Joanna’s Struggle

Amish Girls Series – Book 1

J.E.B. Spredemann
Table of Contents

Books By J.E.B. Spredemann
Authors’ Note
Unofficial Glossary of Pennsylvania Dutch Words
Characters in Joanna’s Struggle
Chapter 1 – Mud Sale
Chapter 2 – Where’s Joanna?
Chapter 3 – An Answer to Prayer
Chapter 4 - Visiting
Chapter 5 – Back to School
Chapter 6 – The New Job
Chapter 7 – A New Friend
Chapter 8 – Honey
Chapter 9 – The Crash
Chapter 10 – The Challenge
Chapter 11 – The Unthinkable
Chapter 12 - Courage
Chapter 13 – Freedom
Danika’s Journey
BOOKS BY J.E.B. SPREDEMANN

AMISH GIRLS SERIES
Joanna’s Struggle
Danika’s Journey
Chloe’s Revelation
Susanna’s Surprise
Annie’s Decision
Abigail’s Triumph
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Leah’s Legacy

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To our family...

Without your love and support, this dream would have never become a reality.
Authors’ Note

It should be noted that the Amish people and their communities differ one from another. There are, in fact, no two Amish communities that are exactly alike. It is this premise on which this book is written. We have taken cautious steps to assure the authenticity of Amish practices and customs. Both Old Order Amish and New Order Amish are portrayed in this work of fiction and may be inconsistent with some Amish communities.

We, as Englischers, can learn a lot from the Plain People and their simple way of life. Their hard work, close-knit family life, and concern for others are to be applauded. As the Lord wills, may this special culture continue to be respected and remain so for many centuries to come, and may the light of God’s salvation reach their hearts.
Unofficial Glossary of Pennsylvania Dutch Words

_Ach_ – Oh
_Aldi_ – Girlfriend
_Ausbund_ – Amish hymn book
_Bloobier_ – Blueberry
_Boppli_ – Baby
_Bopplin_ – Babies
_Bruder_ – Brother
_Dat, Daed_ – Dad
_Dawdi_ – Grandfather
_Denki_ – Thanks
_Der Herr_ – The Lord
_Dochter_ – Daughter
_Dokter_ – Doctor
_Dummkopp_ – Dummy
_Englischer_ – A non-Amish person
_Ferhoodled_ – Mixed up, Crazy
_Fraa_ – Woman, Wife
_Gott_ – God
_Gut_ – Good
_Gross Dawdi_ – Great Grandfather
_Haus_ – House
_Hullo_ – Hello
_Jah_ – Yes
_Kapp_ – Prayer Covering
_Kinner_ – Children
_Kumm_ – Come
_Lieb_ – Love
_Liede_ – Song
_Mamm_ – Mom
_Mammi_ – Grandmother
_Mein Liewe_ – My Dear
_Mudder_ – Mother
_Nee_ – No
_Ordnung_ – Rules of the Amish Community
_Rumspringa_ – Running around years
_Schweschder_ – Sister
_Vadder_ – Father
Vorsinger – Song Leader
Wunderbaar – Wonderful
Characters in Joanna’s Struggle

The Fisher Family
Joanna Fisher – Main character
John Fisher – Joanna’s grandfather
Miriam Fisher – Joanna’s grandmother
Gideon Fisher – Joanna’s dad
Esther Fisher – Joanna’s mom
Isaac Fisher – Joanna’s older brother
Grace Fisher – Joanna’s older sister
Jonathan Fisher – Joanna’s younger brother

The Esh Family
Chloe Esh – Joanna’s best friend
Daniel Esh – Chloe’s grandfather
Peter Esh – Chloe’s dad
Mary Esh – Chloe’s mom
Rachel Esh – Chloe’s older sister
Stephen Esh – Chloe’s younger brother
Abigail Esh – Chloe’s younger sister
Ruthie Esh – Chloe’s younger sister

The Hostettler Family
Judah Hostettler – the bishop
Lydia Hostettler – the bishop’s wife
Nathan Hostettler – the bishop’s son

The Yoder Family
Deacon Yoder – the deacon
Sarah Yoder – deacon’s wife
Ruth Yoder – deacon’s daughter
Eli Yoder – deacon’s son
Annie Yoder – deacon’s daughter

Other
Naomi Fast – a driver for the Amish
Katie Fast – Naomi’s daughter
Philip King – the herb doctor
Eleven-year-old Joanna Fisher bounded into the barn calling, “Jonathan. Jonathan. Mam to…OW!” she cried, as a clod of dirt pelted her arm. From the haymow she heard muffled giggles and impatiently yelled, “Jonathan Fisher, you dummkopp. I’m gonna get you for that. Mam will not be happy when she sees that you’ve gotten my dress dirty again. Especially since,” she added, attempting to wipe the debris from her burgundy cape dress, “we’re going to the auction. Mam said you need to get ready now.”

From behind a haystack she heard a gasp and then a sandy colored head popped up. “The mud sale?” seven-year-old Jonathan exclaimed, climbing down the ladder and darting out of the barn like a bolt of lightning.

Her anger subsided, Joanna giggled softly to herself. “For sure and for certain Jonathan is excited about attending the mud sale.”

She sighed deeply and adjusted her prayer kapp, a few of her honey brown tresses escaping the tight bun behind her head. Lord, I’m trying to love my little brother, but sometimes he makes it difficult, Joanna complained silently to God. She’d been taught in her Amish heritage not just to love her family and friends, but to love her enemies as well. That certainly was not the easiest thing to do.

On this beautiful Saturday morning, the sun shone brightly through the sparse poplar trees that lined the Fishers’ property. They’d just had a church service, or Sunday Go-To-Meeting, as they called it, last week. There would be no meeting this week because they were only held every other Sunday. Joanna loved to attend the services, although sometimes she had trouble staying awake. She didn’t feel bad though, because sometimes she would see several of the older folks nod off too, and occasionally they even snored until they were nudged by the person sitting next to them.

Three hours was a long time for anyone to sit through preaching, let alone a girl Joanna’s age. Her brother Jonathan had an awfully difficult time staying in his seat. One time, unbeknownst to their folks, he made his way up to the front where Bishop Hostettler was preaching. As the bishop delivered his message, Jonathan followed behind him, mimicking his every move. No one reprimanded him for his actions as he performed his silly antics. Joanna attributed their folks’ passiveness to the fact that they were probably too dismayed to do anything at the time. And, of course, nobody wanted to interrupt the bishop’s message. When the bishop noticed the amused faces of his flock and that the eyes of his congregation were focusing on something other than him, he turned around to see what was stealing their attention. He then offered to let Jonathan speak, commenting that perhaps the boy had a future in preaching. Sheepishly, Jonathan declined and Joanna never saw him ascend the platform again.

The ministers preached from the Luther Bible, which was in High German, so Joanna could only understand bits and pieces of the sermon. (Most Amish only spoke Pennsylvania Dutch, which had
some words similar to German, and English.) She was looking forward to this Sunday when they would rest and visit with friends and family.

Joanna skipped out of the barn and accidentally collided into her father Gideon, who was leading their beautiful auburn horse. “Careful, Joanna, you almost bumped into Cinnamon here.”

“Sorry, Dat. I wasn’t looking where I was go—”

“‘Tis all right,” her dad interrupted, patting her hand, “now go help your Mamm. We will leave soon.” Joanna hurried to the house.

“Joanna, we could use your help getting the sandwiches ready to take to the mud sale,” her thirteen-year-old sister Grace requested. “And fill up the thermos with hot coffee.” Joanna did as told, and then placed the items into their large picnic basket.

“Mamm,” Joanna inquired of her mother, “are ya takin’ anything to sell today?”

“Jah, denki for reminding me. I need to go down to the cellar to get some more jellies and jams. It’s a gut thing that the Lord blessed us with extra fruit and vegetables last harvest,” her mother answered.

When everything was finally ready, all six members of the Fisher family loaded the buggy and headed for the mud sale. Joanna could barely contain her excitement. She couldn’t wait to see her best friend Chloe. The two girls enjoyed perusing the many booths almost as much as being in one another’s company.

Maybe now would be a good time to ask, thought Joanna.

“Dat, Mamm,” she said, hesitating, “do you mind if I get an after-school job so I can earn some extra money?”

“Do you think you’ll have any spare time, with all your chores and what not?” her mother queried, sending a pointed look that didn’t reassure Joanna.

“I can do my chores as soon as I get home from school, and I’ll have some extra time during the summer after the harvest is over. I have been doing a good job with my chores, ain’t?” Joanna hoped they’d agree.

Her dad answered, “Well, you have done your chores diligently…Just what kind of work did ya have in mind to do, Joanna?”

“Oh, I’m not sure just yet.” Joanna thought. “Maybe I can help take care of a boppli, or do some housework for one of our Englischer neighbors like Ruth Yoder does.” She hoped mentioning the deacon’s daughter would help her plight.

“We’ll talk about this later. Right now your vadder and I need to discuss the auction,” her mom replied, turning back to the front, indicating the discussion was over.

As her mother and father conversed, Joanna and her siblings sat quietly in the back seat of the buggy. Well, most of them did. Jonathan dug into his pocket with one of his grubby little hands and pulled out a tree frog. An imaginary battle ensued with the small green amphibian and Jonathan’s index finger. Mamm turned around several times in an attempt to shush the young boy, but her efforts were futile and she eventually allowed him to indulge in his merriment.

Cinnamon trotted along at an even pace as they rode past farm houses, barns, silos, and pastures. The fresh scents of spring wafted through the air and Joanna breathed in deeply. Soon, I’ll be able to take off my shoes and run barefoot through the meadow, she mused. Oh, to feel the cool, soft, green blades of grass beneath my feet again after being in these miserable shoes all winter.
Many Englischer cars impatiently passed their buggy on the road, some of them honking their horns. The fast, large metal contraptions were sometimes intimidating from the inside of a horse-drawn buggy, especially the huge semi-trucks that nearly blew them off the road. The Amish preferred a simpler, slower-paced lifestyle which, for the most part, Joanna agreed was better. Sure, the Plain People had to work harder than others but that was the life they had chosen. Separation from the world is what they called it, a lifestyle set-apart. The best part about it though, in Joanna’s opinion, was the closeness of their tightknit community. Their People loved and cared for one another and it was evident in every aspect of life.

Joanna hummed softly as they came into the Ronks firehouse parking lot and up to one of the hitching posts. Several of the young Amish men often offered their help at the small volunteer fire department. Once, the firemen were called out to a fire at her uncle’s metal shop. One of the sparks shot out from the welder and ignited some hay nearby, instantly setting the shop ablaze. There were several Amish men working for the fire department that day, so news of the fire spread quickly. Not too long after the incident, the men of the community rallied together and built a new barn for her uncle in a single day.

The familiar sights and sounds of the mud sale brought excitement, especially for the children. It had been a whole year since Joanna’s entire family last attended one, even though there were several throughout Lancaster County. They are called “mud sales” because they take place in the late winter and early spring when the frozen ground begins to thaw, sometimes turning the ground into mud. The money raised at the sales benefited the volunteer firehouse, to make sure they were supplied with the necessary equipment to serve their surrounding communities.

“Come on, Joanna,” her brother Isaac called. “Stop your daydreaming and let’s go.”

As Joanna stepped out of the buggy, her eyes scanned the crowd for any signs of Chloe. Her friend was nowhere to be seen. *She must not be here yet*, Joanna thought disappointedly.

Her dad seemed to have read her thoughts and chuckled. “Don’t worry Joanna, she’ll be here soon. Let’s look around and see what they have for sale today. Keep an eye out for a gut saddle. We’ll need one for the mare that I plan on purchasing at the auction.”

“Ach, really, Dat?” Joanna squealed. “How will we bring her home?”

“I thought that Isaac would like to ride her back to Paradise,” Gideon replied. “She’ll need to get used to his touch, especially since she’ll be pulling his new courting buggy that we’re picking up from the Hostettlers’ next week.”

By the enthusiasm in his voice, Joanna perceived that her father was proud of her sixteen-year-old brother Isaac. He would be the first of the Fisher children to enter into adulthood and, hopefully, join the Amish church. Eventually, he’d be married and have *bopplin* too. Joanna smiled at the thought, although she had no idea whom her brother might be interested in courting.

“There you are, Jo,” Chloe Esh called from the next table over which sold home baked goods. She quickly made her way through the crowd toward Joanna carrying a whoopie pie for each of them, passing Amish and *Englisch* alike. Children ran to and fro amidst the large crowd. “Can you believe all the people this year?”

“It seems like every year there’re more Englischers, jah?” Joanna replied, as she gave her friend a quick hug and accepted the delicious treat.

“Jah, and Plain folks, too,” Chloe mumbled around a bite. She eagerly pulled on Joanna’s arm.
“Let’s go see the new pony cart Eli Yoder just bought. Maybe he’ll give us a ride in it.”

“I want to look at the quilts too, but we can do that later. First, let me tell Dat where we’ll be,” Joanna spoke, and then turned to her father. “Chloe and I are going to walk around a bit, then meet up with her mamm. Remember, I’m riding home with the Eshes.”

“Make sure you’re home for the evening meal,” her father reminded her, as he and her mother leisurely strolled to the next vendor’s table. “Have a gut time.”

“My dat said to be lookin’ for a gut saddle,” Joanna informed Chloe as they turned to walk in the direction of the quilts. “He’s getting a new horse today to pull Isaac’s courtin’ buggy.”

“Ach, I wonder who he’ll be courtin’,” Chloe said dreamily.

Oblivious to Chloe’s musings, Joanna continued, “I can’t wait – a new horse to ride. I hope the horse is black. The black ones are so pretty, especially when they’re racing.”

“Joanna Fisher! Don’t tell me you’ve been racing Barley without me,” Chloe heralded.

“Shh…we don’t want to let everyone know our secret. Besides, you know I never race without my best friend,” Joanna whispered, surveying the area for Amish folk that may have overheard. Hopefully, Deacon Yoder was nowhere nearby. “Let’s go look at the jams and jellies now. I helped mamm make some plum jam – your favorite,” Joanna said proudly.

The girls pushed their way through the crowd toward the brightly decorated jam table. “Hello, Sarah Yoder,” Chloe hollered, waving to Eli’s mother.

“How are you girls doing this fine morning?” the kind woman asked.

“We’re doin’ gut. Ain’t so, Chloe?” Joanna replied, nudging Chloe gently.

“Jah, how are you?” Chloe politely asked Sarah, although her eyes flitted elsewhere.

“Well actually, I’m all done in. We’ve been here since before sun-up,” Sarah answered, then rubbed the back of her flaxen-haired daughter. “I think Annie and I are ready for a nap.”

“Where are the little ones? Did they stay home today?” Chloe wondered aloud.

“Jah, Ruth is watching them today,” Sarah responded.

“Has anyone bought my mamm’s jam yet?” Joanna questioned.

“Yes, a few, but there’re plenty more yet,” Sarah Yoder answered, as she examined the table full of delicious home-canned jams and jellies. “They usually sell like hotcakes, so I’m sure we’ll be raisin’ lots of money today.” Most of the Amish in Joanna’s district donated their time and talents to help out, along with others in the surrounding communities.

“Joanna and I better get going if we want to see the pony cart and the quilts,” Chloe announced, leading Joanna toward the quilts.

“Have a gut time, girls,” Sarah called, as they walked off.

The girls walked up to a grand display of handmade Amish quilts. Joanna and Chloe eyed the various designs with wonder, trying to decide which of the creations their favorite was. Some of the quilts were simple patch work designs and others were amazingly intricate in detail. Joanna decided the Ocean Wave pattern quilt was her favorite design. Perhaps she’d make one for a friend’s wedding gift someday.

“Look at this,” Chloe remarked, fingering a brightly colored Hearts All-Around quilt, “it’s beautiful.”

“Jah, it looks perfect. Not a stitch out of place. I hope I can quilt this gut someday,” Joanna responded.
“**Jah, me too,**” Chloe agreed, her mouth still agape.

“Hey, there’s Philip King, the herb **dokter.** I wonder why he’s looking at the quilts,” Joanna thought aloud.

“I heard that,” Philip King replied, chuckling.

“**Heard what?**” Chloe asked, feigning innocence.

“I happen to be purchasing a quilt for my friend’s wedding over in Hickory Hollow next week, for your information. And as of now, the three of us are the only ones that know about it, and I expect you two to keep my secret.” Philip winked.

“Of course we will,” they chorused and winked backed. The girls knew how quickly news could spread. The Amish community was certainly not immune to gossip. *Sometimes the People all the way over in other states like Indiana and Ohio know what is going on in our back yard,* Joanna thought. Yes, they would keep tight-lipped about Philip’s gift.

“We need to find him a wife,” Chloe whispered softly in Joanna’s ear.

“**Jah, a wife indeed,**” Joanna whispered back, smiling broadly.

“What was that, girls?” Philip raised his dark brown eyebrows.

“Nothing,” they replied in unison, which sent them into a fit of giggles.

“Well, I’d better get going…back to my herb search.” Philip King smiled and walked off slowly.

*I wonder why that nice, good-looking man hasn’t married,* Joanna pondered.

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A couple of hours later, Joanna and Chloe had been to just about every vendor booth. They both agreed that the quilt table was their favorite – aside from the horses at auction, of course. The sun stood just above the trees to the west and several families, including Joanna’s, had already left for home.

“Chloe…Chloe…” the girls heard Chloe’s mother calling in the distance.

“Ach, that’s Mamm calling. We’d better go,” Chloe chided.

“You go ahead, and I’ll be there in a bit. I need to use the bathroom,” Joanna pleaded.

“Okay, but don’t be long. I think they want to leave soon,” she replied and ran off.

The restroom wasn’t too far a walk, thank goodness. As Joanna turned the corner, she felt a firm grasp on her elbow and it startled her. She saw a huge shadow behind her. “Don’t make a sound or you will regret it,” a man with a deep, raspy voice whispered in her ear. He then pointed in the opposite direction. “Now, we’re going to walk quickly and get into that blue truck over there. Do you hear me, young lady?”

She nodded briefly, glancing at the old rusted blue truck. *What should I do? Run? I can’t, his grip is too strong.* Joanna thought desperately. *Scream!* she told herself. But when she opened her mouth no sound would come out. Frightened and shaking, Joanna complied with his wishes and headed toward the truck in silence…
Chapter 2 – Where’s Joanna?

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” Psalm 56:3

“We’ve got to get on the road now; it’s getting dark,” Chloe’s father reminded.
“I still don’t see Joanna anywhere…she should have been back by now. I told her not to be long.” Chloe was beginning to worry.
“Ach, don’t fret,” Mary replied. “She probably just ran into one of the other kinner and lost track of time. I’ll go with you to find her.”

When Chloe and her mother skimmed the restroom, Joanna was nowhere to be seen. “Well, she’s not in there. Let’s keep looking, she couldn’t have gone far,” her mom decided, heading toward the nearly empty parking lot. “Look, there’s Philip King. Maybe he has seen her.”

“Hello, ladies. Getting ready to head back to Paradise soon?” Philip asked, congenial as always.
“Jah, hullo, Philip,” Mary Esh responded. “Have you seen Joanna Fisher recently? Chloe left her at the restroom about thirty minutes ago and now it’s starting to get dark. She’s supposed to ride home with us.” Most families didn’t like to travel on the main roads at night. There had been many buggy accidents among the People after dark. The lanterns on the buggies were not very bright, and some of the Amish didn’t use many reflectors.

“No, I haven’t seen her since earlier today when she was with your daughter. Let me put my purchases in my buggy, then I’ll help you look for her,” Philip promised with a tinge of concern on his face.

True to his word, Philip returned promptly with another Amish man and two Plain Mennonite friends to help with the search.

After an hour, Joanna was still nowhere to be found. The crowd had thinned out quite a bit and the situation did not look promising. The search team had looked everywhere with no sign of Joanna.
“Do you think we should contact the authorities?” one of Philip’s Mennonite friends suggested.
“Well, she may be at home as we speak…I will use the telephone to see if she went home with someone else.” Peter Esh pulled some coins from his pocket, and then proceeded to locate a pay phone. Unless absolutely necessary, the People did not like to involve the Englisch authorities in their affairs. Instead, they chose to trust God, however difficult that might be.

Ring...ring...ring...ring...ring...the telephone sounded in the Fishers’ barn.
“Did you hear something, Esther?” Gideon Fisher asked as he sat reading his Bible.
“No, I didn’t hear anything. I have too much going on, tryin’ to make dinner and what not, to pay attention. But that doesn’t mean you didn’t hear anything,” Esther replied, smiling.
“Jah, you heard the telephone, Dat,” Isaac said, as he walked down the stairs from his room. “I
was on the balcony and I heard it, but it stopped ringing already.”

“I wonder who would be calling the shop at this time of the day. Probably some Englischer who wants to order a table,” Gideon voiced his thoughts. “Well, I suppose if it is important they’ll call back later.”

A few minutes later, Peter walked back to the group. “I called Gideon Fisher’s shop, but there was no answer. We will pray and trust God for Joanna’s safety. We’ve done all we can. It is time to go home now,” Chloe’s father stated, his voice resigned.

“Yes, we will trust God...He knows best,” Philip offered. Hoping in God was never a lost cause.

“We will stop by the Fishers’ place to see if she’s there,” Peter announced.

“Dear Gott,” Chloe prayed quietly, “please let Joanna be safe.”

Dear Gott, please help me, Joanna begged silently, as she rode along in an ugly, beat-up, blue pick-up truck with the burly stranger. She really wanted to trust God, but she was scared.

“You don’t need worry your perty little head about a thing, darlin’. Just as long as you behave yourself and do as I say, everything will be fine – just fine,” the stranger warned, as he put his hand on her knee.

Joanna winced. She hated feeling his rough, calloused hand on her dress. Somehow, she knew he wasn’t telling the truth. An ugly feeling settled in the pit of her belly, heightening her sense of fear. She had to get away, and fast. What could she do? They were traveling down the highway so fast it made her stomach queasy. She’d only been in an Englischer car a few times. She much preferred the gentle trot of a horse and buggy, but now was not the time to think about that. “Dear Gott, please help me escape,” she silently pleaded once more.

“Okay, here’s the plan,” the stranger stated matter-of-factly. “We’re going to walk into Wal-Mart and head straight to the bathroom. And I mean straight – no looking around, no dawdling, no talking.” By his stern voice and piercing gaze, Joanna knew he meant business.

She nodded.

“As soon as you go into the little ladies’ room, you change into these.” He handed her a closed brown paper bag, then continued, “Leave your hair up, but take off that white thing on your head and replace it with this ball cap,” he said, pointing to her white prayer kapp, as it was called. The man handed her a scruffy-looking baseball cap, similar to the ones some boys wore in rumspringa. “I want you to put the clothes that you’re wearing back into that paper bag and throw it into the trash can. Got it?”

Joanna nodded silently, too frightened to speak. How can I throw away the first dress Mamm helped me make? She’ll be so disappointed.

Curiosity got the best of her and Joanna peered into the bag, spying a pair of denim blue jeans along with a green and brown plaid shirt. I’ll look like one of the boys in rumspringa with this on! Why does he want me to look like a boy? she wondered naively. This man is certainly ferhoodled.
“No peekin’ in the bag,” he grumbled, causing Joanna to startle.

As they pulled into the Wal-Mart parking lot, Joanna became even more nervous. She did not want to put on the masculine clothing. How was she going to escape? *This may be my only chance,* she quivered at the thought, *I have to do it right.* They quickly walked into the store. *Should I tell somebody that works here? What if they don’t believe me?* This was getting scary.

“All right, you’ve got two minutes. You’d better make it quick…” the stranger cautioned.

“But I ne-ne-need to use the restroom, too,” she stuttered.

“Okay, three minutes, but no more. I’ll be waiting right over there.” He pointed to a rack of magazines. “And no funny business,” the man whispered, and then walked off.

Joanna had no idea what “funny business” meant, but she walked into the restroom all the same…
Chapter 3 – An Answer to Prayer

“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid…” Isaiah 12:2a

Gideon Fisher sat at home in his chair reading The Budget, the Amish/Mennonite newspaper, until he heard his fraa call, “Supper is ready”.

He gazed up at the battery-operated clock on the wall and asked, “Esther, has Joanna come home from the Eshes’ house yet?”

From the kitchen he heard Esther say, “Ach, Nee. No.”

Gideon ran his fingers through his brown wavy hair, something he did only when he was worried or impatient. “Ach. I told Joanna to be back for the evening meal. Why hasn’t she returned?”

Esther chided, “You’re so impatient, Mein Liewe. Don’t fret, she probably just lost track of time. She’ll be back soon.”

Dat shook his head unbelieving. “Nee. Joanna would’ve been back by now – I also told Peter Esh to make sure she gets back in time for supper. Peter wouldn’t go against my wishes. It wonders me if maybe something has gone wrong. We need to be certain sure. I’m goin’ to send Isaac to Peter’s to check on Joanna.”

Esther chuckled nonchalantly. “As you wish, Gideon.”

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Joanna couldn’t believe her eyes as she walked into the Wal-Mart restroom. It was Naomi Fast, a Plain Mennonite driver that her parents sometimes hired! It was so good to see a familiar face. Thank you, Gott, she prayed and sighed in relief.

“Joanna? Is something wrong?” Naomi must have noticed the alarm on her face.

“The-the-there’s a man, and he took me. He wants me to put these boy clothes on and ride with him…” she could speak no more, as she broke down into sobs.

Right away, Naomi realized that Joanna had been kidnapped. “Shh…it’s okay,” Naomi said, attempting to comfort her. “That man isn’t going to take you anywhere. This is what we’re going to do.” Naomi thought for a second, sending up a quick prayer for wisdom. “Okay, I’m going to walk out of the restroom and you will follow right behind me. After I get my cart, you stay close by my side where he won’t be able to see you.” Naomi gingerly peeked out the bathroom door and noticed the man that Joanna described was thumbing through a magazine. “Let’s go now,” she said, moving quickly.

Joanna stayed close to Naomi’s side, just as she was instructed to do. She was tempted to look back at the ferhoodled man, but too scared to do so. As soon as they were out the door, they ran straight to Naomi’s car, leaving her purchases behind in the cart. They jumped in and locked the doors. Naomi turned the key and they took off swiftly.

Meanwhile, the gruff man that had abducted Joanna must have noticed something was amiss,
because they saw him run out of the store to his truck. Oh no, he must have seen us, Naomi thought, realizing the potential danger they were in. I’ve got to lose this creep. Please help us, Lord Jesus.

 Isaac saddled Barley and raced to the Eshes’ home. Soon the rambling white two-story house came into view. It was an older home constructed mostly of wood with some stone around the base. The rectangular building had two other smaller buildings attached to it where Chloe’s paternal grandparents and great grandparents resided. These small dwellings were called the Dawdi and Gross Dawdi houses. Typically, an Amish father’s parents and grandparents lived in the small houses, while their son or grandson lived in the large main house, and would take care of them until they passed on.

 As soon as Isaac arrived at the Esh place, he jumped off Barley, too preoccupied to tie him to the hitching post. He walked up to the Eshes’ door and pounded on it. “Peter Esh! This is Isaac Fisher – open the door.” No one answered, so he pounded even louder but still received no response. “Peter Esh. Peter Esh,” he called out as he walked to the barn and around the property.

 There were rows and rows of corn, wheat, and barley growing on the plain and partly up the Eshes’ hill as well. A row of trees lined the edge of the property. Isaac muttered, “No one’s home. I don’t see their buggy anywhere. They must still be at the mud sale. Ach, but it’s dark already.”

 “Ach, I hope I didn’t wake you, Daniel Esh,” Isaac replied respectfully to Chloe’s grandfather, and then proceeded to ask, “Do you know if Peter and his family are back from the mud sale yet?”

 “No, they have not returned yet. Is everything all right?” the kind man asked.

 “Dat is worried about Joanna. She hasn’t returned...we were hoping she’d be here,” Isaac answered. “I’m sure she’ll show up soon enough. Have a gut evening,” Isaac said optimistically, not wanting to alarm the older gentleman, then turned and promptly headed back to his horse.

 Immediately after turning onto the busy street, Naomi spotted a police officer behind her in the rear view mirror. She began turning the steering wheel back and forth, causing the vehicle to swerve all over the road. Joanna hadn’t seen the police car and wondered what on earth Naomi was doing. Had she gone ferhoodled too? The cop turned on his bright, swirling red and blue lights and Naomi pulled over.

 A brown haired, brown eyed, tall man in a black uniform stepped out of the black and white car behind them. The stalwart officer cautiously walked to Naomi’s car window and she quickly explained the situation to the officer. He pulled out a small notebook, hastily wrote down some information, and then looked behind him. Right away, the officer flew to his car and took off after the ugly blue truck as it zoomed past, the loud scream of the siren piercing Joanna’s ears.

 The policeman had asked Naomi to pull over to the side of the road and wait for his return. Joanna watched the scene up ahead of them as the officer accosted her abductor and placed him in handcuffs.Shortly thereafter, she saw a second squad car haul the man away. After Naomi answered the officer’s questions satisfactorily, they were free to go home. Both Naomi and Joanna gave out a sigh of relief,
“Oh Naomi, *denki* so much for saving me,” Joanna cried, as Naomi drove toward home. It was completely black outside now and Joanna was certain her family was worried over her disappearance.

“Don’t thank me,” Naomi replied, “thank God. He answered our prayers. He’s the one who made sure that I was in that bathroom when you came along. I’m glad we have a God who loves us and takes care of us.”

“*Jah.* Thank *Gott*, for sure and for certain,” Joanna agreed, as Naomi pulled the car into the lane where Joanna’s house was located. Joanna peered out the window, taking comfort in the familiar surroundings. Home had never looked so wonderful. “It’s so *gut* to be home. *Denki, Gott,*” she whispered, as unbidden tears slipped down her cheeks once again.

She looked up and noticed several buggies. She never even stopped to think about all of the people that might be fretting over her disappearance. Bishop Hostettler’s buggy, Chloe’s family’s, and even Philip King’s buggy was there. “*Ach,* all the buggies…*Dat* must be worried,” she said, as they stepped out of the car.

“Esther, did you call Naomi Fast?” Gideon Fisher quizzed as he peered out the door, recognizing Naomi’s car. “I wonder if she heard the news about…” His eyes squinted. “Joanna! She has our Joanna with her!” he exclaimed at the sight of his daughter, while rushing outside.

“*Dat!*” Joanna sobbed. Oh, how wonderful-*gut* it was to be held in her father’s strong protective arms! Gideon glanced at Naomi with concern on his face.

“Jo,” Chloe called, hugging her so tight she could barely breathe. “What happened to you? Where did you go?”

Joanna said nothing. Noticing her obvious exhaustion, her father carried her inside and set her on the couch. The small group of friends and family eyed her curiously.

“Joanna, please tell us what has happened, *Liewi,*” *Mamm* prodded gently.

“I – I…” Joanna fought for the words, but was still too shaken to share the ordeal. She glanced around at the familiar inquisitive faces of friends and neighbors and took comfort in the concern shown for her. She shivered as chills ran down her spine, and *Mamm* patted her back comfortingly.

Gideon Fisher turned to his eldest daughter and said, “Grace, get some hot peppermint tea for your sister.” Grace nodded and headed toward the kitchen.

“Tis all right, Joanna,” Bishop Hostettler spoke up, and then turned to the onlookers. “Let us leave the family, so they can get some rest, *jah?* Tis late and the girl is clearly exhausted…things always look better in the morning. Joanna is safe at home now and that is what matters.” With that, one by one, the families left for their own homes.

“Naomi Fast, would ya mind stayin’ awhile?” Gideon requested, and then called toward the kitchen, “Grace, bring a cup of tea for Naomi also.” Naomi nodded in agreement.

“I’d be glad to help any way I can,” the kind lady offered, then proceeded to answer Gideon’s and
Esther’s questions. As she sat down on the couch, she recounted everything Joanna had shared with her regarding the incident, up to the point when they pulled into the Fishers’ lane. Naomi herself even looked shaken by the ordeal.

“Let God be praised,” Gideon proclaimed. “Our lost sheep has been found and she is safe in the fold again.”

“How can we thank you?” Esther enquired gratefully.

“I’m just glad that God gave me guidance and showed me what to do,” Naomi said, putting a hand on Joanna’s arm. “This is one brave girl you have here,” she said, smiling.

“Jah, very brave,” Mamm and Dat agreed.
Chapter 4 - Visiting

“Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Exodus 20:12

Joanna yawned as she opened her eyes to see the beautiful sun rays streaming through her window. She had a room of her own so she didn’t need to worry about waking anyone. Joanna shared the upstairs with her siblings, but there were four separate bedrooms so each of them could have their own privacy. She felt blessed to have one of the front bedrooms because the house had a small balcony out the front, which was rare for houses in her community. Oftentimes, she would walk out her door to behold God’s glory in the night sky. The bedroom next to hers was Grace’s, which also had access to the balcony. Across the hall from her bedroom was Isaac’s room, and across from Grace’s room is where Jonathan slept, with a set of steps to the downstairs between the two boys’ rooms.

She took off her heart-shaped prayer kapp, gently brushed her waist-length hair, and then placed the covering back on her head. She removed her nightgown and changed into her plain dark green dress and full-length white apron. When Joanna opened her door, she was overwhelmed by the smell of eggs, bacon, and fresh baked bread. Goodness. I must have slept too long. Why didn’t anybody wake me to help prepare the food? she wondered. As Joanna slowly ambled down the stairs, she could see her mother and Grace busily preparing breakfast.

“Good morning, mein dochder. Did you sleep well?”

“Jah, I slept well, Mamm,” Joanna said. “Why didn’t anybody wake me up to help make breakfast?” she asked, expressing her thoughts.

“You were pretty worn out last night after the ordeal. We thought you could use a little extra rest,” Esther explained.

“Denki, Mamm.” She smiled. “Would you like me to help set the table?”

“Jah, that would be gut,” her mother replied.

Just then, Gideon, Isaac, and Jonathan came in from the barn. “Somethin’ smells wunderbaar,” Gideon commented, stomping the mud off his boots at the back porch. “Boys, you’d better take your boots off outside,” he said to his sons.

“Sit down, Gideon, and have some hot coffee,” Esther offered.

“Scrambled eggs – my favorite!” Jonathan exclaimed with a look of sheer delight on his face. He slid into the kitchen in his socks and nearly ran into his oldest sister, who stood in front of the stove preparing the eggs. As soon as she turned to the sink, Jonathan sneakily stuck a fork into the pan and shoved a bite into his mouth.

Grace turned back to the eggs just as Jonathan was about to steal a second bite. “Ach, Jonathan! What are you doing now?” She quickly shooed him out of the kitchen, threatening him with a wooden spatula. He popped the second bite into his mouth, and then scurried away with a mischievous grin.

“Here’s the fresh milk from Daisy and Buttercup,” Isaac said, handing the warm jars to his mother.
“Denki,” she thanked her eldest son, and then called to the girls. “Is everything on the table?” The girls nodded and they all sat down.

Gideon bowed his head to signal he was about to pray. The family all bowed their heads as well, and then waited in silent reverence. After a short while, Gideon cleared his throat and the family once again lifted their heads. The prayers said at the table were usually prayed in silence, but on occasion they would speak aloud.

As the food was passed around the table, the Fisher family discussed their plans for the day. “We won’t be leaving the farm today. Mammi Miriam has asked us if we would join her and Dawdi John for the noon meal,” Gideon explained. “I told them we would love to. They’re expecting us at eleven, so we can help with the preparations.” Smiles lit up the table like the kerosene lantern that hung overhead.

“May I go fishin’ with Dawdi John?” Jonathan asked excitedly. He, Isaac, Gideon, and John often made the short trip to the pond by foot. Many times they would bring back a large trout or two that Esther would prepare for dinner. Jonathan could taste the fish already.

“Let’s see if Dawdi is up to going today, then we’ll decide,” his father replied. “And if we do, you have to promise not to eat the bait this time.” Gideon chuckled at the remembrance. By the time the men arrived at the pond, the cheese and dough balls they used for bait were conspicuously missing. He figured they had just forgotten the bait at the house until Jonathan smiled broadly and they quickly identified the cheddar cheese stuck to his front teeth.

“Maybe we can pick some flowers, if they’re in bloom yet,” Grace suggested.

“Well, we can figure out all the details when we get there. Right now, let’s clear the table and get the dishes washed,” Esther said, in her usual practical tone. The men left the table and went outside while the ladies proceeded to clean up, anxious for the time when they would walk to the dawdi haus.

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“Kumm. Come on in,” Mammi Miriam said with a smile as bright as the sun, as the family walked into the house. Joanna and her sister went to the kitchen, and noticed the table was already set.

“May we help with anything?” Joanna offered.

“Ach, nee. I already have everything ready. I’m just waiting on the roast and vegetables in the oven,” Mammi Miriam replied, and then thought to herself. “I think there are some flowers blooming in my garden right now, though. Will you girls take this vase and go pick some to set on the table?” The girls nodded, and then went outside in search of some of God’s most beautiful creations.

Meanwhile, the men folk went to the small living room. The room was sparsely decorated with only a small green sofa, a wooden rocking chair that had been a hand-made gift from Gideon, and a coffee table. A small brick fireplace provided a focal point and adorned the corner of the room. The men conversed about the weather and other areas of interest, while the women did likewise in the kitchen.

After the meal was over, the men headed outside. “Miriam, I’m going down to the pond with the boys. Hopefully, we’ll be bringing back supper,” Dawdi John said, as he went for his fishing pole.

The women folk now sat in the small living room, as Mammi Miriam walked briskly to her bedroom. “I have something to show you,” Miriam said enthusiastically. It sounded as if Mammi was rummaging through her hope chest.
“I wonder what it could be...” Joanna thought aloud. The girls looked at each other, and then at Esther who was curious herself.

Miriam finally appeared with a large colorful blanket in her arms. The girls and Esther gasped in unison. “Oh, Miriam, it’s absolutely gorgeous,” Esther complimented.

“Do you think so? It’s for Isaac...to set up his home someday,” Mammi Miriam said with misty eyes. “It’s not finished yet, but it should be in time.”

Joanna and Grace both gaped at the beautiful quilt, as they gently fingered the small stitches. Joanna thought of all the quilts that she and Chloe had perused at the mud sale and decided this was every bit as gorgeous as those. “Look at all the bright colors – just like the flowers in your garden, Mammi. I think the Double Wedding Ring pattern is my favorite,” Grace stated.

“Then I’ll just have to make one for you too...when your time comes, that is,” Mammi Miriam replied, smiling. Joanna noticed that Grace blushed after Mammi’s comment.

“Now, we mustn’t let Isaac know about Mammi’s surprise,” Esther warned. Both girls nodded, indicating their agreement to keep the secret.

Miriam returned after putting the quilt away in her bedroom. “Now, who would like a slice of apple pie?” she asked, then headed to the kitchen. She proceeded to remove two large pies from the oven. “We’ll just enjoy a little dessert until the men get back from fishing, jah?”

Joanna breathed a sigh of relief when the family returned home for the evening. Neither Dawdi nor Mammi had asked her about her abduction and for that she was thankful. The sooner she forgot about the whole ordeal, the better.

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Barrett Winston stepped in line behind the other prisoners. It felt good to be out in the fresh air after being cooped up in his small cell. He looked around and noticed the high chain-link fences with coiled razor wire on top. No escaping here, he thought.

When they reached the center of the yard he was confronted by a fellow inmate. “Hey Winston, how much time you got?”

“Twenty years,” Barrett growled back.

“Twenty years, what’d you do?” the large muscular inmate asked.

“None of your business, Jones. Now run off and find yourself a little dolly to play with,” he responded feistily.

A short, tattooed, dark-haired prisoner joined the two men. “I’ll tell you what he did, Jones. I heard he’s in here for child abduction. He’s one of those sickos that does wicked things to innocent little children.”

“Children?” Jones clenched his fists and popped his knuckles, summoning a few other inmates. “Do you know what we do to worthless losers like you?” Barrett gulped and braced himself for what was inevitably coming next.
Chapter 5 – Back to School

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” Psalm 127:3

The beautiful, old one-room schoolhouse sat at the top of a small hill. It sported a fresh coat of white paint, which the men in the community had recently completed, along with a few repairs. A set of swings and several handmade see-saws were available in the school yard for the children to play on. The many trees around provided a nice shaded area for a picnic lunch, or a haven from the sun.

Grace and Joanna marched silently to the one-room schoolhouse as Jonathan ran up ahead to meet his friends. They and the other scholars from Paradise attended every year when it wasn’t planting or harvesting season. Even though Isaac was sixteen, he no longer needed to attend school. He now stayed home to help out his father in his woodworking shop, and would sometimes volunteer his time to make repairs on the schoolhouse. Amish children were only required to attend school up until the eighth grade, assuming a vocational education thereafter.

Joanna was grateful for a moment of peace. It had only been two days since her abduction had taken place. Since then, she vowed that she’d never go anywhere alone again. In fact, the thought of leaving the house this morning frightened her. At times like this, she was thankful for her brothers and sisters.

“Hullo, Joanna – wait for me.” Joanna didn’t even need to turn around to see who it was. She knew that voice very well. It was Chloe.

She jogged up to them, panting all the while. Chloe, who usually loved to talk, simply grasped Joanna’s hand and began walking at a slow, steady pace. She must’ve sensed her friend’s need for quiet. When they reached the schoolyard, Joanna suddenly stopped and took a deep breath. She hoped she wouldn’t have to explain to everyone. Sure enough, scholars from all directions came running toward them, pounding her with questions.

“Where were you?” Matthew Riehl asked.

“What happened? Were you scared?” asked another schoolmate.

“Leave Joanna alone,” Chloe declared protectively. “She doesn’t want to talk about it, so just let her be,” she repeated.

“I’ll tell you what happened,” Sadie Lapp announced, eager to share all that she knew with the whole class. “A huge, scary, ferhoodled man came up to her and grabbed her. He said …”

Sadie’s voice trailed off as Joanna and Chloe walked around the side of the schoolhouse. “Ach, Chloe, I’m trying to forget what happened, but it’s so hard. I don’t know what to do. That terrible man…” Joanna’s voice pleaded softly for help.

“Never mind that Sadie Lapp. She always sticks her nose where it doesn’t belong,” Chloe said in disdain. “You can pray that Der Herr will help you forget,” her friend suggested.

“Jah, I’ve done that already. But you don’t understand, Chloe. Everywhere I go I’m afraid that man is going to come and take me away again. Every time I hear an Englischer car, I think it might be
him.”

“That isn’t going to happen, Jo. Didn’t you say that the police officer stopped him? I think the Englischers put people in jail for that sorta thing, jah? You’re safe here. Besides,” Chloe continued, “I don’t think Gott will let that happen to you again. He saved you, jah?”

“Jah, He did,” Joanna agreed.

“I’m sure you’ll forget as time goes by. Just try not to think about it so much. Try to think about something gut – like the boppli that my mamm is going to have this fall.” Chloe waited for Joanna’s reaction.

“You’re jokin’.” Joanna smiled, questioning Chloe with her big blue eyes.

“No, I’m not,” Chloe confirmed.

“Ach, Chloe, that’s the best news. I bet you’re excited.” Joanna grinned broadly. And by the look in her eyes, Chloe agreed.

DONG…DONG…DONG…DONG, the school bell declared. At the familiar sound, both girls walked confidently into the schoolhouse with the other scholars.

During lunch time, Joanna and Chloe talked about the new boppli that would be born this winter.

“I hope it is a boy,” Chloe said optimistically. “We have plenty of girls in the house. With me, Rachel, Anna, Abigail, and Ruthie, Mamm has enough help. But Dat only has Stephen to help him. I know Dat and Stephen both wouldn’t mind havin’ another man around to help out with farmin’ and what not.”

“Jah, a boy would be nice,” Joanna agreed, and then noticed the other children playing. “Let’s play hide and seek now. I’ll count first and you go hide.”

Joanna stood by the old oak tree and covered her eyes. She began counting; instinctively knowing Chloe would run off. “One…two…three…” Joanna counted while Chloe searched for good place to hide.

When Joanna finished counting, she set off looking for Chloe. “Ready or not, here I come.” She stopped short when she noticed Chloe standing near the corner of the schoolhouse, in plain sight of all things. Why is Chloe just standing there? Joanna thought, and slowly snuck up behind her. “You’re it, Chloe,” she exclaimed.

“Shh…” Chloe hissed. “Look, there’s my sister Rachel and your brother Isaac – what are they doing?”

Joanna carefully peered around the back corner of the schoolhouse. Sure enough, Isaac and Rachel were standing by the back door. “They’re talking and laughing,” Joanna answered.

“Do you think they’re sweet on each other?” Chloe puzzled, gaping at the sight.

“That’s what it looks like to me,” Joanna mused aloud. Her eyes suddenly grew wide. “Isaac just got his courtin’ buggy. Maybe he’s going to court our teacher, your sister…”

“Maybe they’ll even get married…and then have bopplin,” Chloe added.

“Then we’d be related – like sisters!”

“It would be wunderbaar to have you for a sister, Jo.” Chloe beamed at the prospect, her eyes sparkling. “That’s the best kind of sister to have – your best friend.”
“Sisters.” The two girls celebrated the possibility.

“Sisters?” asked a familiar young man’s voice. The girls whipped around and found Isaac and their teacher – both of them looking baffled. Joanna could feel heat rush to her cheeks.

“Oh, n-n-nothing,” Chloe stammered, attempting to mask the discovery of her sister’s possible secret courtship.

“We were j-just discussing Mary Esh’s b-boppli,” Joanna stuttered.

“It’d be gut to have an-other brother, rather than to have another sister, jah?” Chloe stumbled over the words as she spoke them. “B-because I have s-so many sisters already.”

“Girls, why are you speaking that way? I’ve never heard either of you stutter before,” Rachel asked quizzically, lowering her eyebrows. “Are you feeling all right?”

Neither girl explained, nor did they care to. Isaac and Rachel would surely both be nigh unto death with embarrassment if they had any idea what their sisters had been discussing.

“Jah, we’re fine,” both girls shrieked in unison before scampering back to the front schoolyard – leaving behind Rachel and Isaac, who were thoroughly bewildered and even more confused than before.
Chapter 6 – The New Job

“Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.” Proverbs 20:11

Joanna happily hummed a hymn from the Ausbund as she sauntered into her bedroom to change for chorin’ time. This was one of her favorite times of the day. She lifted her dark blue dress and apron off the hook on her wall. After removing her school dress and slipping into her chorin’ dress, she then took the straight pins from her drawer and pinned on her apron.

Once Joanna had retrieved her basket, she skipped outside to the small chicken coop. This year her family only had fifty of the feathery fowl, twenty white, twenty-nine red, and a single rooster. She quickly gathered the eggs into the wire basket and scattered the feed for the chickens, trying to avoid the rooster which could sometimes cause trouble.

Next, she went into the barn to feed and water the horses. She walked through the two large barn doors that housed the large animals and went directly to one of the stalls. “Hullo, Bloobier. Hiya, Cinnamon,” she greeted the content animals in a sing-song voice, “How are you doin’, Barley?”

She fed Cinnamon some alfalfa by hand and the animal enjoyed Joanna’s attention, always making the most of it. Joanna giggled. “You silly thing, you’re all ferhoodled in your head – just the way I like you.” Just then Barley snorted, as if he was trying to say, “What about me?” confirming his envy.

Joanna turned. “Ach, Barley. Why are you jealous? It’s not as if you don’t get plenty of attention,” she said teasingly, over her shoulder. Then she walked across the narrow passageway to Barley’s stall and stroked his mane, feeding him by hand just as she had with Cinnamon earlier. “You’re so fast,” she murmured to Barley, remembering when she and Chloe had raced him and Cayenne, one of the horses owned by the Esh family.

The girls wouldn’t be allowed to ride horses anymore when they’d become ladies – just three years down the road. Dat and Mamm didn’t like the idea of the girls racing, for fear they’d be injured. “Sometimes horses can be unpredictable animals, especially if spooked,” Dat had warned. But that hadn’t stopped Joanna and Chloe. They couldn’t help but race the beautiful creatures, despite their parents’ concerns. They did feel a bit guilty afterward, though. The Bible did say to honor their parents…but why would God make horses if they couldn’t race them in the first place? After all, their parents hadn’t outright forbidden them to ride...

Joanna shook herself from her musings and moved on to Bloobier’s stall. They had named the white colt Blueberry because when she was born she had large, beautiful blue eyes the color of blueberries. Bloobier was her name in Pennsylvania Dutch, the nickname Joanna liked to use for the blue-eyed mare.

After feeding Blueberry, she continued on to the last occupied stall where the new horse stood waiting. Isaac’s courting buggy horse they’d purchased at the auction. Joanna shivered as she remembered that day, then quickly pushed the thought aside and tried to focus on the magnificent
animal before her. The horse appeared skittish and scared, probably not yet accustomed to her new surroundings. She snorted, throwing her head back. Joanna moved slowly so she wouldn’t frighten the creature, and held out a long orange carrot. “Kumm,” she spoke gently, and the horse gradually came near and began to nibble on the carrot. Feeling compassionate toward the new animal, she began to sing a liedе. The horse had visibly calmed down and she was even eating grain from Joanna’s hand. For this, she was pleased. “You are a nice horse, jah?” she encouraged, gently stroking her mane.

Joanna studied the large equine creature. Mainly black in color, except for the white star on her forehead and white socks on all four feet, the horse was very beautiful in build, strong and sleek. The sheen of her black coat was lovely as well. Just looking at it made her mind run wild with excitement. Just wait until I get to race her...that is, if Isaac lets me.

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Joanna strolled into the kitchen where her mother was cooking supper. As she stepped into the room a delicious fragrance permeated the air. Joanna closed her eyes trying to guess what the menu was for the evening meal. She smiled, fresh bread, roast beef, vegetables...

“Joanna, I need you to set the table,” Esther said.

“Sure, Mamm.” Joanna took out six plates from the cabinets and six forks from a drawer which held the silverware. She headed toward the table and set the plates and forks down one by one.

Dat and Isaac had come in from the barn, after stomping the mud off their boots. They had just this week received a large order for a dining room set: a kitchen table, eight chairs, and a china hutch. Installing a telephone in the barn had really helped their family business. Now, they received calls for orders several times per week. Most of the Amish in their community didn’t own telephones, neither were they allowed to. This was because they felt that having a telephone in the home was opening up a door to the Englischers’ world, one that all too often lead to wickedness and a departure from the Amish church. Just one of the ways the church leadership attempted to keep members in the fold, thus preserving their unique way of life. The bishop and the other elders of their district did, however, sometimes allow telephones in the barn for business purposes.

Esther and Grace set the food out on the table: green beans, a creamed beef dish, and fresh-baked bread. Oh well, at least my guess was close, Joanna thought as she eyed the delicious feast. Oh, how Joanna loved fresh bread with slow-churned butter on top. Just the thought of it made her mouth water.

Gideon came and sat down at the head of the table, the place where an Amish father always sat, demonstrating his leadership in the home. Esther, his wife, sat next to him with each of the children beside, or across from her. After every family member was seated at the table, they all bowed their heads in silence. When Gideon was finished with the silent prayer, he cleared his throat. Each family member then served themselves a helping of food, with the exception of Jonathan, whom Esther helped in order to avoid disaster.

When the meal was finished, Gideon said another silent prayer, and then everyone was excused from the table. The women cleared the table, and Esther joined Gideon in the living room shortly thereafter. Grace and Joanna moved to the sink to wash the dishes, and then retired to the living room where the rest of the family was. In the evenings, the Fisher family would often read the Bible, play games, or read an Amish publication. This was the place where Joanna felt the safest, amongst her
“Joanna,” Gideon spoke, lifting his eyes from the newspaper, “are you still wantin’ a job?”
“For sure and for certain!” Joanna replied with excitement. “What did you find, Dat?”
“It says here, ‘Wanted: reliable person to deliver honey in Paradise. Part-Time. Please call (717)915-0027.’ You could use your scooter to make the deliveries. Would you like me to call the number and find out where they’re located?” Dat asked.
“Oh, yes. Denki, Dat.” Joanna smiled.

Gideon arose from his seat and headed toward the barn. He returned several minutes later. “Well, it looks like you may have yourself a job,” her dad said encouragingly. “I’ll have Isaac take you to meet the woman Friday after school. She seemed real nice. She said she had health problems and couldn’t do the deliveries on her own anymore. I think the place may be just down the street from Phillip King’s farm, so you shouldn’t have any trouble finding it.”

Joanna smiled…a job at last!
Chapter 7 – A New Friend

“A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24

Isaac stood waiting next to his buggy as Joanna trudged out of the schoolhouse on Friday. Today they were going to see Joanna’s new employer. Isaac helped her into his new courting buggy and soon they drove off. “Is there something wrong?” Isaac asked, noticing concern on her face. “I thought you’d be excited about your new job.”

“Just nervous, I guess,” Joanna replied. She didn’t want to bother Isaac about her frequent nightmares. “I hope the lady that I’m working for will like me.”

“Dat said she sounded real nice on the telephone. I think you’ll be fine...besides, who wouldn’t like a sweet eleven-year-old Amish girl?” Isaac said, trying to pull a smile from her lips.

“Don’t overdo it, Isaac,” she said, smiling. “But thanks for trying to encourage me.”

“Trying to encourage you? I got you to smile, didn’t I?” He grinned.

“Jah. Denki, Bruder.”

They rode along in silence now as they passed a few farms, drove over the covered bridge that stretched across Miller’s Creek, and arrived on the outskirts of town. Right down the street and across the road from Philip King’s herb shop was a small, dark-blue cottage with white trim and gables to match.

A lovely garden graced the front yard – a quarter of it contained culinary herbs such as parsley and dill, another portion grew young sprouting vegetable plants, in a beautiful third quarter bloomed colorful, fragile flowers in their beginning stages, and in the midst of the fourth section stood a large, sturdy oak tree. Its branches hung over the house as if to protect it, which would also provide plenty of shade in the summertime. An old wooden swing hung from one of the branches of the large oak tree. Joanna felt the house looked a bit spooky, especially when she saw the swing blow in the soft breeze.

Goose bumps suddenly emerged on Joanna’s arms. “Tis some house, jah, Isaac?” Joanna commented. But Isaac didn’t seem to think there was anything scary about it, at least he didn’t act like it.

“Jah, I guess.” Isaac couldn’t understand her apprehension. “Kumm, Joanna. Let’s meet your new boss.” She looked around as they slowly walked up to the door. The cottage had a beautiful porch that seemed to wrap around the whole house – it was quite lovely. A small white wicker sofa with bright throw pillows decorated the porch. An empty rocking chair that sported the same design and colors gently rocked in the breeze. She took a deep breath before Isaac knocked on the door. I’m glad I’ll be working for a lady and not a man, Joanna breathed a sigh of relief. She was still uncomfortable around strangers after her frightening ordeal.

A woman’s voice sounded through the door, as they heard the click of the lock turning and a chain unlatching. “Just a minute, please.” The door cracked open a little, and then finally opened all the way.

“Naomi Fast, I can’t believe it’s you. I didn’t know you sold honey.” Joanna smiled at the pleasant surprise, relief flooding her soul.

Naomi chuckled. “Well, there are many things you don’t know about me. Except that maybe I’m a crazy driver.” She hoped bringing that up wouldn’t bring back painful memories for Joanna.

Joanna and Isaac both laughed. “Jah, thank Gott for that. Now I know why your name is Naomi FAST,” Joanna replied, which made them all laugh even harder.

The playful banter subsided and they got down to business. “Let’s go out back and I’ll show you the bee hives,” Naomi said. After quite a long walk to the edge of her property, they finally reached the hives. “This is where the honey is made; I thought you’d like to see it.”

“I don’t want to get too close, I’ve already been stung a couple of times,” Joanna shared, hesitant to step forward to the many rows of white boxes.

“Well, it’s not essential to be near the bees for your job, so don’t worry. I just assumed you’d like to know a little bit about them and see where they are kept. They are actually fascinating creatures. Did you know that one honey bee only makes about 1/12 teaspoon of honey in its whole life?”

“Ach, no...and they’re always so busy too,” Joanna commented.

Isaac piped in curiously, “How much honey does each hive make?”

“Well, that depends on the weather. Normally, when it’s not too damp, each hive will produce about fifty to sixty pounds of honey per year,” Naomi answered.

“So, with twenty hives...” Isaac said, mentally counting, “that’s about a thousand pounds or more a year? Wow! No wonder you need extra help.”

“It’s actually not as much as it sounds. For example, some of my customers buy five gallons at a time. That equates to about sixty pounds, and that’s just for one customer,” Naomi explained.

Naomi proceeded to show Joanna and Isaac around her property. It was mostly flatland with a small sloping hill toward the back of her fifty acres. The bee hives were kept close to the small hill because Naomi didn’t want the children playing near them. Directly behind the house, she had about two acres that were fenced in. A long clothes line stretched from the back porch to one of the trees in the yard. The fenced area also housed some children’s play equipment – a large wooden structure that had a slide, two swings, some plastic rocks to climb up, and a pole to slide down. There was also a colorful see-saw and a trampoline. Joanna had never seen so many unnecessary items. And although they looked like fun, she wondered who would ever have that much extra time to play on them.

Finally, they came back to the house. “Would the two of you like some lemonade?” the kind lady asked them.

“Nee, denki. I mean, no, thank you. We should be starting back home soon,” Isaac answered for them both. Truthfully, he was eager to get home so he could prepare for his date with Rachel tonight.

“Do you have any questions about the job, Joanna?” Naomi looked at her.

“Well, I was wondering...would it be okay if my friend Chloe comes along with me? I’d rather not go out by myself anymore.”

“I understand, and that would be perfectly fine with me. As a matter of fact, I think it’s a wonderful idea. I have a lot of customers already and I get new ones every week,” Naomi replied approvingly, and then added, “By the way, Joanna, I’m really glad it was you that came today. I have a
feeling that we’re going to become good friends.”

“Denki, Naomi.” Joanna smiled genuinely, looking into her eyes with affection. This would indeed be a good, safe place to work.

I can’t wait to tell Mamm and Dat who I’ll be working for, Joanna thought excitedly, as Cinnamon trotted along. And Chloe. She mused. No, I won’t tell Chloe. I’ll keep it a secret and surprise her, too.

“Did you hear me, Joanna?” Isaac asked, interrupting her thoughts.

“Hear what?”

“I guess you didn’t hear me. I asked you about working for Naomi Fast. I said, don’t you think it’s a coincidence that your employer turned out to be Naomi, after all that’s happened?”

“Do you think I’m workin’ with Naomi for a special reason, Isaac?” The thought had never occurred to her.

“Could be.” He shrugged.

They both sat quietly and pondered that for a while. Then Joanna spoke up, “Isaac, did you see any children there?”

Isaac thought about it. “No. Did you?”

“Nee. I didn’t hear any either.” Joanna looked straight ahead at the covered bridge they were about to tunnel.

Isaac slowed Barley as they entered the shaded enclosure. “They probably went somewhere with Naomi’s husband, jah?” The sunshine beat warm on their shoulders while they continued toward home, passing neighboring houses and farms. Levi and Joshua Hostettler waved a hello from the back of a plow when they passed by the Hostettlers’ farm and they waved back.

“There were a lot of toys in the backyard. I wonder how many kinner she’s got.”

“Maybe we should have asked her,” Isaac replied.

“Jah. I’ll ask her next time,” Joanna said, as they pulled into their drive.

That evening, there was a knock at the door. Bishop Hostettler stood on the porch, his expression unreadable. “Hullo, Gideon. I hope you and your family are well this evening.”

“We are,” Joanna’s father replied. “What brings you out tonight, Judah?” he asked his familiar friend.

“I actually wanted to speak with Joanna outside. Of course, you may come as well,” the bishop stated matter-of-factly.

“Very well, I will get her.” Gideon then proceeded to the living room and returned with Joanna. They all stepped outside onto the back porch, and then sat down.

The bishop cut to the chase. “Joanna, the reason I am here is to clarify a few things about your abduction. I understand that you were alone when the incident took place. Am I correct?”

“Jah,” Joanna answered timidly.

“How long were you alone for?” he asked, concern shown in his eyes.
“Not long at all. We heard Chloe’s *mamm* call, but I needed to use the restroom. Chloe went to her *mamm*, and I turned to find the restroom, which wasn’t far away. But as soon as I turned the corner, that’s when...” Joanna’s voice trailed off, she was unable to speak anymore, not willing to replay the scene in her head again.

“I do not wish to add to your distress, but I wanted to let you know that the elders are going to make an announcement at the Sunday-Go-To-Meeting in two days. We have learned something from this incident, as I am sure you have too.” He paused, stroking his long, graying beard. Although Judah Hostettler wasn’t much older than Gideon, his facial hair was much grayer. Joanna attributed the fact to the sometimes demanding role a bishop had in trying to juggle the needs of his family with the needs of the community. The position derived much sympathy from the People, especially when a bishop had an especially large family, as did Judah. “We want the People, especially our young people, to be kept safe. We have decided that no young person should ever be out in public alone, but always have another person with them. I believe this will prevent any more problems, such as the one you experienced.”

“That sounds like a reasonable request,” Gideon commented, looking from the bishop to his daughter.

“If you feel uncomfortable about attending Meeting on Sunday, you may stay home. I spoke with Brother Esh and he has agreed to allow Chloe to stay behind with you. Your *vadder* has already agreed to it, as well.”

“*Denki.*” Joanna was grateful that her church district had a kindhearted bishop. She’d heard that they weren’t very common amongst their People. And although he could be stern at times, he genuinely cared for the People of Paradise.
Chapter 8 – Honey

“Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” Proverbs 16:24

Joanna jumped out of her sleep at the rooster’s crow. She sighed heavily as she sat up in her bed, wiping the sweat from her brow. She had, once again, been bombarded with frightening nightmares. *When will they ever go away?* She thought.

The dreadful man, by whom she was kidnapped, seemed to haunt her almost nightly. She saw herself riding with him in his truck again, but this time she was wearing the boys clothing that he had given her. He drove her out to a small, decrepit old house in the middle of nowhere. They got out of the truck and she looked around. She realized that there wasn’t a single soul around for miles – she could scream, but nobody would hear. He took her arm roughly and they walked to the house and...that’s when she woke up, thankfully. She did not want to find out what would happen next, had her dream continued. It was too frightening. Tears filled her eyes and she began shivering. *Oh, Gott, please help me. Thank you that it was just a dream. It was just a dream,* she reminded herself.

She took a deep breath, and then managed to compose herself. Somehow, she had to push these ugly thoughts out of her mind. She was safe at home now, wasn’t she? She arose quickly from her bed and donned her purple dress, black shoes and stockings, black apron and white prayer kapp – after pinning her hair up. It was only a little after five o’clock on Saturday. *Today I’m going to visit Naomi Fast and start my new job.* That was something positive to think about. *And if Chloe can go with me, she’ll be able to earn money for her family, too. Yes, this will be a gut day.*

After breakfast and chores were completed, Joanna took her new green scooter from the barn and headed toward the Esh house. Her parents had given her the scooter as a birthday gift last year. *I hope Chloe’s mamm will allow her to go with me,* she thought. As she rode into the Eshes’ driveway, she saw Stephen, Chloe’s only brother, in the field. She felt sorry for him. Since he was the only boy in the family, he had it pretty rough. There was a lot of work to do around the Esh farm and Peter Esh often hired other young Amish men to help work in the field. Daniel Esh, Chloe’s grandfather, helped out some, but he was getting up in years. Even though Chloe was a tomboy, she seldom worked in the fields. Her father didn’t want to burden the women folk in his home, as he felt the responsibility to provide rested on his shoulders. Joanna hoped the Esh family would be blessed with another boy, for Peter’s and Stephen’s sake.

Although Chloe sometimes played with Stephen, he still didn’t have someone especially close to him. And even though he and Levi Hostettler seemed to be pretty *gut* friends, Joanna sensed he had no one that he could really confide in. Someone he could share his deepest, darkest secrets with and know they would never tell a soul. That’s how it was with her and Chloe, and that’s how she wanted it to stay. But perhaps boys didn’t need that kind of companionship?

Joanna quickly parked her scooter and walked up the steps to the door. Just as soon as she knocked, the door flung open revealing Chloe’s mother. Mary Esh looked rather piqued. “*Hullo, Mary*
Esh. How are you doing today?” Joanna asked politely.

“I’m feeling a bit tired today, but I’ll get by,” Chloe’s mother answered.

_Oh no_, Joanna thought to herself. _She probably won’t want Chloe to go._ She forged ahead anyway. “I’m starting my new job today delivering honey and I was hoping that Chloe could come along. She would be back by dinner time. After what happened at the mud sale, I-I’m afraid to go anywhere by myself,” she pleaded. Oh, how she detested bringing up that wretched day!

Mary paused, sensing the poor girl’s distress. “I think I can get along without her today,” she answered compassionately. She turned from the door, inviting Joanna inside.

Mary went to the bottom of the stairs to summon Chloe. “Joanna wants you to go with her to her new job. You may go if your chores are done,” she told her daughter as Chloe hastened down the stairs.

“I just finished them, Mamm.” Chloe smiled brightly, and then turned to her friend. “And I would love to go with you, Joanna. Let me get my scooter.”

“Denki, Mary Esh,” Joanna called, as they headed out to the barn. She wanted to tell her congratulations on her _boppli_, but that was not their way. Pregnancies were usually kept quiet until it was too obvious to keep secret anymore. Joanna felt privileged to be one of the few privy to the wonderful news.

While Joanna waited for Chloe to get her scooter, Abigail Esh walked up to her. “Joanna, may I go with you and Chloe?” she asked softly.

“Sorry, Abby, not this time. Chloe and I are starting a new job,” Joanna replied. It was hard not say yes to sweet little Abby. She was little for six, had beautiful green eyes that bored right into you, strawberry-blond hair, and a smile that brightened the world.

“Abigail, go see if Mamm needs help with Ruthie,” Chloe suggested. “I found my scooter. We’re off now, jah?”

“Jah,” Joanna answered. “Goodbye, Abby. I’ll see you when we get back, and then maybe we can swing, okay?”

The young girl’s eyes brightened. “Denki, Joanna!”

Joanna and Chloe waved goodbye to Abigail and took off in a hurry. The girls rode through puddles and around rocks. The beauty of the countryside was everywhere. The trees seemed to scream, ‘Look at me’ as they modeled the first faint flowers of spring. Joanna loved Paradise. It was where she was born and where she desired to stay forever.

“Let’s race, Jo,” Chloe challenged. Not waiting for an answer, she took off ahead of Joanna and dirt flew into Joanna’s mouth, hitting her in the face.

“Chloe, stop! Ya got me all dirty,” Joanna hollered after her friend.

Chloe stopped and waited patiently for Joanna to catch up with her. When Joanna did sidle up next to her friend, she was panting. “I guess racing was a bad idea,” Chloe remarked and then giggled. “It looks like you’ve been making mud pies – and eating them too!”

Joanna couldn’t help but laugh also. “Thanks to you. Ach, I must look a sight.” She attempted to wipe the caked mud off of her face, only smearing it in the process.

“Jah, sorry about that,” Chloe answered, removing a handkerchief from her sleeve. She helped Joanna clean her face and then they continued on to their destination at normal speeds.

_I’m glad Naomi Fast is so nice. I’m going to like working for her._ Joanna thought, as she and Chloe found the address and went into the driveway. _At least she doesn’t live too far from my house._
Chloe tapped on the door and Joanna waited to see her reaction.

“Hello, Joanna,” the familiar voice greeted her at the door. “And this is your friend Chloe, right?”

“Naomi Fast?” Chloe asked in disbelief.

“I do believe we have met already, Chloe.” Naomi smiled, and then gestured with her hand. “Come on in, girls.” She led the girls to the small sectional in her living room. “Let me get you some lemonade and you can sip on it while we go over your delivery schedule for the day.”

“How many customers will we be delivering to today?” Joanna asked, taking note of the mostly plain furnishings. Naomi’s place wasn’t much different from her own home. She did have electric though, but there wasn’t a television in the room like she’d once seen inside an Englischer’s house. She’d heard most Englisch homes contained the wicked devices.

“You only have ten for this morning. I figured I would start you out slowly, and then as you get the hang of it, I’ll add more customers to your route. Most of them are around here, so you won’t have to go too far just yet.”

“That sounds gut,” Joanna said.

“And I’d like the two of you to join me for lunch when you’re done,” Naomi insisted.

“That would be wunderbaar,” Joanna exclaimed, looking at Chloe, who agreed.

“Here is your list of customers. You have the Starks, which will be just down the street on the left-hand side; the Alcorns, which are across the street from them; the Kleins, the Hamms, and the Tufises, which all live on Miller Road. I’ve written all of the addresses down in case you get mixed up. I’m pretty sure you know where the rest of the customers live – the Yoders, the Bontragers, the Zooks, the Millers, and the Gingriches.”

“Jah, we know where they live.” Chloe confirmed the names of the Amish that lived in their church district.

“Then it looks like you’re all set,” Naomi said.

Joanna and Chloe proceeded to take the honey and carefully loaded the amber filled jars into the front baskets of their scooters. In no time, they were off to deliver the honey to the names Naomi had written on the list. As they collected the money from each sale, Joanna placed it into an envelope and stuck it into her apron pocket.

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*Rumspringa,* or the running-around years, typically begins when Amish boys and girls in the community turn sixteen. At this time, they are allowed to explore the outside world and then eventually decide if they want to be baptized and officially join the Amish church.

A young man’s parents usually provide him with his own courting buggy in which he can begin to court a young woman. He will ask her permission, and then she’ll let her beau drive her around in his buggy after Sunday night Singings – a special time when young folk gather together to sing, play games, and fellowship.

Likewise, at this age a young woman may receive a hope chest to store things that she’ll use when she gets married: special quilts, tablecloths, tea sets, etc. Courtships are kept secret in the Amish communities. Sometimes the parents don’t even know who their son or daughter is courting until just prior to the publishing, or public announcement, of their upcoming wedding. The wedding will
normally take place within a few weeks after it’s published, typically after the fall harvest.

Isaac Fisher and Rachel Esh rode past an open meadow in Isaac’s new courting buggy. A gentle breeze flowed through the buggy bringing with it the delightful fragrances of spring flowers.

“How do you like it?” Isaac asked, gesturing to his new rig and attempting to quell the pride that threatened his being.

Rachel pulled her eyes away from the two butterflies flitting in the sunshine near a copse of trees. Perhaps they are a match...I wonder if Isaac and I are a match as well. She glanced over at Isaac and caught his smiling eyes under his straw hat and her heart leaped. “Jah, ‘tis nice, Isaac.”

Isaac attempted to calm his nerves, taking a deep breath. It wasn’t easy riding with a girl a year older than him. Most likely, she’d already attended many singings and Isaac had no idea how many young men she’d already ridden home with, especially since the girls in their district were allowed to attend singings at fourteen. At this very moment, he didn’t like that allowance. Why couldn’t their girls start attending singings at sixteen like they did over in Bishop Bender’s district? He wiped a sweaty palm on his trousers trying to summon enough courage to ask this beautiful woman to be his steady girl. “Rachel, I was hoping to ask you to go to the singing with me on Sunday.”

“Are you hopin’ to ask me, or are you asking me?” Rachel teased.

“Ach, quit teasing, Rachel.” Isaac smiled. “I’m nervous enough as it is.”

Rachel giggled. “I thought that might be why you’ve been so quiet. Jah, I will go to the singin’ with ya, Isaac,” she replied, blushing.

Isaac took a relieved breath and gently caught Rachel’s hand. “Gut.”

“What’d you name your new horse?” She quickly changed the subject, lest her cheeks become brighter than the tomatoes she and Mamm canned last harvest. He’s holding my hand!

“I was thinkin’ of naming her Racer because she used to be a race horse. I couldn’t come up with anything else. Unless you have any suggestions...” Isaac smiled at his girl.

Rachel pondered for a moment, assessing the large creature. “Well, she is black...how about Midnight?”

“I’d say Midnight fits her right fine with her shiny black coat and the star between her eyes. I like it. How do you like that, Midnight?” On cue, the horse snorted her reply, as if agreeing to the name. “Midnight it is.” Isaac laughed along with Rachel, as they rode merrily through the countryside.

“You want to see how fast she can run?” Isaac asked, eager to try out his new horse.

“We can go a little faster, but I don’t want to go full-speed. She looks like she can run a pretty fast clip,” Rachel replied apprehensively.

Isaac clicked his tongue and slapped the reins. Midnight took off a little quicker than he’d expected. Isaac pulled on the reins, but Midnight did not slow down.

“Whoa, Midnight,” Isaac called to the horse. Midnight began to slow until they drove near a leftover puddle from the last rain. The horse spooked at the sight of her reflection in the water and took off again. She abruptly veered to the right, which caused the buggy to swing into the other lane. Rachel hung on for dear life, while Isaac attempted to gain control of the frightened mare. The oncoming car slammed on the brakes, but could not stop...
At about 11:30, Joanna and Chloe returned to the Fast residence. “You girls finished the route a little quicker than I’d expected. I hope you didn’t run into any problems,” Naomi commented.

“Nee, we didn’t,” the girls said, reassuringly. “There was one customer though, Elsa Klein, that wanted us to stay and talk awhile. After about ten minutes, we told her we needed to get back.”

“Sometimes I feel sorry for the elderly woman. She doesn’t have any relatives to care for her, so she lives all alone there. She says the honey helps with her arthritis – she mixes it with apple cider vinegar and water, and then drinks it down. I try to visit her once in a while,” Naomi replied.

“Perhaps we can visit her sometime, too,” Joanna voiced her thoughts. “I guess living in an Amish community has its advantages. Our elderly people always have someone to care for them, even if they have no relatives living. We feel it is our responsibility to take care of them, like the Bible says.”

“That’s right. The Amish never put their loved ones in those homes for older folk,” Chloe chimed in.

“I think Ms. Klein would like it very much if the two of you visited her.” Naomi smiled.

Joanna thought she heard a baby crying. “Naomi, I think I heard something. A boppli?”

At first, Naomi looked puzzled. “Oh, you probably heard Katie. I guess she must have awakened from her nap. I’ll just set the soup on the table, so you girls can help yourselves already.” She quickly took three bowls and spoons from the kitchen and set them on the table next to the steaming pot of obviously homemade chicken noodle soup that smelled delightful. She then ran upstairs to her daughter.

“I didn’t know she had a daughter. Did you?” Chloe asked, sitting down at the kitchen table.

“I figured she had children because of the toys in the backyard. I’ve been meaning to ask her about that,” Joanna answered, as she dished out soup for the three of them.

Naomi walked slowly down the stairs leading a little girl with curly brown hair, caramel eyes, and little freckles that spotted her face. She looked like she was about two years old. “Honeybee, this is Joanna and Chloe, they are going to be delivering honey for me. Say hi, Katie.” Naomi prodded.

“Hi, Katie,” the little girl answered shyly. The ladies laughed in unison at Katie’s innocent mistake.

“Honeybee – that’s such a cute nickname,” Joanna commented.

“And very appropriate too, with you being in the honey business. How many words does she know?” Chloe questioned.

“Well, not too many.” Naomi thought aloud, “Let’s see…she knows hi, bye, no, yes, food, and Mama. I think that’s it. But sometimes she jabbers on and I have no idea what she’s saying.”

“No, Mama. No,” Katie said, tugging at her mother’s dress and trying to pull her to the kitchen.

“Are you hungry, Katie?” Naomi asked. Katie nodded.

“All right, I’ll get you some applesauce,” Naomi said, walking into the kitchen with Katie clinging to her calf-length, pink floral cape dress. She returned a moment later with a small bowl and spoon, which she gave to Katie who happily began to feed herself.

“I noticed the playground outside. Do you have other children too?” Joanna asked curiously.

Naomi sighed. “Well, yes and no. You see, I did have twin girls: Faith and Charity. They were about your age. As a matter of fact, the two of you remind me a lot of them. My husband David and the girls passed away last year in a terrible automobile accident. Our car was hit head-on by a drunk
Both girls looked at each other, then back at Naomi with sympathetic eyes. “Were you in the accident also?” Chloe asked.

“Yes, we all were. Katie and I were the only ones to survive. I guess God still has plans for us. Katie’s car seat went through the window and landed on the side of the road. She escaped with just a few scratches, miraculously. I was in the hospital for a while and I had to have surgery on my back. That’s why I decided to hire someone for the honey route. I’m not able to get around as well as I used to, and my blood circulation hasn’t been the same since the accident. I try to exercise some, but it’s not enough – my hands and feet still fall asleep often. The doctors can’t help me, either.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your husband and daughters,” Joanna offered her condolences with tears in her eyes, “...and your health problems.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that,” Naomi said in a comforting tone, “but I’m not upset about it. I do miss them, but I take comfort in knowing that I’ll see them in Heaven someday. God has already used the accident for good.”

“What do you mean by that?” Chloe quizzed.

“Well, at the funeral there were several family members and friends that came to the Lord.”

“You mean, they go to your church now?” Chloe looked at Joanna to see if she understood what Naomi was saying.

“No, I mean that they got saved. They are now on their way to Heaven.” Naomi explained further, “When a person believes in Jesus Christ and trusts Him alone to save them, they are born again.”

“But I don’t understand...” Chloe looked confused. “I thought you had to be Plain to go to Heaven.”

“Let me show you what the Bible says.” Naomi took her King James Bible out of her purse and opened it to John 3:16. “‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Does it say anything in this verse about being Plain?”

“No, it doesn’t. It just says that you have to believe in God’s Son,” Chloe answered. “But I heard that it’s prideful to say you’re going to Heaven.”

“It can’t be prideful because there’s nothing that you can do to get to Heaven. It’s only through God’s free gift that we can get there, like it says in Ephesians 2:8-9. Please don’t take my word for it. Study God’s Word for yourselves. If you want, I’ll give you a list of Bible verses to look up,” Naomi offered.

“We would like that. Jah, Chloe?” Joanna said, as she took her last bite of soup.

Naomi quickly wrote down some verses off the top of her head from John, Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, Titus, and Revelation. “When you girls come back again, we can discuss the verses and any other questions you have.” She handed each of them a piece of paper.

The three of them stood up from the table and the girls offered to help with the dishes. Naomi declined the help and insisted the girls enjoy a chocolate chip cookie in the living room, while she cleaned Katie up. “You know, I was hoping to get to know you girls better today, but it seems like you’ve learned more about me.” She laughed.

A loud screeching noise, followed by a boom brought their attention outside. The girls jumped up from the couch and hurried to the door to see what had happened, with Naomi close behind. “Nee, it
looks like a buggy accident!” Chloe cried.
Chapter 9 – The Crash

“He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man...”

Psalm 104:14a

Naomi and the girls ran to the site of the accident. A blue, mid-sized vehicle sat at an angle on the opposite side of the road. The front fender had been smashed in and black skid marks lined the road just up to where a black courting buggy lay turned on its side.

“It looks like Isaac’s buggy,” Joanna panted, fear evident in her voice. She looked closer and saw her older brother lying on the road beside the buggy, his leg bleeding profusely. “Quick, Chloe, go get Philip King!” Joanna hollered. She removed her apron and placed it over Isaac’s wound, applying pressure as she’d seen her father do with an injured horse one time.

Chloe took off on foot as fast as she could.

“Don’t worry, Isaac. Chloe is getting help. You’ll be fine.” Joanna attempted to comfort her unconscious brother, tears streaming down her cheeks. She determined to remain calm for Isaac’s sake. Dear Gott, please let my brother be all right, she continued praying silently.

Naomi emerged from around the opposite side of the buggy with her free arm around Rachel Esh, who appeared to be intact, but was obviously shaken. Chloe had not yet seen her sister, so she didn’t know about her involvement in the accident. Isaac’s new horse had gotten free and was now eating grass on the side of the road. The driver of the blue vehicle sat in his car with his cell phone to his ear. He appeared to be uninjured.

Chloe returned with Phillip, who carried a large black bag with him. Joanna moved away so Philip could take over. He quickly took out a sandwich-sized plastic bag that contained a red powdery substance, which he poured generously onto Isaac’s bleeding leg. The bleeding stopped within a couple of minutes. Phillip then poured on a little more for good measure, and began to wrap the wound tightly.

“He’s still conscious, but appears to be in shock.” Phillip took a small, brown, glass dropper bottle out of his bag and put a few drops into Isaac’s mouth. Immediately, Isaac’s eyes flew open.

“Water,” Isaac begged. Phillip handed him a fresh bottle of water from his bag and he drank like a parched man in the middle of the desert.

Phillip turned to look at the ladies. “He’ll be okay,” he said confidently. Turning to Rachel, he asked, “Are you doing all right?”

Rachel replied, “Jah, I’m fine. Denki for helping Isaac,” she said with a hint of concern in her voice. Rachel knelt down beside Isaac and he took her hand, giving her a weak reassuring smile.

“That’s what I’m here for,” Philip said. “You should probably go home now and get some rest,” the kind herb doctor advised.

“But, Isaac –” Rachel protested, looking at his now-closed eyes.

“He’ll be fine. He just needs some rest now,” Philip reassured Rachel once again, and then turned to Chloe. “Make sure she gets plenty of rest as well.”
Chloe nodded, and then she and her older sister set off on foot, after saying goodbye to Naomi and Joanna.

Phillip walked across the street to check on the man in the car. “Are you okay?”
“Yeah, I’m fine. Scared to death at first, though. I didn’t know if the boy was going to make it, he looked pretty bad. I called 9-1-1,” the man said.

Screaming sirens sounded, drawing their attention down the road. The noise brought back unwanted memories for Joanna, catapulting her back to that fearful day of her kidnapping. The image of her abductor grasping her arm replayed in her mind, seemingly forever seared in her consciousness. *Oh no, not again,* she thought dreadfully.

As the ambulance and a fire truck arrived on the scene, she was jolted back to reality once again. Joanna watched in a haze as the emergency medical attendants laid Isaac on a stretcher and put him into the ambulance. Naomi came alongside her and placed an arm around her waist. She asked if she would be all right, and then informed Joanna she needed to take Katie back inside the house. Joanna indicated that she would be in shortly, bidding Naomi farewell. The technicians shared a brief conversation with Philip King, and then whisked her brother off to the hospital.

Joanna walked silently to Midnight, who seemingly had no idea what was taking place. “Hey, how are you doing?” Joanna said while gently running her hands over Midnight’s shiny black coat.

“Any damage?” Joanna turned to see Philip standing a few feet behind her.
“*Nee,* she seems fine. I think she’s just scared. Would you like to check her?”

“Yes, I would.” Philip began looking over Midnight, gingerly feeling for any damage. The horse didn’t protest as Philip probed the animal, but responded well. “She’s still shaken up a bit, but there appears to be no damage done. She should be fine by tomorrow. Would you like me to go to your house and let your parents know about the accident?” By then, several other buggies from their district had arrived to assess the scene. It was likely that her folks were already informed of the accident, but she couldn’t be sure.

“*Jah,* that would be *gut.* *Denki,* Philip.” Joanna was thankful to have a knowledgeable herbalist in their district.

“I can take Isaac’s horse home if you’d like,” Philip offered. Joanna nodded her consent, and Philip rode off on Midnight in the direction of the Fisher residence.

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“Joanna, your family is here.” Naomi gently shook Joanna awake where she lay on Naomi’s couch. “They’ve asked me to drive to the hospital. We’ll leave as soon as the babysitter arrives.”

“*Denki,* tell them I’ll be right there.” Joanna shook herself from her weariness, then got up quickly and hurried to join her family. Esther, Gideon, Grace, and Jonathan all sat at Naomi’s table with mugs of hot cocoa when Joanna walked into the dining room. Jonathan poked his index finger into his mug, pushing down the marshmallows that floated on top. He took one of the slippery white treats and popped it into his mouth, sucking the remainder of cocoa off his dripping fingers.

“Ach, Jonathan. Must you make a mess everywhere you go? Mind your manners now,” Esther warned the boy.

“Is Isaac hurt badly?” Grace asked, paying no mind to her brother’s foolishness.
“I don’t know for sure. His leg didn’t look too gut. Philip King stopped the bleeding and bandaged him up before the ambulance came,” Joanna replied.

Gideon Fisher sighed in relief. “That’s good to hear. Hopefully, he can come home with us tonight. Philip said he was going to the hospital to check on Isaac.”

Just then, the front doorbell rang. “That must be the babysitter. Is everyone ready to go?” Naomi queried.

“Jah, we’re ready,” Esther answered, after helping Jonathan wash and dry his hands. They abruptly arose, heading to Naomi’s vehicle. As soon as Naomi finished instructing the babysitter, they were off to the hospital.

Ding Ding. The elevator opened to the fourth floor of the hospital. Gideon strode up to the nurses’ station while Naomi, Joanna, and the rest of her family walked to a nearby waiting room.

“They said he’s in room 427. He can only have two visitors at a time, so your mudder and I will go in first. Grace, keep an eye on your bruder. Jonathan, you must be gut,” Gideon dictated. “The doctor will come and give us an update in a little while and let us know whether he can come home with us tonight or not.” Joanna’s parents departed, turning down a corridor toward Isaac’s hospital room.

The waiting room was decorated with colorful, abstract paintings. The blue chairs, that sat along the walls, somewhat matched the paintings and the carpet as well. A television blared in the upper corner of the room, and Naomi walked over to turn it down. Joanna and her siblings, along with Naomi Fast and a handful of other Englisch visitors, whom she did not know, waited patiently for any news.

Gideon and Esther returned to the waiting room a few minutes later. “Isaac was asleep and we didn’t want to wake him,” Esther explained.

Philip King walked into the waiting room and shook Gideon’s hand. “How’s he doing?” Philip asked.

“We don’t know yet. We’re waiting to hear from the doctor,” Gideon said, just as the doctor walked into the waiting room.

“Are Isaac Fisher’s parents here?” the doctor asked.

“Jah. We are Isaac’s parents,” Esther informed the doctor.

“I just wanted to let you know that Isaac is doing well. Whoever treated him at the scene is to be commended. They possibly saved his life. The EMT workers said that the bleeding had already stopped before they even arrived. That’s amazing considering his artery was cut open. He easily could have lost a lot more blood. Whoever patched him up knew what they were doing,” the doctor said, marveling.

“‘Twas a gut friend,” Gideon stated, knowing that Philip wouldn’t want his name mentioned. He nodded and smiled a ‘thank you’ to Philip. Philip briefly nodded back.

“Will Isaac be able to come home with us tonight?” Esther enquired.

“We’d like to keep him here overnight for observation. If all goes well, he’ll be released to you in the morning,” the doctor answered, shook their hands, and then left the room.

The group sat back down and began conversing amongst themselves, the rest of the visitors had cleared out of the waiting room. “Naomi Fast, have you met Philip King?” Gideon asked, remembering his manners.
“Well, I saw him at the scene of the accident...but no, we have never been formally introduced,” she answered, purposely not mentioning the fact that she’d seen Philip at the Fishers’ home on the night of Joanna’s disappearance.

Philip stood up to shake her hand. “Naomi, is it? Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too, Philip. Would you mind if I asked you a question?” Naomi quizzed. Philip nodded his consent. “What did you put on Isaac’s leg to stop the bleeding?”

“Cayenne pepper.” Philip smiled with a twinkle in his eye.

“Cayenne pepper, as in the spice?” Naomi cocked her head, looking confused.

Philip laughed. “I get that reaction a lot. Yes, cayenne is one of the greatest herbs that God has given to mankind. I would not be without it. It is excellent for many things...and one of those things is the blood.”

“You mean helping the blood to clot, right?”

He nodded. “Yes, but it’s also good for circulation. High blood pressure, low blood pressure, and even for heart attacks. It equalizes the blood,” Philip answered assertively.

“Where can I get some for myself?” Naomi wondered.

“You can buy it at the health food store, or I’d be glad to bring you some,” he offered.

Joanna interjected, “I work for Naomi, and she just lives down the street from you. I’ll be glad to bring her to the store after I’m done with my honey deliveries.”

“Honey?” Philip was taken aback. “Do you sell raw honey?” he asked Naomi, lifting his dark brows.

“Yes, I do. My deliveries have been increasing since the flowers started blooming – allergy season, you know.”

“Do you think you’d be able to supply the store? I usually have to order my honey from out of state, but I prefer locally harvested honey. That would be great to have a supplier nearby.” Philip chuckled. “And to think I’ve had a supplier just down the street all this time...I should really get to know my neighbors better.”

“That would work out just fine for me. Just let me know how much you’ll need.” Naomi was pleased; this meeting had to be providential. This single transaction would help her financial situation immensely. “Well, Joanna, it looks like we’ve just added a new customer to your delivery route.” Smiles abounded.

“We need to go check on Isaac again. Perhaps he will be awake now.” Gideon stated, returning to the issue at hand. He and Esther walked out of the room, leaving the others behind.

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“Dat, Mamm, is that you?” Isaac called out as they stepped into room 427.

“Jah, Isaac. Tis us,” Gideon confirmed. They rushed to his bedside to offer a hug. “How are ya feelin’?”


“Rachel?” Gideon and Esther looked at each other questioningly. Both were unaware of the secret courtship between Rachel and their son. Nobody had mentioned her involvement in the accident.

“Jah, Rachel Esh. She was in the buggy too. Didn’t anyone tell you?” he said, panic-stricken.
“Where is she? Is she all right? I need to see her!”

“No, we didn’t know that she was in the accident. I’ll be right back, Sohn.” Esther quickly left the room and Joanna returned in her stead.

“Rachel is fine, Isaac. She wasn’t injured in the accident, just a little shaken up. She’s at home resting. Don’t you remember?” Joanna reassured her brother.

A sigh of relief escaped Isaac’s lips. “Jah, jah. I remember now. That’s gut.”

“The doctor said you’ll probably get to go home tomorrow,” Gideon said encouragingly. “Mamm will stay here with you tonight and she’ll call me in the morning when you’re to be released. You will be able to see the Esh girl soon enough. Rest now, my son.” Gideon smiled inwardly, so Isaac’s found himself an aldi.
Chapter 10 – The Challenge

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

Monday dawned a new week, and Joanna was glad that the bishop’s announcement was behind her. The People readily accepted the new proclamation and not one had protested. After all, the rules of the Ordnung were in place for their own benefit and safety. Like the rules God has in the Bible – they’re not for God, but for our own good.

The prior day, the day of rest, was anything but restful. Joanna’s family, with her, Esther, and Isaac excluded, had gone to the Sunday-Go-To-Meeting. Esther was still at the hospital with Isaac, and Chloe had come to stay with Joanna. They had a great time preparing for the evening meal together and chatting about the events of the past week.

“What do you think about Philip and Naomi?” Chloe asked unexpectedly.
Joanna’s eyebrows arched slightly. “What do you mean?”
“Well, Philip needs a fraa…” Chloe mentioned slyly.
Joanna caught on, adding, “…and Naomi’s not married!” The two girls laughed out loud. “Do you think it’s possible, though? Naomi is a Mennonite.”
“Jah, but she’s still Plain for the most part. Besides, love conquers all things.” Chloe smiled, remembering the line from a book she’d read. Both of the girls remained silent for a moment, pondering the situation.

“I have an idea,” Joanna said excitedly. “Well, Philip will probably order a lot of honey, right?”
“Jah, I guess so. What does that have to do with anything?” Chloe looked confused.
“We can’t deliver that much honey with our scooters…”
“So…” Chloe still didn’t catch her drift.
Joanna helped her out, “So Philip will have to come and pick it up himself.”
“And what if we just happen to tell him to come around lunch time?”
“Of course, Naomi wouldn’t want to be rude and she’d invite him to eat with us.” The girls continued to scheme until their folks arrived back home. Chloe went home with her parents and Joanna’s family planned to pick Isaac up from the hospital.

Barrett awoke to find himself alone in a small white room with a tiny window on the door. The Hole, he thought. It was solitary confinement – the place where the worst prisoners go to get over their “negative” behavior.

There was no one to talk to, except God. And that was something that Barrett had no idea how to do, nor did he want to. As far as he was concerned, there was no God. After all, what did God ever do
for him? He came from an abusive home with a mother that was always strung out on drugs and he had no idea who his father was. His whole young life, he’d been bounced around to countless foster homes where nobody really cared about him, or so he thought. The small flap opened on the door and a container of food was pushed in.

“Why am I in here?” Barrett asked angrily.

“They said you started a fight out in the yard,” the guard answered.

“But I didn’t –” Barrett heard the outer door slam closed. It was no use trying to talk to the guards when you’re holed up in solitary confinement. Maybe I should talk to God, he mused, if I don’t I might go out of my mind in this place.

After dinner, the whole family sat in the Fishers’ living room. Isaac had come home with a set of crutches, which he laid beside him next to the couch. Gideon sat in his wooden chair with the Bible open on his lap, and began to read the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew chapter five. In the Sunday services, the ministers read from the German Bible. However, certain passages of the King James Bible had been approved by the leadership for home reading, to which they were thankful.

Just then, Joanna remembered the scripture verses Naomi had given her. She waited for Gideon to finish reading, and then spoke, “Dat, I have some verses that I’d like to look up.” She handed him a paper and they read each verse one by one.

Gideon read part of the last verse again, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...” He stopped, pondering for a moment.

“What does that mean?” Jonathan asked innocently, stroking the blue-bellied lizard he’d found under the wood pile outside.

“I think it means that we are not saved by the good things we do, but by God’s mercy,” Mamm explained.

“What’s mercy?” Jonathan asked, placing the reptile atop his head to nest in his hair.

Gideon chuckled at the sight, and then just shook his head. He attempted to gather his thoughts once again. “Mercy is when we don’t get what we deserve,” Dat answered. “Remember the verse we read about everyone being a sinner?”

“Jah,” Jonathan answered, nodding solemnly, the lizard bobbing up and down with the motion.

“What do sinners deserve?” Dat asked.

“Nothin’ at all. I think I got it now,” the boy said, taking the lizard and letting it perch on his shoulder now. “Is Lizzy a sinner too, Dat?” Jonathan referred to his reptile.

Gideon held in a chuckle and patted the Bible. “Nee, this is for humans.” Jonathan nodded his understanding.

Isaac chimed in, “Wait a minute, didn’t the verse say He ‘saved’ us? It’s written in the past tense. That means that Titus knew that he was saved already.”

“But I thought the bishop said that we can only hope for salvation? And it’s prideful to say that you’re saved.” Grace looked to Dat and Mamm, clearly confused. Her question begged clarification. If the bishop and elders said one thing and the Bible said another, then who was right?

Joanna spoke up now, “Naomi Fast says it can’t be prideful to say that you’re saved, because
there’s nothing that you can do to get saved. She said the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only one who can do the saving, so HE is the one who gets all the glory, not us.”

“I’ve never thought about that before, but I think she’s right. Now it all makes sense.” Gideon silently praised Der Herr for the new-found truth they had just discovered. “Let’s study this more, so we can be certain it’s true.” They all agreed.

That evening they spent over two hours searching the scriptures in context. Alas, they came to the conclusion that Naomi had indeed been correct in her assertion. After bowing their heads in prayer once again, one by one, they each confessed Jesus Christ as their saviour and asked forgiveness for trusting in their own works of righteousness.

“That means we can’t be Amish no more, ain’t so?” Jonathan asked Dat, rolling the poor lizard up in one of his front shirttails.

“Anymore,” Grace corrected her younger brother.

“No, Sohn. It means that I need to pray, and then have a talk with Bishop Hostettler.” Dat knew that might be a daunting task. Judah is an understanding man. Surely he won’t say anything against the Word of God, Gideon reasoned within himself.
Chapter 11 – The Unthinkable

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies...” Matthew 5:44a

As Naomi’s property came into view, Joanna and Chloe saw an Amish buggy leaving her house. Was it Philip King’s buggy? The girls glanced at one another in disbelief and shared a grin. After parking their scooters on the side of the house, they ran up the steps to the front door.

“Hello girls, come inside,” Naomi welcomed them.

“Was that Philip that just left here?” Joanna asked, her curiosity getting the better of her.

“Yes, it was. He was curious about the bee business, so I showed him the hives in the back. He also wanted to know when the honey would be delivered.”

“How much honey did he order?” Chloe asked.

“He ordered two cases, which is twenty-four jars. He said they’ll probably sell out in a couple of weeks.”

“Naomi, how will we fit all of those jars in our baskets?” Joanna asked conspiratorially.

“Oh.” Naomi laughed. “You girls won’t be delivering them. Philip is going to come by on his lunch break and pick them up.”

The girls looked at each other again in disbelief, both of their jaws hanging open. Perhaps God was already at work in Philip and Naomi’s lives.

“Is something wrong girls?” Naomi asked, with a knowing grin on her face.

“Sorry, Naomi, we were just talking about something on the way over here and...” Joanna stopped, deciding she’d already said enough.

“Well, I’d like you girls to get going as soon as possible. You know how busy Saturdays can get. Besides, I’d like you to be back when Philip comes by. Here is your list. And would you tell Ms. Klein that I’ll be by to see her on Monday?”

“Jah, Naomi, we will,” the girls confirmed as they rode off.

Rachel Esh knocked on the back door of the Fisher home. “Just a minute,” she heard a voice say from inside the house. The door was opened by Isaac’s mother, Esther, who wore a welcoming smile. She hoped his mother didn’t think it was too forward of her to come visit Isaac at his home – in broad daylight, of all things. But she figured her behavior would be acceptable considering the circumstances.

“Kumm in, Rachel.” Esther’s excitement bubbled over.

“Mamm and I baked lots of cookies this morning, so I thought I would bring them by and see how Isaac is doing,” she said shyly with a hint of pink in her cheeks.

“I’ll get him for you,” Esther obliged. “Isaac...you have a caller,” she called up the stairs, and then excused herself to the kitchen with a knowing smile playing on her lips.
Isaac slowly limped downstairs as he held onto the rail. His face lit up at the sight of Rachel. “Let’s take a walk outside, jah?”

“But, your leg...” she protested.

“I’ll be fine. I’m starting to get used to getting around with these crutches. Besides, there’s more privacy out there,” Isaac said, referring to his mother and sister in the kitchen.

“I brought you some cookies,” Rachel said, pointing to the basket on the table. “Would you like one?”

“Jah, denki.” He sank his teeth into one. “Mmm...This is the best cookie I’ve ever tasted.”

“Isaac Fisher, you’re just tryin’ to flatter me.”

“Maybe so,” he said teasingly, “but they are gut.” His countenance turned serious as he made eye contact. “Sorry about what happened. I’m so thankful to Gott that you weren’t hurt. I’m afraid I won’t be able to take you home from singings for a while. I can’t get around too well just yet and my buggy is out of commission, as you know.”

“That’s okay, Isaac. It wasn’t your fault...besides, I can wait for you.” She smiled encouragingly, helping him down the back steps of the porch.

“You will?” Isaac couldn’t believe his good fortune.

“I hope I didn’t embarrass you by coming here today,” she said sheepishly.

“Nee. It’s fine, Rachel. I wouldn’t mind if you came every day,” he said, his neck darkening a shade.

They walked along in silence for a while, heading toward the wood shop. “There’s something I’d like to show you in the shop,” Isaac said excitedly. He opened the barn doors where there stood several chairs and a dining table.

“Did your Dat make these?” She ran her hand over the smooth table top and admired the intricately carved wooden chairs.

“Dat and I did, jah,” he said, trying not to sound too proud.

“This is the best I’ve seen in all of Lancaster County,” she proclaimed.

“Now, who’s trying to flatter?” He teased.

“No, Isaac. I really do mean it. These are sehr gut. Someday I hope to have...” her voice trailed off, dreaming of her future home as a married woman. She probably shouldn’t voice those thoughts to Isaac just yet; he might think her too eager to marry. But isn’t that what every girl secretly hopes for?

“What did ya say, Rachel?” Isaac probed.

She quickly changed the subject. “Is there going to be a funeral soon?” she asked, looking at the pine boxes that lined the wall.

“Na...The bishop just likes Dat to keep a couple extra boxes on hand,” Isaac replied nonchalantly.

“Should we go inside now?” she asked, feeling eerie about the caskets, and noting that they probably shouldn’t be alone in the barn.

Isaac set his crutch aside, and then gently pulled her into his arms. “Not yet.” He leaned closer to Rachel, attempting a kiss. Their anticipation rose as their lips were mere inches apart.

“BOO!” Jonathan popped up out of a pine box, and the lid flew open. He giggled and took off running as fast as he could.

“Aah!” Rachel couldn’t help but scream, she was so startled by the little rascal. Her heartbeat failed to slow.
“Jonathan!” Isaac hollered after him, disappointed his brother had ruined his opportunity to steal a kiss from his girl.

Isaac then looked into Rachel’s bemused eyes and they both couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

Philip locked up the herb shop and placed his sign on the door: Closed for lunch. Be back at 1:00pm. It had been a long time since he’d been invited to a woman’s home for a meal – a very long time. In fact, he had been just seventeen and still in his Rumspringa – his running around years. He and his friends had been out at the bowling alley, and that’s where he met an Englischer named Karen. She was fun and full of life and for six whole months they spent nearly every Saturday evening together. When the relationship began turning serious, Philip realized he had a choice to make. He could leave the Amish forever and marry Karen, or he could fully commit his life to God and the church.

His younger sister Rebekah had been in a similar situation a few years after Philip’s dilemma. Unfortunately, she did leave the Amish for the man she loved and moved away to California, causing their parents much heartbreak. Philip was certain that had played a factor in the early death of their folks; they just weren’t the same after Rebekah left. With only having two children due to medical complications during pregnancy, their family was smaller than most, if not all, in their community.

It had been a painful decision to leave Karen all those years ago, but he knew he’d made the right one. He was doubly certain after his sister left. But now, just over thirty and still single, there was little chance he’d ever find someone to marry. He had been so busy with his work, that he hadn’t even thought much about it. Until now.

It had been kind of Naomi to offer lunch, especially since he wouldn’t have time to stop by his own house to make something. She had told him about the unfortunate accident that claimed the lives of her husband and daughters. It must have been very painful for her. He could only imagine. She still had her youngest daughter, but somehow she seemed lonely. He noticed how her eyes lit up when he took an interest in the bees. He wasn’t sure if it was just his imagination or not, but had there been a spark between them? A common bond, perhaps? What would it be like to hold Naomi in my arms? Philip quickly chided himself for the improper thought. No, he must trust Der Herr with his future.

He clicked his tongue urging his horse to go faster. Dear Vadder Gott, if it’s Your will, please give Naomi and me a chance together. Let this lunch date go well, Lord. And please help me not to do anything stupid to mess it up. I’ve been lonely and I’d really like to find someone to marry. And be blessed with my own kinner. Nevertheless, Thy will be done. You know what’s best for me, Lord. Help me to trust you. Amen.

Naomi glanced at the clock on her wall – ten minutes till twelve. I hope the girls get here before Philip does. There was a knock on the door. She took a deep breath, and went to answer it. “Hello, Philip. The girls haven’t returned from their route yet, so would you mind if we sit out on the porch?” she asked, wanting to abstain from all appearance of evil, as the Bible says. “I’ll bring out some lemonade.”
“That would be great,” he said appreciatively, taking a seat on the rocker.

Naomi returned with a tray holding two glasses and a pitcher of lemonade. “I wanted to thank you for the cayenne. It makes such a difference. I have more energy, and I can stand on my feet a lot longer than before.”

“It’s a wonderful herb – one of the best God has made. I’m glad it’s helping you,” Philip concurred, sipping on the sweet beverage. “When you run out, just let me know. I always keep it in stock.”

“Oh, I just remembered that I haven’t paid you for it yet.” Naomi arose from her white wicker chair and started toward the door.

“No need to. Please, consider it a gift from a friend.” He smiled.

“Thank you, Philip. I appreciate that.” Naomi sat back down, taken aback with his kindness. She noticed that the time was slipping by, and Philip would need to get back to his shop before too long. Naomi pondered the situation for a moment, weighing her options. “I don’t want you to be late. You may have customers, and I wouldn’t want you to keep them waiting. Why don’t we go ahead and eat without the girls? I’m sure they’ll be along soon.”

Philip nodded in agreement, secretly thankful to have some one-on-one time with Naomi.

When they sat down at the table, Naomi asked Philip to say the blessing over the food. Naomi had prepared a simple lunch of salmon sandwiches, fruit salad, and pita chips with hummus. Philip commented on the food, “Salmon is one of my favorites. This sandwich is outstanding.”

Naomi laughed. “You don’t get out much, do you?” She teased and Philip laughed as well. “Seriously though, salmon is a favorite of mine too. I prepare it at least once a week.”

“Well, then I hope you’ll invite me over next week also.” He teased back – kinda. To that, they both laughed.

Conversation continued in a comfortable flow as they spoke on different subjects. It seemed they had a lot in common. Neither Philip, nor Naomi, could believe how well they got along. It was as if they were old friends and had known each other for years. Their instant camaraderie was quite unexpected.

When Katie awoke from her morning nap, she instantly went to Philip. Naomi hadn’t ever seen her daughter react that way with a man, but for some reason she liked Philip King. And Philip seemed to be a natural with children, too. Quite surprising since he had no kinner of his own.

Knock, knock, knock.

“That must be the girls.” Naomi went to answer the door, a bit disappointed that their time alone together had come to an end.

“Sorry, Naomi, but Elsa Klein insisted that we stay and sing for her. We tried to get here sooner,” Joanna attempted to explain, as the girls scampered through the door.

“That’s okay. You girls just sit down and eat now. Philip will need to get back soon, and I want you to help him load the honey before he leaves,” Naomi insisted, setting a plate for each girl.

“Denki, Naomi,” the girls said, as they joined the adults at the table.

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“I really enjoyed our time together,” Philip ventured as he leaned toward Naomi, his voice low so
he wouldn’t be overheard by the girls on the porch.

Naomi realized she held his gaze a bit longer than she should have. “As did I, Philip.”

“Let me know if you need anything from the herb shop.” Philip smiled, as he sat back against the seat in his buggy.

“I will. And you inform me if you need more honey,” she answered back, just before he signaled the horse with the click of his tongue.

“When do you think he’ll be back?” Chloe asked curiously, the girls joining Naomi at the end of the walkway.

“Why do you ask?” Naomi responded.

“I think Philip King is nice. Don’t you, Naomi?” Chloe hinted.

“Yes. Philip King is a nice man.” And smart...and funny...and handsome, Naomi blushed at the thought. She hadn’t considered any man since her husband’s death, but perhaps...

“May I ask you a question?” Joanna said earnestly, rousing Naomi from her thoughts, as they sat alone on the front porch. Chloe had now gone around to the backyard to push Katie on the swing set.

“Sure.” Naomi sat up in her chair, sensing Joanna had something important to say.

“How did you do it? I mean, when I listened to you talk about your accident, it seemed like you were okay about it,” Joanna tried to explain what was on her mind.

“I am okay about it. I realized that even though I don’t understand what God is doing, I can still trust him,” Naomi said.

“But what about the drunk driver? Don’t you want him to pay for what he did?” Joanna asked. Even knowing her own people taught unconditional forgiveness, the principal was still difficult for her to grasp.

“Her,” Naomi stated, “the drunk driver was a woman. And she is paying for what she did. Every day she has to live with the fact that she killed three innocent people, and all because she made an unwise decision.”

“How do you know that?” Joanna wondered.

“I know that because I go and visit her every week. Her name is Virginia,” Naomi stated.

“You go and visit her? Why?” Joanna couldn’t believe what she was hearing. It was unthinkable. How could Naomi spend time with the person responsible for her loved ones’ deaths?

“God laid it on my heart to let her know that I had forgiven her. When I told her, she broke down in tears. I let her know that it was only by God’s grace that I was able to forgive. I shared the Gospel with her and now she is saved. We meet once a week at the jail for Bible study.”

“How could you forgive her?” Joanna was curious. “I mean, how did you do it? Weren’t you angry with her?”

“I realized that if God could forgive any sin, why couldn’t I? I’d be putting myself above God if I didn’t forgive. Who am I to hold onto unforgiveness when I myself have been granted forgiveness freely? The Bible says that if we don’t forgive others, then we will not be forgiven,” Naomi stated.

“I want to forgive too, but I don’t know if I can,” Joanna said with a tear on her cheek.

Naomi realized she was talking about forgiving her abductor. “God can help you. He can place forgiveness in your heart,” Naomi reassured. “Just ask him.”
Chapter 12 - Courage

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”
Deuteronomy 31:6

The prison chaplain walked to Barrett Winston’s cell. “Winston, is there anything I can do for you today?” the caring man asked.

“Na...there ain’t nothin’ you can do to help me.” Barrett sat on the side of the small bed with his head down.

“Well, I can pray with you. Would you allow me to do that?” The chaplain peered through the steel bars.

“I guess it couldn’t hurt none,” Barrett consented.

The guard opened Barrett’s cell and let the chaplain inside. He took a seat on the small mattress beside Barrett. “What would you like me to pray with you about?”

Barrett shrugged his shoulders.

“Didn’t you just get out of the hole?” the chaplain asked.

Barrett nodded in affirmation. “Yep, third time this month.”

“What for this time?”

“Same old thing. I supposedly started a fight,” Barrett grumbled. “You know, it’s funny that I’m the only one that gets pounded. The other prisoners just get away with beating on me and I’m the one that ends up in solitary. Not one scratch on the other guys. Life just ain’t fair.”

“I’m afraid that inmates don’t look too favorably upon someone with your criminal background. Neither do the guards. Have you ever thought about a lifestyle change – with God’s help?”

Barrett hung his head down low again. “I don’t know how I can make it in here for twenty years. Honestly, I’m at the end of my rope. I wouldn’t even know where to start.”

The chaplain handed Barrett a Bible. “Start here,” he said, and then bowed his head to pray.

Barrett prayed silently, God, if you’re really there and you care about me, give me a sign.

Gideon Fisher arrived at the bishop’s house just prior to three o’clock. Bishop Hostettler lived about two miles from the Fisher residence, just past Miller’s Bridge. The Bishop and his wife lived in the main house alongside their son, who constructed Amish buggies. Nathan Hostettler and his young wife resided in the small dawdi haus. The last time Gideon had been out to the Hostettlers’ place was when he put in the order for Isaac’s courting buggy. But today, he was not there to talk business. He would be discussing matters of faith with the bishop, and he could only pray that it would go well.

“Good afternoon, Gid. I hope everything is okay.” Oftentimes, many of the People only visited the
Gideon reassured Bishop Hostettler. “There are no problems, Judah. On the contrary, we’re doing great.”

“How is Isaac’s leg?” the bishop asked.

“It’s healing. Isaac is a little frustrated that he can’t do more...especially since his courtin’ buggy is damaged. Do ya think Nathan can repair it?”

“I’m sure that won’t be a problem,” he answered. “And how is Joanna doing?”

“My dochder appears to be doing okay, although I can tell that she is still bothered at times. I think the job that she’s taken with Naomi Fast is helping her a lot.”

“One does not get over an incident like that easily. It will take some time.” Judah tugged on his beard.

“Judah, the reason I’ve come is to discuss something that’s been on my mind.” Gideon forged ahead.

“Let us go inside and sit down. I will have Lydia prepare some iced tea for us,” the bishop said, leading the way into the house. They sat down in a small room off the side of the living area, which Gideon supposed was the bishop’s counseling office. “Now, what would you like to discuss with me, Gid?”

“Do you have an English Bible in here?” Gideon asked, glancing at the bookshelf behind the bishop’s desk.

“Yes, I do. Would you like me to get it out?” His eyes peered over his reading glasses.

“Jah, but not for me. I brought my own. There are some things that I have been reading.” Gideon stopped talking when he heard a knock on the door.

“Kumm in, Lydia.” The bishop’s wife set two glasses of iced tea on the desk. “Denki, Fraa,” Judah remarked, as Lydia quietly exited the room.

Gideon opened his Bible and the bishop pulled his from off the shelf. “Judah, I read something the other day with my family and I wanted to hear your thoughts on it. It says here in Ephesians chapter two, verses eight and nine: ‘For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.’“

The bishop nodded his head. “Jah, that is true.”

“But it says that we can be saved. And that salvation is a gift. And that there are no works involved. Am I correct in my understanding?” Gideon questioned, wondering what the bishop’s reaction would be.

“Are you implying that there is salvation outside the Amish church?” His forehead creased.

“The Scriptures imply – no, they proclaim that salvation and eternal life are gifts. Gifts free for the taking upon faith in Christ. Romans chapter six and verse twenty-three states this also. There is no mention of being a church member or of being a good person,” Gideon spoke passionately. “Salvation is available to all...Amish and Englisch alike.”

“I do agree with what you are saying, Gideon. However, I don’t think it would be wise to share your feelings with everyone. This teaching can divide our community, and I’m afraid that we already have an alarming number leaving our fold. It is our traditions that keep us strong and unified,” the bishop asserted.

Gideon couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “But Judah, we’re talking about eternal life! The
difference between Heaven and Hell. To simply believe in God is one thing, but to trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation is another. The Bible says there is no other way to be saved. Don’t you want that for our People? Shouldn’t the Truth be paramount to any man-made traditions, including the Ordnung?"

The bishop seemed to be contemplating Gideon’s words. “I don’t want to make any hasty decisions. Let me pray about this, and then I will get back to you on this matter.” He paused for a moment, weighing his words. “Gideon, you do realize where this could lead if it’s not accepted by the elders. We are gut friends, I would hate to see you and your family under the Bann.” The concern in his eyes was evident.

“Likewise, I would hate for our People to be deprived of the Truth. Good day, Judah.” He gave a brief nod, and then stepped out.

Gideon left the Hostettlers’ feeling disappointed. But he wasn’t totally dejected – there was still hope for their community. However, if they rejected the Scriptures, there could be dire consequences for not only the community, but for the Fisher family as well. Surely the bishop would not impose the shunning on them, would he? Standing for Truth hadn’t been easy for their Anabaptist ancestors. As a matter of fact, it had cost them their very lives. If the Fishers had to face the Bann for taking the right stance, then so be it.

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Joanna sat at the small corner desk in her room with pen and paper in hand. She sighed. Dear Gott, please help me to do this. Give me the courage that I need. She picked up the paper that Naomi had given her. It read: Barrett C. Winston 95648-073, FDC Philadelphia, Federal Detention Center, P.O. Box 562, Philadelphia, PA 19105. Naomi had been kind to find the information for her. Now, she’d have to figure out just what to write. She began the letter...

Barrett C. Winston,

I wanted to let you know that I have forgiven you. God loves you and He wants you to be saved. Please read John 3:16 from the Bible.
From,
The girl you kidnapped

Joanna folded the letter and placed it into an envelope. She addressed it to the man but kept the return address blank, not wanting him to find out who she was or where she lived. She would take the letter to Naomi, who would mail it for her when she went into Lancaster later in the week.

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Isaac took a deep breath. “Rachel, you know that we’ve been good friends since we were kinner. I have loved you for as long as I can remember. I oftentimes find myself daydreaming about you, and wondering if you love me the same way I love you. I have been giving it great thought, and I would be honored if you would consent to be my wife.”

Isaac glanced into the mirror and then looked at his reflection which frowned back at him. “No,
that will never do. I have to think of something else...” He paused a moment. “Hmm...Okay, now I know.” Clearing his throat he began again. “Rachel, I love you very much and I know it’s a lot to ask, but will you at least consider becoming my wife? Please say yes, Rachel. You will make me the happiest man alive—”

A high-pitched voice echoed from behind him. “Oh Isaac, you’re so wonderful. I would love to marry you.” Startled, Isaac looked into the mirror and saw Jonathan batting his eyelashes behind him. Isaac’s face turned beet red with embarrassment, and then anger. Jonathan giggled at his brother’s foolishness.

“Jonathan Fisher...just wait until I get my hands on you!” Isaac grabbed his crutches and dashed out the door, hobbling down the stairs after Jonathan, who had already safely made it outside.
Chapter 13 – Freedom

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” John 8:36

When Joanna awoke this morning, peace flooded her soul. She realized that she had not had a single nightmare since four weeks ago – the night she and her family received salvation. She no longer struggled with fear. Thank you for your goodness, Lord, she prayed silently. She donned her Sunday dress with a smile, and started downstairs to help with the morning meal.

After breakfast, the Fisher family took a lengthy drive to the Yoders’ farm which was several miles away. The church meeting would be held in their house today. Everyone filed in to the large dwelling: first the men, then the women and children. After all the People were seated, the Vorsinger began singing and the rest of the congregation joined in. The bishop, the ministers, and the deacon retreated to an upstairs room.

Several songs were sung from the Ausbund until the leaders returned to the front of the room and sat down. Uncharacteristically, the bishop stood up and addressed the congregation in English, “A member of our flock came to me this week with a challenge. The challenge was from the Word of God. He showed me some very convincing Scripture verses that have made me question what I have always taught and believed to be true. After examining the Scriptures on my own, I proceeded to meet with the other leaders in our district and shared my convictions with them. They too, thought the scriptures to be perplexing and convicting. With that said, today’s services are going to be different from what we normally do. If you have any questions, please feel free to come and talk to one of the leaders after the meeting is over.”

Gideon looked at Esther with a smile, and then at the bishop, who nodded his head.

Did the bishop get saved, too? Joanna wondered.

Chloe, who was sitting next to Joanna, threw a questioning glance her way. Joanna smiled and silently mouthed “Naomi” to her. It was obvious to Joanna that Chloe had no clue what she was talking about, so she leaned over and whispered, “Remember the Bible verses Naomi gave us?” Chloe finally understood.

After the service was over and everyone had eaten, two of the ministers walked over to Gideon. They both shook his hand and thanked him for having the courage to share the truth that God had shown him. “I’m glad it was received with an open heart. Many in other Amish communities have rejected this message.”

One of the ministers commented, “And many are under the Bann because of it. Although we will still hold on to our traditional Amish ways, we also want to follow God’s will for our People. And we believe that we have found it. God is not willing that any should perish. He wants all folks to be
Gideon didn’t see the other minister or Deacon Yoder after the service and wondered whether they had agreed with the decision of the others.

“My family and friends couldn’t care less about me. Most of them hate me. I wonder who would be writing to me. With a quizzical look on his face, he stuck one of his hands between the cold iron bars. The mail call attendant dropped a plain white envelope into his hand. No return address. He sat back down on his bunk and turned the letter over, then slipped his finger under the flap to break the seal. He slowly pulled out the folded lined paper and noticed only a few short sentences. He read the letter and couldn’t believe the words on the page. He read it again to make sure his mind wasn’t playing tricks on him. Hastily, he grabbed the Bible that had been given to him by the chaplain, opened it to John 3:16, and read the precious words. Barrett fell to his knees and wept like a new-born baby. Please forgive me, God. I’ve always thought nobody ever loved me. I was wrong!

THE END
What did you think of the book? We’d love to hear your thoughts! Your honest review would be an immense blessing to other potential readers and to the author.

Many thanks!

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A sneak peek at Book 2 in the Amish Girls Series...

Danika’s Journey

J.E.B. Spredemann
Chapter 1 - Tragedy

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die...” Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a

Ri-i-i-i-ing. The seventh-grade students at Lincoln Middle School all took their seats in Ms. Harris’ classroom. “All right class, put your books away. Today we are going to have a math quiz.”

Danika Morales groaned along with the rest of the students. She felt a tap on her shoulder, and a piece of folded lined paper fell into her lap. Danika looked up to make sure Ms. Harris didn’t see. It wouldn’t do to get caught passing notes. She couldn’t afford another trip to the principal’s office. She opened the note under her desk and read, Is your cell on silent?

She quickly wrote back, Yes, and then passed the note back to Cindy as she placed her book in her desk and removed her pencil for the test. She felt her phone vibrate in the front pocket of her hoodie and took it out to glance at the text message. It read, Math is so boring.

Danika grinned. Cindy hated math as much as she did. I know how you feel. I don’t know how I’ll ever make it through medical school! Can’t wait till next period, she quickly texted back.

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“Hey, Dani, can you come to my house after school today?” Cindy asked during lunch.

She loved spending time with Cindy, especially since her parents owned an awesome cottage a block from the beach. Many times the two of them would take their surfboards out to ride some waves, or just sit on the sand and watch the tides roll in. Danika thought for a moment. “No, I don’t think I can today. My dad said I need to get caught up with my assignments. Ugh, I hate homework,” she said, rolling her eyes. “Besides,” she added in a more serious tone, “Dad’s having another treatment again today. I can’t wait until he’s done with all that stuff.”

“Yeah, me too. I’ve heard it can be rough,” her friend sympathized. “And now that you mention it, I should probably catch up on my homework too.” Cindy sighed. “I can’t believe my mom and dad are getting a divorce. They were getting along just fine. I don’t know what happened. Why does life have to change?”

Danika hugged her friend. “I don’t know. Don’t worry. I won’t change, I’ll be your friend forever,” she promised.

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When Danika walked through the door of her suburban two-story home, she quickly dropped her backpack on the couch and walked to the refrigerator to find something to eat. After she finished making herself a PBJ sandwich, she picked up her backpack and headed for her room. Since dad won’t
be home for a while, I can check my email real quick and then finish my homework, Danika thought, as she searched through her backpack to find her smart-phone. She tried to keep her mind on her studies but her thoughts often drifted to her father. She couldn’t help but worry about him.

He was at the hospital again today. He had been diagnosed with cancer six months ago and was having another chemotherapy treatment session. The doctors said that the chemo would help him get better, but it definitely didn’t make him feel or look any better. When he came home from his treatments, he seemed even worse: he was constantly vomiting, he could hardly eat, and he had begun to lose his hair too. She didn’t understand how that could make him get better. It just didn’t make any sense. But his oncologist insisted that this was the only way to go, that is, if he wanted to stay alive. Eventually, he’d said, her father’s cancer should go into remission.

Danika sympathized with her dad; she couldn’t help but bear some of the suffering he was going through. He didn’t complain, but it was evident by the look in his eyes that he was in constant pain. She was sure he was just trying to be brave for her sake. After all, he was all she had left. Her mom had passed away in childbirth when Danika was eight years old. Not only did she lose her mother that day, but a much-anticipated baby brother as well. She couldn’t bear to lose her father too. Where would she go? How would she survive on her own?

Two hours later, her dad came through the door, assisted by the neighbor who had taken him to his appointment. Today, he had come in using a walker for the first time. This was not a good sign. Danika rushed to him as she noticed his weakened state, “Are you okay, Dad?” she asked with concern shown on her face.

“I’ll be all right, Pumpkin,” he answered bravely. “I just need to go lie down and rest a while.”

To Danika, it seemed as if that’s all he ever did lately. He’d come home from his treatments, make an attempt at rest, get really sick, start to feel better again, and then go to another treatment. It was a vicious cycle. She just wished they could have their normal lives back.

“Danika, I need to talk to you about something important. Please come and sit on the couch by me,” her father requested as he rested on their tan sofa. The neighbor had left and promised to come back again when she was needed.

“What is it, Daddy?” Danika trembled, sensing the urgency in her father’s frail voice. His pale countenance did not bring much comfort.

“Honey, I feel like my body is weakening. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be around.” He paused, drawing a labored breath.

Tears filled Danika’s eyes. “Please don’t talk like that, Dad. You’re going to be fine. The doctors said–”

“Shh-h...it’ll be okay.” Her father’s hand gently stroked her thick nearly-black hair. “I love you, Pumpkin.”

“I can’t live without you, Daddy. Please don’t leave me here by myself.” She sobbed.

“Danika, I want you to listen to me. You have to be brave. You will get through this. Do you remember your Uncle Philip? He’s your mom’s brother – the one that came to Mom’s funeral from Pennsylvania.”
Danika tried to recall the man. “No, Dad, I don’t remember.”

“Philip King is a good man. After I’m gone, I’d like you to go and live with him,” her father stated wearily, taking her hand.

“Daddy, please don’t talk like that,” she pleaded.

“Re...member...” Her father gasped. “I...love...you...”

“But Daddy, you’re not going anywhere. You’re staying here with me. You have to! You have to!” Danika cried, holding her father’s now-limp hand. “Daddy? Daddy?” She shook his shoulder to try and wake him up, but there was no response. She panicked, breathing heavily. “No-o-o!” She wept uncontrollably, as she realized her father was gone.

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