman quickly took back her hand. Eden noticed it was callused, like maybe she’d been sweeping for a long time or something.

“*Ya*, it is nice to meet you too.” Anna smiled. “Welcome to Montgomery. I hear you’ll be staying with your cousin for a month.” She nodded to Yvonne.

“Yes, ma’am.” Eden wanted to make a good impression, for Yvonne to be proud to have her around. “I’m happy to be here.”

“I bet things must be quite different here than where you’re from, uh . . .” Anna looked at Yvonne. “Did you tell me California?”

Her cousin nodded. “*Ya*.”

“It is very different here. I love how it’s all out in the country, the buggies everywhere . . .” Eden shrugged. “I think it’s awesome.”

Anna was dressed exactly like Yvonne, except she was wearing a maroon dress, and she had a small black purse hanging from her wrist, almost identical to Yvonne’s bag.

“Eden loves to read, and she’s helping me out around the store.” Yvonne glanced at Eden and smiled. “I’m happy to have the help and company.”

Anna nodded. “I always tell the *kinner* that reading sharpens the mind. And the *maed lieb* to read.” She chuckled. “I don’t think Samuel has opened a book since he graduated from the eighth grade.”

*Samuel?* “Uh . . .” Eden looked at Yvonne. “Is that the same Samuel I met?”

Her cousin cleared her throat. “Um, *ya*.” She turned to Anna. “I was teaching Eden how to drive the buggy, and we ran into Samuel.”

“He’s *mei* oldest.” Anna smiled again, and Eden thought she was pretty, too, like Yvonne. “I think *mei* husband—Leroy—wished he had three or four more like him.” She laughed. “Not that he doesn’t love the *maed*, but I think all men hope for more than one boy to help in the fields.”

“I’ll be at your house on Wednesday. Samuel is teaching me to ride a horse.” Eden grinned. “I’ve never been on a horse, and I’m so excited to learn how to ride.”

Anna’s expression fell right away, as if someone had given her some sort of horrible news. Eden glanced at Yvonne. Her cousin was chewing on her bottom lip. Eden wanted to ask if it was some big secret about Samuel giving her lessons, but Anna’s bright smile and chipper mood had shifted into . . . something else.

“Anna, is there anything special you need today?” Yvonne plastered on a big smile, but her eyes reflected an emotion other than joy.

Eden wasn’t sure what she’d done wrong. But it was obviously a secret that Samuel was planning to teach her to ride a horse.

“Actually . . .” Anna glanced at the clock on the wall behind the counter. “I’ve lost track of time, and there is somewhere else I need to be. But I’ll drop back by when I’m not so rushed.”

“*Ya*, sure.” Yvonne followed Anna to the door, and for a moment, Eden wondered if she was going to follow her

into the parking lot, but she only waved and came back into the store.

There was no place to put this huge elephant, so Eden decided not to try. “Um, I’m sorry. I guess I shouldn’t have said anything about Samuel teaching me to ride, but I had no idea that—”

“Don’t worry about it.” Yvonne waved her off. “Really. Samuel is the one who offered. It’s fine.”

Eden stood still, not sure what to do and feeling like she might cry, which was lame, but a knot was forming in her throat just the same. “Does she not want me around Samuel because I’m not Amish? I think I read that somewhere, but I didn’t really think it would be true.”

Yvonne leaned against the counter and put a hand to her forehead. “It doesn’t have anything to do with you personally, Eden, so please don’t think that it does. Anna and Leroy are super protective of their *kinner* . . . their children.”

Eden wondered right away if Anna knew her background. Was Yvonne’s sister-in-law judging her based on that or strictly because she wasn’t Amish? “I mean, it’s not like a date or anything.”

“Look, I’m going to be honest with you. I was a little surprised that Samuel made the invitation. He certainly knows how strict his parents are when it comes to outsiders. But there is nothing wrong with making friends while you’re here, and Samuel is a *gut* guy.”

“You were an outsider before you turned Amish. Did they treat you funny?”

Yvonne half laughed. “First of all, you don’t *turn* Amish. And even though my and Abraham’s situation wasn’t the

norm, either way . . . we aren't their children. I think that is the biggest fear that Amish parents have—that their children will grow up and leave one day. And the irony is, hardly any of them do.”

Yvonne's hands seemed to find their way to her stomach, and she smiled. “I'll be hoping that *mei* little ones stay around, but I also know that they will have the freedom to make that choice when they are of age.”

Eden brought a hand to her mouth as a small gasp escaped. “You're pregnant, aren't you?”

Yvonne covered her face with both hands. “I shouldn't say anything. I haven't even told Abraham.” She lowered her hands. “But *ya*, I think so.”

Eden didn't know Yvonne at all, but based on the little she'd seen so far, she thought she would be an awesome mom.

“Wow. That is so cool. Congratulations.” Eden was warm all over, seeing how Yvonne was so giddy.

Her cousin put a finger to her mouth. “Don't tell anyone. I'm planning to tell Abraham tonight, then we probably won't share the news for a while because that's how it's done here.” She blinked back tears. “We've been trying since we got married. I was starting to think it wasn't going to happen.”

Yvonne oozed goodness. Eden could recognize badness without any problems, but she believed she had the same gift when it came to seeing the good in people. She went to Yvonne and hugged her, and the way Yvonne squeezed her tightly made her feel safe. It was a strange thought to have, since she barely knew the woman, but the feeling was

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there just the same. She was more cautious when it came to physical contact with men.

Eden was a little concerned now about her visit with Samuel on Wednesday. Not because she thought there would be any physical contact, but due to Anna's display in the store. She was nervous about her horse-riding adventure and didn't want to cause any problems while she was here.

She pushed the thoughts aside. Right now, she was going to try not to worry about it and just be happy for her cousin.



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