



The Amish Quiltmaker's Unattached Neighbor (The Amish Quiltmaker #6)

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Category: Historical

Description: Irrepressible Colorado Amish quiltmaker Esther Kiem is delighted to help the four Yoder sisters stitch together their beloved great-grandmother's birthday quilt...especially when it means putting her matchmaking talents to use!

Infused with her signature humor and heart, award-winning, USA Today bestselling author Jennifer Beckstrand blends quilting, mischief, and matchmaking for the sixth Amish Quiltmaker romance – perfect for fans of Amy Clipston, Wanda Brunstetter, and Linda Byler.

At thirty-two, Ada Yoder is resigned to caring for her three sisters, her ever-impractical father, and their prosperous, but demanding, farm. The last kind of trouble she needs is Enos Hoover claiming that six acres of their land actually belongs to him—and taking steps to prove it. But Ada soon finds that battling Enos clever strategies is delightfully intriguing—and lighting an impossible spark . . .

Enos is determined to make his mater proud by turning difficult acreage into a successful farm. Legally, he is in the right to reclaim the land from the Yoders. But Adas hard-working stubbornness and refreshing honesty are proving to be more of an irresistible challenge than an obstacle. Now, can Enos and Ada find enough faith and understanding to reconcile family, duty, and love—and stake their claim on a forever happiness together?

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A da Yoder stood alone in the field, her hand clutching a copy of A Guide to Your New Pivot Irrigation System , her bonnet ties flapping in the wind, and big, fat tears rolling down her face. She wasn't crying because the pivot irrigation system owner's manual was incredibly boring or because the weather was chilly or because she'd just sliced her finger trying to tighten a bolt on one of the gear boxes.

Ada almost never cried. Her tears were as rare as whiskers on a newborn baby. The last time she remembered crying was when Mamm died, almost five years ago, and she'd barely let herself cry even then because there had been sisters to comfort and bed linens to wash and burial arrangements to make. That had been an appropriate time to cry. It certainly wasn't appropriate or sensible to cry now.

She wasn't even crying that the farm needed a new irrigation system, and the cost was more than a whole year's worth of income. The tears weren't because of the heavy weight of being in charge of the household or carrying the load of the farm. But would it kill her schwester Beth to milk the goats just once without being asked? Was it too much to expect Dat to open his mail instead of throwing all the bills in a heap on his nightstand? Nae , Ada never cried over such trivial things. She liked being useful to her family, and Beth's laziness made Ada feel all that much better about herself.

Ada scanned the opening paragraph of her owner's manual and found the sentence that had made the tears spring to her eyes in the first place.

Congratulations , it said, you have just purchased the most exciting and innovative pivot irrigation system in the world.

A stiff wind had caught her upside the head and made her realize that her life was even less exciting than a thirty-year-old pivot irrigation system owner's manual. The owner's manual had colored pictures, diagrams, lists, and bold fonts. Ada had clean toilets, three pairs of shoes, and a shotgun she'd never fired. She had a fater who was rarely home, a sister who took her for granted, and a farm that demanded every hour of her life and gave back nothing in return. The land certainly didn't love her or appreciate what she did for it.

Feeling wildly ungrateful, Ada sniffed back more tears. Gotte had been good to her, even though He'd taken Mamm and left Ada to care for her schwesteren . She had a kind, if scatterbrained fater , four adorable goats, and a tidy house. It was a wonderful life.

It was also a wonderfully boring life, no more exciting or interesting than a dog-eared owner's manual. Even more pathetic was that she was crying about it. Who cried over an owner's manual?

Pepper, Dat's border collie, ran past Ada, chasing some sort of critter that eventually disappeared down a hole, yipping all the way. Pepper sniffed at the hole for a few seconds, perked up his ears, and barked twice before loping in the opposite direction on the hunt for another prairie dog or bushy-tailed rat. Pepper seemed never to tire, and he certainly didn't complain or whine about his life. Then again, Pepper's life was much more exciting than Ada's. He routinely chased coyotes and protected small children from danger. Of course he didn't complain.

Ada slapped the tears from her face and refused to indulge in more self-pity. She didn't believe in self-pity. She believed in hard work, sparkling white sheets, and common sense. Ada Yoder did not cry over things like owner's manuals and her dull existence. Last night her schwesteren Mary and Joanna had both announced that they were expecting babies, and surely, thinking about the gute news had moved Ada to tears. For sure and certain that was the reason she'd suddenly disintegrated into a

puddle in the middle of the field.

She stuffed the more-exciting-than-her-life owner's manual into a compartment in the tool belt she wore around her waist and gingerly climbed the last leg of the irrigation system like a ladder. Balanced on the pole and holding tight, she pulled a tube of grease from her tool belt and applied it to the bolts that connected the linkage arms. Greasing all the moving parts was maintenance Ada had been in charge of for years. Dat didn't like heights, and Ada was agile and fast and didn't mind climbing things. She hooked her arm around the pole, put the lid back on the tube, and slid it into her tool belt.

Down on the ground, Pepper suddenly broke into a run, barking and carrying on as if he sensed a threat lurking nearby. Ada's gaze traveled toward the weathered wood fence that separated the Yoder property from the neighbor's. A tall Amish man stood on the other side of the fence looking her way. How long had he been there, and why was he staring at her?

Ada wasn't one to spook easily, but her heart lurched, her foot slipped, and she lost her hold. She heard a loud rip as she fell backward, and for one fleeting moment, her only thought was irritation that she'd have to mend her dress. Thank Derr Herr she had quick reflexes. She shot out her hand and caught hold of the vertical pole. Her left shin met the pole she'd been standing on, sending a stabbing pain up her leg, but at least she hadn't fallen clear to the ground. A bruise was better than a broken arm or severed artery.

She heard shouting and turned to see the suspicious man struggling toward her as swiftly as possible, slowed down by a pronounced limp. Pepper chased after him, barking and snapping at his heels but never getting close enough to bite. Pepper was probably waiting to see what the man would do before passing judgment and clamping his teeth onto his leg.

Ada tightened both hands around the vertical pole. Her right leg dangled in the air, and her hem was caught on the pole over her head, which meant that the front of her dress was up around her ears. The good news was that it was a cold day, and she'd worn a pair of sweatpants under her dress to keep her legs warm. She'd never been more grateful for chilly weather in her whole life.

"Are you okay? How can I help?" Sneaky Man had finally reached the bottom of the irrigation system leg, his hands stretching into the air, a mildly curious look on his face. Pepper redirected his barks at Ada, who obviously looked like she needed more encouragement than the stranger standing on solid ground.

Ada had to admit Sneaky Man looked more concerned than menacing, but she wasn't ready to forgive him for startling her. "Do you often creep around other people's property spying on their personal business?"

His left eye twitched slightly. "Do you want help getting down?"

"Nae , denki . I'm perfectly capable." She wasn't that far from the ground, and she certainly didn't want more humiliation heaped on her head.

Sneaky Man frowned, pinned her with a skeptical look, and lowered his arms. "For sure and certain you are perfectly capable," he said, though it was obvious he didn't believe it for a second.

With one arm hooked around the pole, Ada yanked at her skirt, but it didn't budge. She wasn't quite sure what it was caught on, but she couldn't pull it loose. She'd either have to climb back up and work the fabric off whatever it was stuck on or take her dress off and leave it behind.

Climb back up it was.

“Here, look,” he said, the slightest tinge of irritation in his voice. “Just let me help you. You’re bleeding, and I don’t want to be responsible if you fall backward and get a severe head injury.”

“I release you of any responsibility.”

“Now you’re just being stubborn.”

“Now you’re just making a pest of yourself,” Ada said. Nothing made her blood boil like a man who couldn’t take a hint. Would Pepper bite him if she told him to?

She braced both feet on the pole beneath her, then grabbed the pole above her head. Even though her shin stung something wonderful, she pulled herself to standing. Sneaky Man was right. She was bleeding. She felt the blood trickle down her leg and into her shoe.

“Don’t worry,” he said, his tone laced with sarcasm. “I’ll stand right here to catch you when you fall.”

She glanced back at him. “Oh, ye of little faith.”

“Oh, ye of great pigheadedness.”

Ada glared at him. “Isn’t that just like a man. You can’t make me do what you want so you attack my character.”

He didn’t back off like she’d expected him to. “Isn’t it just like a woman. You’re angry so you refuse to listen to common sense.”

Ada pressed her lips tightly together. She wasn’t used to being rebuked like that. Sneaky Man was bold, disrespectful, and wildly aggravating. But it was kind of

exhilarating trying to put him in his place. Their conversation had been anything but boring.

Ada's dress was caught on the bolt that held one of the leg poles in place, with a tear several inches long parallel to the hemline. She wasn't happy about the rip, but her dress had probably stopped her from falling to the ground. She worked the frayed fabric away from the bolt, smoothed down her dress so it again fell nearly to her ankles, and gingerly lowered herself to the ground. Sneaky Man stepped back to give her room. He really had been standing too close, ready to catch her if she fell. And he accused her of being stubborn!

He didn't congratulate her for saving herself. She hadn't expected him to. No doubt he was irritated that she hadn't let him rescue her or that she had been right and he had been wrong.

Ada studied Sneaky Man out of the corner of her eye while she brushed her hands down her skirt and adjusted her tool belt. He had a muscular build, and he was taller than average height, but not impractically tall like Mary's husband, Clay. Sneaky Man was definitely Amish, wearing a typical straw hat, black coat, and thick suspenders. He didn't have a beard, which meant he was unmarried, but Ada judged him to be in his thirties. A bachelor? He had an honest face with a strong jaw, cool brown eyes, and a tiny scar at the corner of his mouth. He was certainly handsome, but handsome men didn't impress Ada all that much. What she really liked was a man who didn't try to rescue her when she didn't want to be rescued and didn't think he was right all the time. "So," she said, "why were you spying on me?"

"I wasn't spying."

"Yes, you were. You startled me, and that's why I slipped."

"You can't blame me for that. You shouldn't have been up there in the first place."

Your husband should be braving the cold and climbing ladders, not you. Where is he? I can't respect a man who leaves such dangerous work for his fraa ."

Well, hadn't Sneaky Man made a whole bucketful of assumptions! Ada nearly choked on her reply. She had been feeling a little picked on. Mary and Joanna had husbands who would gladly climb roofs and haymows or ford raging rivers if their wives asked them to. Ada had no one.

And that was the way she liked it.

Besides, it was none of Sneaky Man's business. "Who are you to judge my husband? You don't even know him."

"I know he hasn't replied to the five letters I've sent him in the last four weeks. Is he lazy or dumm or too much of a coward to confront me?"

Ada clenched her teeth. Sneaky Man was brutally honest, but there was no call to speak like that about Ada's fictional husband. She jabbed her finger in Sneaky Man's direction. "Let me tell you something about my husband." She cleared her throat. There really was no reason to defend a fake person, no matter how rude Sneaky Man was or how badly she wanted to put him in his place. She blew a puff of air from between her lips. "He doesn't exist."

Sneaky Man's horrified expression was worth five bruised shins. "He's . . . he's dead? I apologize. That was very wrong of me. I'm sure you're doing the best you can . . . I shouldn't have . . . Can't the gmayna help you?"

Ada couldn't help the laughter that burst from her mouth like the contents of an exploding soda can. The sheepish look on his face was very satisfying, especially since he'd been so rude. "Don't hurt yourself, for goodness' sake. The truth is, I've never been married. You were just going on and on. I had to stop you."

“You could have said something sooner.”

Her lips twitched upward. “That wouldn’t have been any fun.”

“What’s so fun about making me think you had a husband?”

“I never made you think that. You just assumed. It was fun to watch you dig a deeper and deeper hole.”

He didn’t seem amused, and he certainly didn’t seem to like Ada’s mirth at his expense. “So who have I been sending letters to?” He pointed toward the house. “His name is Mervin Yoder.”

“My fater .” Ada caught her bottom lip between her teeth. “He’s always been a little slow opening his mail. Why have you been sending him letters?”

His eyebrows inched together. “It’s a matter between men.”

Ada nearly choked on her own spit. “Oh, sis yuscht ! You’re one of those men.”

“One of what men?”

“One of those men who thinks a woman, especially an unmarried woman, doesn’t have a brain in her head.”

A small muscle in his cheek bounced up and down. “Oh, sis yuscht ! You’re one of those women.”

She glared at him with all the ice and fire she could muster. “Oh, really?”

“You hate men and blame all of your problems on us.”

Ada could appreciate his firmness of mind, even if she couldn't stomach his point of view. "Well, it certainly makes things easier on you to stuff me into a convenient little box and disregard my opinions."

He met her glare with a searing one of his own. "Didn't you just do the same thing to me?"

Ada stiffened. "Nae."

He folded his arms across his chest. "You said I'm one of those men. Haven't you also stuffed me into a convenient little box?"

How aggravating that he was right and how irritating that Ada was mature enough to admit it. She softened her expression and scrunched her lips to one side of her face. "I think we've both been unjustly stuffed."

The surprise on his face was evident. "Like a Thanksgiving turkey. It's very uncomfortable." He cracked a slight and reluctant smile. "I apologize. You're right. I shouldn't make assumptions about you just because you're a woman."

"That is very generous of you to admit you're wrong."

"I didn't say I was wrong." His eyes flashed with amusement, so Ada didn't feel the need to chastise him.

But she did feel the need to growl, softly. "What I was trying to say is that I'm sorry too. You made me mad. And just so you know, I don't blame anybody for my problems. I own them and do my best to solve them."

"So do I," he said. "I was making assumptions about you simply because you're a woman. I know it's unfair, but I've had too many bad experiences to believe I could

have a rational, unemotional conversation with a woman about water rights and farmland. I was hoping if I spoke with your dat , we could have a talk without all the dramatics.”

Ada did her best to keep her temper in check. He had no tact, but at least he was being honest with her. “I hate to burst your bubble, but you’ll get much further if you talk to me. I make the decisions about the farm. Organization is not my dat ’s talent. He likes to plant and plow and shear sheep, then come home, eat dinner, read his newspaper, and go to bed. Though I consult Dat before making financial decisions, I pay all the bills, rent the needed equipment, and keep house.” Ada stopped herself. Was she bragging? Making herself out to be some sort of saint? She was doing neither of those things. It was just the reality of her life.

Sneaky Man looked as if he wasn’t quite sure what to make of Ada and her forceful personality. She smiled to herself. She always enjoyed throwing an overconfident man off-kilter.

Ada pulled her mind away from all distractions. She had been vehemently arguing with a perfect stranger, and she didn’t even know his name. “Who are you, why were you spying on me, and what is this rational, unemotional conversation you want to have with my dat ?”

“I wasn’t spying.”

“Then what?”

He turned his face toward the fence where she’d first seen him. “I should really talk to your fater .”

Ada threw up her hands. “You are impossible. Didn’t you hear a word I just said?”

He narrowed his eyes. “You’re proving my point about women being too emotional.”

“You’re proving my point about men thinking women are dumm .”

He huffed out a breath. “In my defense, I saw you crying not fifteen minutes ago.”

Ada’s heart skipped a beat. He’d seen that? “Maybe I had something in my eye.”

“You didn’t have something in your eye.”

“The pivot irrigation system manual bored me to tears.”

That coaxed a small smile from him. “I don’t wonder but it did.” He paused, then pointed toward the fence that separated their properties. “Some of your fence posts are painted purple.”

For sure and certain he was trying to avoid her questions. “It’s my bruder -in-law’s fault. Clay was a famous baseball player, and his fans would come to our farm all the time looking for an autograph. He’s from Indiana where there’s a purple paint law.”

Sneaky Man nodded as if he knew everything. “It’s like putting a NO TRESPASSING sign on your property. We have the same law in Pennsylvania.”

Ada had no patience for a know-it-all. “If you know about the purple paint law, why did you trespass onto our farm?”

He looked at her as she didn’t have a brain in her head. “You were hanging by your dress from your irrigation system. I thought you needed my help.”

“I didn’t.”

“Besides that, Colorado doesn’t have a purple paint law.”

She really hated a know-it-all. “Dat was very irritated because Clay realized there was no purple paint law after he’d painted half the farm purple.” Ada turned her face away to hide a smile. She and Mary had laughed about the purple paint for days. But she wasn’t about to show Sneaky Man anything but a stern face. “Why did you send my dat those letters?”

He studied her face. “If you promise not to cry, I’ll tell you what I’ve been writing letters about.”

“I won’t promise anything, especially if you want to talk water rights. Around here, nobody can have an unemotional conversation about water rights, man or woman.”

“I can understand that. This place is dry as a bone.” Again his gaze traveled to the far side of the fence. “I just bought your neighbor’s farm.”

That was nice. It had been vacant for almost five years. “So far, I don’t feel like crying.”

His expression hardened like stone. “I’ve got all the legal paperwork, the plat map, and the deed. I own six acres of your farm, and I’m going to take what’s rightfully mine.”

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A da stormed into the house, tore off her bonnet, and slammed the door behind her. “Dat,” she yelled. She slid off her coat, untied her shoes, and pulled the left sweatpants leg up and her stocking down. “Dat! Where are you?”

An inch-long gash on her shin was already starting to turn purple, and dried blood caked the front of her leg, but she didn’t have time to clean it or get herself a Band-Aid. As quickly as she could, she hobbled across the kitchen and down the hall to Dat’s bedroom. “Dat!”

He wasn’t in his room. Maybe he’d gone to buy feed for the goats or get his hair cut. He might be visiting Mary, who lived in the house immediately south of their farm.

“Ada, for goodness’ sake, you scared me half out of my wits.” Ada’s little schwester Beth stood in the doorway clutching her cell phone and frowning at Ada as if Ada had just broken every dish in the house. “You came in the house screaming like there was a fire or something.”

Ada wasn’t in the mood to give Beth the time of day, let alone an explanation. “Where’s Dat?”

“Avery Smith needed help with his sheep.”

“Do you know when he’ll be back?”

“No idea.” Beth must have seen the utter distress on Ada’s face. Her eyes filled with concern. “What’s the matter?”

Ada waved her hand in the air and swatted Beth's question away. "Nothing. Nothing. I just need to talk to Dat."

Beth's expression sagged. "Oh, okay. Well, if you don't need me, I'm going to ride my bike over to Sadie's. Her beauty magazine came yesterday."

On a normal day, Ada would have given Beth a stern lecture about using a cell phone and reading worldly, inappropriate magazines, but today Ada just wanted Beth out of her hair so she could solve the latest crisis without having to coddle her little schwester. "Okay. Be careful on the road."

Beth's eyes widened in surprise. For sure and certain she'd been expecting a lecture. "Okay. Denki. I'll be home for dinner. Are you still making barbecue chicken pizza?"

Nae, she wasn't going to make barbecue chicken pizza. Ada's life had been completely upended, and Beth would be lucky to get toast and a bowl of canned apricots. "Probably," she said, because she really wanted Beth to go, and she didn't want to explain herself.

Beth's spirits seem to sink even lower, though Ada couldn't fathom what she'd done. "Okay then. I won't be long."

Dat's nightstand was piled four inches high with unopened mail. How long had these letters been sitting here? Whenever Ada got the mail from the mailbox, she pulled out the envelopes that looked like bills and gave Dat everything else. That way they stayed current with their debts, and Dad didn't have to worry about the budget.

Ada picked up the pile of envelopes and thumbed through them. Junk mail, junk mail, what looked like a wedding invitation. Oh, sis yuscht, a bill. Junk. The town newsletter. From the stack she pulled out five envelopes, all from Bird-in-Hand,

Pennsylvania, all written in the same slanted, elegant hand. Sneaky Man had fine penmanship, but that was truly the only gute thing about him. He wanted to steal their land, and Ada wasn't about to let him get away with it. Her heart banged against her rib cage as she examined Sneaky Man's envelopes. The first one was postmarked January 4, almost three months ago. Her heart quit banging and plummeted to her toes. Ada was going to have to go through the mail more carefully so she didn't miss important letters like the one in her hand.

She ripped open the envelope and found a single, handwritten piece of paper.

Dear Mervin Yoder,

I have recently purchased a piece of property in Byler, Colorado, and the county recorder's office has informed me that you are my neighbor to the west. Unfortunately, there has been an error in the usage of this property, and it is in the record that I own six acres you have been farming for almost two decades. The fence dividing our farms was erected in the wrong place. It needs to be moved as soon as possible so that when I arrive in Byler, I will be able to start working my entire piece of land. I have also discovered that two shares of water are attached to the six acres, and I would appreciate your meeting with the watermaster and signing those shares over to me.

Ada wanted to spit and say more than a few inappropriate words. Did Sneaky Man truly think they would hand over almost ten percent of their farm just because he asked—and not so nicely? He was arrogant and impertinent beyond belief.

I am planning to arrive in Byler on March 15. With this much advanced notice, you should have more than enough time to move the fence and work out the water situation. Please reply as soon as you can. If for some reason the fence can't be moved before I get there, I would be happy to help you vacate my share of the property. Please let me know if this will be the case.

Blessings, Enos Hoover

Blessings ! He'd sent them blessings ? The man had no shame.

Ada crumpled the letter in her fist and threw it across the room. Why had she ever wished for anything but a boring life?

She thought better of throwing a tantrum, strode across the room, and picked up the paper, smoothing it out in her hand. Dat would need to read it. She turned the letter over. On the back was an intricately drawn map of sections of both farms, complete with tiny trees, miniature fenceposts, and precise right angles everywhere she looked. He'd even drawn a little horse standing next to their barn. It was charming and beautiful, and it made Ada sick to her stomach. Sneaky Man was the most horrible man in the history of horrible men.

No wonder she'd disliked him right from the start. Men who skulked around in the shadows and spied on unsuspecting women were not to be trusted.

She glanced at the letter again. Enos Hoover. That was Sneaky Man's name, but Sneaky Man fit him much better. After she had climbed down from the irrigation system and he'd told her he owned part of her farm, she had argued with him, but she hadn't cried or thrown a fit, mostly because Ada didn't throw fits, and partly because Enos had expected her to. She had refused to give him the satisfaction.

Instead, she'd told him in the calmest, most reasonable way possible that he was getting six acres of their farm over her dead body. Then she'd turned on her heels and marched away, with Pepper trotting alongside her. Now she wished she had let Pepper bite him in the ankle.

Ada opened the next four envelopes and quickly scanned each one. They all said basically the same thing, but with each progressive letter, Enos's appeals for some

sort of response from Dat got more and more urgent. Ada could almost hear the edge in Enos's voice when she read the letters. He hadn't wanted to surprise Ada any more than she had wanted to be surprised. But he wasn't likely to back down about taking their property. She needed a plan.

Ada had never been so utterly frustrated with Dat than she was at this moment. If he'd opened his mail in a timely manner like normal people, they could have been ready for an attack. Ada knew the watermaster personally, and surely there was a law favoring the farmer who had worked the land for several years, even if it wasn't his.

Someone knocked loudly on the door, and Ada nearly jumped out of her skin. She'd completely forgotten that Esther Kiem and Cathy Larsen were coming over today to talk about quilts and recipes. Cathy was on the town council. Maybe she'd have some advice for Ada.

Ada set Enos's letters on the nightstand and tripped quickly down the hall to the front room. She opened the door, and Cathy didn't even say hello before barging into the room and making herself at home. "We've been standing on that porch for five minutes." Cathy was an Englischer who often drove the Amish into town for shopping and errands. She was also a dear, if unconventional, friend. She stamped her feet as if removing snow from her shoes even though there wasn't any snow on the ground or even a speck of frost. A holdover habit from winter, no doubt. She set her giant yellow purse on the love seat and peeled off her fluorescent blue coat. "Didn't you hear us knocking? I bruised my knuckles."

"I was . . . distracted," Ada murmured. That was an understatement.

Esther held her six-month-old son, Benny, in one arm, while almost-two-year-old Junior and five-year-old Winnie stood on the porch next to her. "We've got some very exciting news, and we couldn't wait one more minute to tell you."

Cathy fished through her purse, which was the size of a small country. “Esther thinks she’s found you a husband.”

“A husband?” Ada ground her teeth together but tried to sound as if she was talking about the weather. “I don’t need a husband.”

Esther shot Cathy an arch look. “That’s not what I said. I just said that he and Ada should meet.” Esther Kiem was one of Ada’s dearest friends and an expert quilter. She also had the strange habit of tucking random objects behind her ear for safekeeping. Today she had a seam ripper behind her ear, which was one of the most dangerous things she wore regularly. As long as Ada didn’t try to hug her, she wouldn’t get her eye poked out.

Ada was in no mood to talk about husbands. “Winnie, Junior, I’m so happy to see you.” Even though Ada was completely disheartened by Enos’s letters, for die kinner’s sake, she did her best to appear untroubled. She took the buplie from his mater’s arms and gave him a big smooch on his chubby cheek. “Ach, Esther, he gets bigger every time I see him. What are you feeding him? Heavy whipping cream?”

Esther laughed. “Something like that.”

“Come in, Junior,” Ada said. “You and I are old friends.” Junior marched into the house as if he lived there. Junior and Winnie had spent a lot of time at Ada’s house after Benny was born. There were complications, and the poor buplie had been in the hospital NICU for almost a month. Winnie and Junior loved petting the goats, playing with Pepper, and running around the fields beyond the fence. If Enos Hoover got his way, they’d have a lot less room to run.

“I’m hungee,” Junior said.

Ada nodded. “Do you know where the cookies are?” Without another word, Junior

ran into the kitchen as if he had somewhere he urgently needed to be.

Esther laughed. “He knows where the cookies are.”

“Jah . I’ve moved them to the lowest shelf so he won’t be tempted to climb on the counter.”

Esther sighed. “He climbs everything, like a mountain goat. Did you see the goose egg on his forehead? Yesterday while I was doing laundry, he fell off the kitchen table and conked his head on one of the chairs. He was very sad, but the accidents don’t seem to discourage him.”

Cathy sat down on the love seat next to her purse. “Get a box of pool noodles and slip them on the corners of every piece of furniture in your house. It’s the only way.”

Winnie threw her arms around Ada’s leg. “I found a dead grasshopper. Mamm says I can keep it.”

Ada gave Winnie a hug and helped her off with her coat. “Soon you’ll need a whole room for all the bugs you’ve collected.”

Winnie beamed. “Mamm bought me a bug collector. It has twenty-four compartments.”

Ada cocked her eyebrow. “That is a wonderful big word for such a little girl.”

Winnie held up four fingers. “I’ve already got this many bugs. Can I have a cookie?”

Ada smiled. Winnie’s attention span was only slightly longer than Junior’s. “Of course. Help yourself.”

Esther took off her bonnet and coat and hung them on the hook by the door. “Get a cookie and then bring Junior back into the living room. We don’t want him climbing on top of the refrigerator.”

Ada eyed Esther doubtfully. “He can’t do that, can he?”

Esther grimaced. “He’s tried. The kid is like a one-man wrecking crew.” She took the baby from Ada, spread a blanket on the floor, and sat him on the blanket, propped up with pillows so he wouldn’t tip over. Ada limped to the couch, and Esther sat next to her. She gasped and curled her fingers around Ada’s arm. “ Ach , Ada, you’re hurt.”

In all the commotion, Ada had completely forgotten about her shin. She glanced down. It looked so mushy, they’d probably want to amputate. “This is nothing.”

“It looks very sore.”

“It is, but who cares about blood at a time like this?”

“A time like what?” Esther said.

Cathy fished around in her purse and pulled out a protein bar. “She wants to hear about the husband you found for her.”

“I really don’t,” Ada said.

Esther gave Cathy another pointed glare. “I never said I’d found her a husband. We just met someone yesterday who we thought was interesting.”

“It never hurts to be proactive,” Cathy said. She attempted to tear open her protein bar, but it wouldn’t budge.

Ada didn't really want to know the answer, but she asked the question anyway. "What does 'proactive' mean?"

Esther stretched a fake smile across her face. "It just means you should keep an open mind. Cathy drove me into town yesterday because I had to go to Walmart, and on the way home, she picked up someone from the bus station."

Cathy was still working on that protein bar wrapper. "What she's trying to say is, he's not married, he's quite good-looking, and he's rich."

Esther groaned. "Cathy, don't tell tales. We don't know if he's rich."

"We don't know that he isn't. I'm trying to pique Ada's interest. It's easier to fall in love with a man who has money." Cathy used her teeth on the stubborn package. "He's reserved and quiet and altogether too serious, but he seems nice enough. Of course I'm adamantly against the marriage."

"I'm not getting married," Ada insisted. Esther knew better than to try to match Ada with anyone. It was all too futile and unnecessarily painful. And today she just wasn't in the mood.

Esther's mouth fell open in indignation. "Why are you against the marriage, Cathy? There's nothing wrong with him."

Cathy tapped her still-unopened protein bar on the arm of the love seat. "He has a wooden foot, but that's not why I'm against the marriage."

Esther stared at Cathy as if sheer willpower would get her to stop talking. "We don't know if it's wooden."

"Well, it's fake. And his mother is a piece of work."

Esther's gaze flicked in Ada's direction. "There's nothing wrong with his mother."

Cathy shook her head. "No girl in her right mind would want that woman for a mother-in-law."

Ada was hopelessly lost, but if she asked questions, Cathy and Esther would think she was interested. "I'm going to go to get a Band-Aid."

Esther stopped Ada by placing a hand on her arm. "I'm sorry, Ada. I know you don't want to talk about this, but it's really not what you think. He's just moved to Byler, and he brought his elderly mother to live with him."

Cathy looked as if she'd swallowed a whole lemon. "She's not elderly. She's at least twenty years younger than me, and I'm not elderly yet."

Cathy was eighty-six, but she worked on the principle that you are only as old as you think you are. She thought she was about twenty.

Esther gave Ada a weak smile, as if even she didn't believe what she was saying. "He's about your age, never been married, and of a serious nature, like you. I thought of you because maybe he'd make a nice, comfortable friend. That's all I was thinking."

Cathy snorted loudly but didn't say anything. Ada would have snorted too, but she didn't want to scare the baby.

Esther mostly ignored Cathy, but Ada could almost hear Esther's spine stiffen. "And it's especially convenient because he's your new neighbor. He bought the old Connor farm directly to your east."

Shock slapped Ada upside the head, and outrage punched her in the gut. "Enos

Hoover?” she said, choking on his name as if it were a moldy piece of bread.

Esther’s expression fell. “Oh, you’ve already met him?”

Ada wasn’t one for dramatics, hysterics, or explosions, but she nearly lost what composure she had left. She stood up, growled, sat down again, and balled her hands into fists. “I met Enos Hoover just this morning.”

“I think he’s handsome,” Esther said. “Don’t you think he’s handsome?”

“He informed me that he owns six acres of our land and the two shares of water that come with it.”

Esther’s eyes nearly popped out of her head. “What? He didn’t mention that to us.”

“Water shares don’t work that way,” Cathy said.

Ada could barely spit out the words. “He says he’s going to take down the fence that’s been there for over thirty years, dismantle our irrigation system, and farm our land whether we like it or not.”

“There might be a fence law.” Cathy seemed to be in her own little world over there on the love seat.

Esther pressed her fingers to her lips. “I don’t understand. He was really nice.”

“He’s not nice. He’s sneaky and arrogant and thinks that since we’re supposed to love our neighbor that we’ll just cheerfully hand over our land. But he’s provoked the wrong woman, and I won’t go down without a fight. In fact, I won’t go down at all.”

“You go, girl,” Cathy said. “I don’t feel one bit sorry for him, even if he only has one

foot.”

Ada paused to draw a breath, then decided she should maybe pay a little more attention to Cathy. “What did you say?”

“I said he only has one foot. He didn’t tell us how he lost his foot, but his mother mentioned it when they were getting out of the van.”

“No, Cathy, what did you say about water shares?”

Cathy studied the protein bar in her hand. “Enos doesn’t have any right to those water shares as long as your name is on them. Or is it in your dad’s name?”

Ada perked up considerably. “You’re right. Those shares are in Dat’s name. We pay an assessment every year.”

“Enos may own the land, but he doesn’t have shares to water it with.”

Ada pressed her lips together. The situation was better than it had been two minutes ago, but Enos still thought he owned their six acres. “Cathy, you’re on the town council. You must know people who can help me.”

Cathy looked momentarily horrified. “Are you asking me to hire someone to break Enos’s kneecaps?”

Ada was equally horrified. “Of course not! What a terrible notion.”

Cathy waved her protein bar in Ada’s direction. “Of course it is. I know you better than that. I’m not sure what came over me. Maybe I should stop watching Law and Order reruns.”

“Have you talked to your dat about this?” Esther said.

“Not yet, but I’ll tell him as soon as he gets home.” And try to keep her patience. Even though Dat hadn’t opened his mail, this mess wasn’t his fault. “I’m hoping Cathy can help me with the legal issues surrounding the land. Enos said he’s been talking to the county recorder.”

“That’s a good place to start.” Cathy nodded at Ada, a smug look on her face. “And just for the record, I was never in favor of this marriage.”

Esther’s sigh was long and resigned.

“Neither was I,” Ada said.

Esther stood up, went over to the love seat, and took the protein bar from Cathy. She pulled the seam ripper from behind her ear, skewered the package, then ripped it open and handed it to Cathy.

Cathy took a bite. “Thank you. I thought I’d never get it open. My blood sugar was dropping.”

Esther put the seam ripper behind her ear and flinched. “Oh, sis yuscht . Winnie and Junior have been quiet a wonderful long time.”

She and Ada both raced into the kitchen. Junior was sitting atop the table, the cookie jar between his spread legs, with a cookie in each hand and chocolate smeared all over his face. Winnie was kneeling on the floor next to the fridge wiping up a large puddle of purple liquid with one of Ada’s sparkling white kitchen towels.

Ada glanced at Esther and laughed. “ Vell , it could have been worse. There’s no blood.”

They cleaned the floor and the table and the children and took everyone back into the living room. Cathy was holding Benny and talking to him. Cathy's baby talk was gravelly and loud, as if she thought Benny would understand her if she spoke loudly enough. It was hilarious and sweet at the same time. They sat Winnie next to Cathy and Junior next to Esther, and Ada gave them each a book to look at.

Esther pulled a small notebook from her diaper bag. "Are you too upset to talk about quilt blocks?"

"There's not much to talk about. I've finished mine, Mary has finished hers, and Joanna's are done too. I don't know that Beth has even started hers yet." Almost two years ago, the schwesternen had decided to make a sampler quilt for Grossmammi Beulah's hundredth birthday. Mammi was going to be a hundred and two in September, and the quilt wasn't finished yet because Clay Markham had crashed into their barn, he and Mary had fallen in love, and there'd been no time to make quilt blocks with a wedding to plan. Then Menno Eicher had come to town to find a fraa , and Joanna couldn't sew because she spent all her spare time steadfastly disliking Menno. When she decided she liked him just fine, there was another wedding to put on. Thank Derr Herr Ada had finished her quilt blocks, because with Enos Hoover trying to steal part of their farm, she'd have no time for anything but putting up a fight.

They were all just waiting on Beth.

Esther pursed her lips. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to finish Beth's quilt blocks, or this quilt will never be done."

"I'd hate for you to do that," Ada said. "You have less time than any of us, and we shouldn't let Beth off the hook. The quilt won't be as meaningful if Beth doesn't finish her own squares."

Cathy quit bouncing the baby and gave Ada a funny look. “Just a minute. What quilt block did you choose?”

“I’m finished with all my blocks. You don’t have to worry about helping me with my corners. They all match perfectly.” Ada wasn’t a proficient quilter like Esther, or even as gute as Mary, but she prided herself on matching corners and meticulously straight lines.

“But which one did you choose?”

Ada shrugged. “The Bachelor’s Puzzle. I like it because it has so much movement to it, like a pinwheel. I made nine blocks and chose a different color scheme for each. I thought that would look charming on Grossmammi Beulah’s quilt.”

The wrinkles on Cathy’s forehead bunched up like ruffles on an Englischer’s dress. “Nobody ever listens to me.”

“I listen,” Esther said.

Cathy held the baby on her lap with one hand and shook her finger at Ada with the other. “Don’t you remember what I told Mary when she picked the Drunkard’s Path quilt block?”

Ada couldn’t help but grin. Cathy had told Mary that there was a little magic in every stitch sewed into a quilt block. “Ach , Cathy, you know the Amish don’t believe in magic.”

“That’s what you told me then, but you can’t forget what happened to Mary after that. And Joanna.”

“You can’t believe the things that happened were anything but chance.”

“Chance?” Cathy said, so loudly the baby flinched. “Mary chose the Drunkard’s Path quilt block and not a week later, Clay was driving drunk and just happened to crash into your barn. And then she married him. Joanna chose the Sugar Bowl pattern, and Menno Eicher showed up from Sugar, Idaho. And she married him. You’ve made nine Bachelor’s Puzzle blocks, and a bachelor has moved next door. We’re all puzzled because we don’t know what to do about the six acres. Or maybe Enos Hoover is like a puzzle because he’s missing a piece.” Cathy waved her hand back and forth. “We’ll figure out the puzzle part later, but it doesn’t matter. You’ve recklessly chosen the wrong quilt block, and you’re going to end up marrying Enos Hoover, and I can’t approve of your mother-in-law.”

Ada pinned Cathy with an arch look. “Now you’re just talking nonsense.”

“No, I’m not. Just wait until you meet her.”

Ada huffed out a breath. “Cathy, I know you mean well.” That wasn’t exactly true. She never knew if Cathy meant well or just meant to stir the pot. “But Enos Hoover is the last man in the world I would marry. He’s arrogant and unreasonable. He’s trying to steal part of my farm. He’s more of an enemy than a potential husband.”

“We are supposed to love our enemies,” Esther said, obviously trying to smooth things over between Cathy and Ada.

Cathy shook her head. “You’re doomed.”

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Ada usually enjoyed church. She loved when all the voices combined in songs of worship. The sermons grounded and inspired her and always strengthened her resolve to be a better person.

But not today.

Today she had no desire whatsoever to be a better person. And it was all Enos Hoover's fault.

All she could think about was how angry she was with him, even though Jesus said not to be angry and not to call your neighbor nasty names, even in your head. Unfortunately the good Lord had taught, quite inconveniently, that if someone asked for your cloak, you should give them your coat also. Did that mean she was supposed to give Enos her six acres and the water shares? It didn't help matters that Enos was sitting on the end of the row opposite Ada and she had a full view of him while the minister preached about love and kindness and all that other stuff that Ada didn't want to hear.

It was very irritating that even though she wanted to dislike Enos completely, he sang "Das Loblied" with the appropriate solemnity and restraint, and he had a beautiful bass voice that resonated clear through the Sensenigs' basement. Though few people would say Ada had any soft spots, she had a weakness for good tone and in-tune singing. She narrowed her eyes. If he wasn't sitting there so smugly, singing the hymns on pitch and acting as if he belonged here, she might be able to dislike him less.

The man had no shame. He had shown up for gmay today as if he was completely

innocent of any wrongdoing. As if he wasn't trying to steal a piece of Ada's farm. Ach , vell , it wasn't technically Ada's farm, but Dat wasn't going to be much help.

When she'd told Dat about the letters and Enos and the six acres, Dat had straightened himself to his full height and declared that Enos Hoover wasn't going to get an inch of their farm, but then he'd backed away and said that maybe Gotte wouldn't let them into heaven if they didn't give Enos their land.

"It's Enos who needs to worry about heaven," Ada had said. "'Thou shalt not steal.'"

But Dat hadn't been quite so determined after that. He was very concerned about getting into heaven. When Ada had suggested they go see the county recorder, Dat had hemmed and hawed and said that Gotte's will would be done and that the whole thing would work itself out in the end. What he really meant was that Ada would work things out because Dat was just too tired and too busy to deal with it. Ada was the problem solver. Ada was the one Dat depended on. Ada was the one who would have to save the farm.

At times like this, she wished Dat didn't need her so much.

But it was nice to be needed.

Ada sat toward the front of the room with the other unmarried girls. Her lack of a husband was only embarrassing on church days when she had to file into the room with all the married women watching her. But Ada had never been one to feel sorry for herself. If Gotte didn't want her to have a husband, then she would not question Gotte's will. Her judgmental neighbors could take it up with Gotte and leave Ada out of it. She refused to base her worth on her marital status. It was a sure road to heartache.

Beth and her best friend, Sadie, sat next to Ada, making Ada feel that much older

than everyone in her row. Sadie was a sweet girl. A little too talkative, but always willing to do anything for anybody. She had gone all the way to Idaho to convince Menno to come back and marry Joanna. Ada liked Sadie even more than she liked Beth. Sadie had a cell phone, but she also had a job and calluses on her hands from working the farm.

Both Mary and Joanna were absent because they were both expecting babies and feeling poorly. Mary threw up almost every morning, and Joanna felt like she was going to throw up all the time. Ada hadn't talked to either of them since her unpleasant encounter with Enos Hoover. Ach , she could surely use their advice now. But she hated to burden either of them with her problems, especially now that she had their health to consider.

During the final hymn, Ada stole a glance at Enos's mater who was sitting on a folding chair on the back row to Ada's left. Enos and his mater had arrived at gmay in a brand-new buggy pulled by a beautiful black horse. Enos walked with a limp, and his mater walked with a cane, but she didn't look exceptionally old or feeble. She had a pinched, snippy little mouth, as if she was ready to scold anyone who might dare sin in her presence, and her expression was one of superiority, her gaze looking to find fault with everyone and everything.

Ada turned her face back to the front and tried to concentrate on the song. She knew better than to judge someone by their appearance. All three of her schwesteren were much prettier than she was, and boys had always passed Ada over in favor of one of her younger, more appealing siblings. She took a deep breath and tried not to judge Enos's mater harshly, even though her son wanted to steal Ada's water rights. Ada knew next to nothing about the woman, except that Cathy Larsen said that the mater was "a piece of work," whatever that meant. Cathy had certainly been afraid that Ada would marry Enos and be stuck with his mater for the rest of her life.

The discussion they'd had about Ada's Bachelor's Puzzle quilt blocks was ridiculous.

Cathy had spent the next hour trying to convince Ada to choose a different pattern and resew all her quilt blocks, but to Cathy, every block seemed rife with peril. Cathy feared the Log Cabin block would have Ada living in the wilderness with a mountain man. Wild Goose Chase evoked sirens and police cars. Double Wedding Ring meant Ada's husband would die young and she'd have to find another one. Cathy had clutched her heart at the thought of Old Maid's Puzzle, and Broken Dishes did not bode well for Ada and her future husband's relationship. "Surely you'll be throwing plates at each other before the honeymoon's even over," Cathy had said. Shoo Fly meant insect infestations, and Fox Paws indicated certain death. The three of them, even Cathy, had ended up laughing hysterically, though Cathy's way of laughing was to stretch her lips across her teeth and grimace painfully.

Cathy had finally found an acceptable block toward the back of her book called Good Fortune. "Nothing wrong with good fortune, as far as I can see," she had said.

Esther had seemed reluctant to say it, but she had anyway. "The Amish don't believe in luck."

Cathy had thrown up her hands. "Well, then. I've done all I can. Ada, I hope you have a nice life with your crosspatch mother-in-law."

Ada vacillated between curiosity and hesitation about Enos's mater. She wasn't sure she wanted to meet such a sour-looking woman, but she was quite curious about a person who could fluster Cathy Larsen. It was almost impossible to knock Cathy Larsen off-kilter.

Dat had agreed to talk to Enos Hoover after services and get more details about the land and Enos's supposed claim to it. Ada didn't want to be within a country mile of Enos, but they needed more information before they could make a battle plan. As a last resort, they might need to appeal to the bishop, but Ada wanted to avoid that. If she didn't like the bishop's final decision, she wouldn't be able to do anything about

it.

After the prayer, Enos's mater sat resolutely on her chair until Enos went to her, helped her stand, and led her to a sofa, which had been pushed against the wall to make room for the benches. He sat down next to her and fussed and simpered, patting her hand, whispering soft words, and overall looking deeply concerned. Ada was a little surprised. She wouldn't have guessed that Enos had one sympathetic bone in his body. His mater frowned and grimaced and pressed her hand to her forehead, acting as if she was the most ill-treated woman in the world. Enos's ministrations didn't seem to do anything to make her feel better.

It was warm enough outside that the elders had decided to set up tables in the backyard for fellowship supper where there was a sweeping view of David Sensenig's beautifully tilled field, ready for planting potatoes. Men and boys carried benches out of the house while the women prepared bread and spreads, chow-chow, and pickles in the Sensenigs' spacious kitchen.

Beth grabbed Ada's hand as they both stood up. "I've got your back. If you need me to give that Enos person a gute scolding, just let me know."

"I've got your back" was an Englisch term meaning that Beth thought she could protect Ada from Enos Hoover, as if Ada needed protection in the first place. Beth was very sweet, but she was incapable of protecting Ada from anything. Beth was the one who always needed looking after.

Ada didn't want to hurt Beth's feelings. "I will let you know if I need your help, but I'm sure I'll be just fine. Denki ."

Beth seemed relieved that Ada didn't really need her to do anything courageous or daring. But that was always the way with Beth. She had gute intentions with no determination behind them.

Ada went upstairs to the kitchen and sliced a loaf of bread. She put it in a basket, then took it outside and set it on one of the tables. The women had a system for serving supper as efficiently as possible. Ada didn't see Enos again until the men were done eating and the women sat down. He led his mater up the outside basement steps and to the nearest table where he helped her get some food and put some church spread on a slice of bread.

Ada sat down next to Esther Kiem and her two little ones. Esther's husband, Levi, was walking the baby around the yard so Esther could eat. With a sly look on her face, Esther nudged Ada with her elbow. "Enos Hoover is staring at you."

Ada nudged Esther back and refused to look. "Of course he is. I'm probably the first woman he's ever met who didn't swoon at his feet when he walked by."

Esther tilted her head and cocked an eyebrow. "You think women swoon at his feet?"

"Well, of course they do. He's got a strong jaw, nice eyebrows, and very broad shoulders, but under all that manliness is a heart of stone. I like to think I chipped away at his confidence a bit."

Esther's lips twitched. "I'm sure you did." She handed Junior a pinch of bread with jam on it. "Did you see how he stayed right by his mater's side and buttered her bread and poured her some water? I find it hard to believe he has a heart of stone."

Ada scrunched her lips together. "For all his flaws, Enos Hoover seems to be a gute son, but while his kindness doesn't discourage me from fighting for my farm, it does make me want to be more civil about it."

"Hmm," Esther said. "What do you know about his flaws? Maybe he doesn't have any."

Ada knew exactly what Esther was trying to do. Cathy had warned her that Esther wanted Ada and Enos to marry. “He’s trying to steal six of my acres, Pepper doesn’t like him, and he spies on people.” Ada counted on her fingers. “He says women are too emotional, he thinks he’s entitled to my water rights, and he pranced over here today in a brand-new buggy. What else is he doing but flaunting his money? And those are just the flaws I know about. I’m sure he has thousands of others.”

Esther scoffed. “Well, of course he has a new buggy. No doubt it was cheaper to sell his old buggy in Pennsylvania and buy a new one here rather than pay to transport the old one clear across the country.”

Ada shut her mouth and thought about it. “I guess that was a little judgmental of me.”

Esther giggled. “I love watching you try to convince yourself that you’re not interested in Enos Hoover.”

Ada growled. “Of course I’m not interested. What is it with you married Amish women? You see two people and decide they’re perfect for each other simply because they’re both single.”

Esther shrugged, a twinkle in her eye. “He’s rich.”

Ada cuffed Esther on the shoulder. “You just said he wasn’t.”

Esther laughed. “Well, make up your mind. Would you be more interested in a rich Enos Hoover or a poor Enos Hoover?”

Ada scrunched her lips together. “Neither, and you can just get whatever notions you have about the two of us out of your head. Enos is a menace to the community, and I’m going to put him in his place.”

“Well, now you have your chance, because he’s coming this way.”

Ada looked up, and her heart leaped into her throat. Enos Hoover was indeed headed toward her, his strides resolute, his limp barely noticeable. It wasn’t very nice of him to just leave his mater sitting there all by herself. Ada held her breath. Did he actually mean to talk to her? Hadn’t he been adamant that he wanted to talk to her dat instead of to her? She couldn’t very well avoid him unless she jumped to her feet and ran as fast as she could in the other direction.

Just in time she remembered that she didn’t want to avoid him. She relished a battle with Enos Hoover because he underestimated her. She would meet her adversary head-on and put up a fight he’d never forget.

“Enos,” Esther said, when he got closer. “It’s nice to see you again. How is your mater ?”

Enos glanced back at his mater sitting all by herself, picking at her food as if she feared it might make her sick. The tiny lines around his eyes deepened. “She’s having a little trouble adjusting to the elevation.”

Esther clicked her tongue in sympathy. “ Ach , I had the same problem when I moved here. Tell her to drink plenty of water and take garlic and cloves. For sure and certain she’ll feel right as rain soon enough.” She grinned and draped her arm around Ada’s shoulder. “Have you met your neighbor Ada Yoder?”

“ Jah , we’ve met,” Enos said, as if he was talking about contracting the flu.

Ada resisted the urge to glare at her very bad friend and instead looked Enos squarely in the eye and tried to appear as resolute as possible.

Enos returned her gaze with an even more determined look of his own. “I can’t find

your fater. Has he read my letters? I would like to talk to him about moving the fence this week.”

Ada gazed around the Sensenigs’ yard. Where was Dat? “Anything you can say to my dat , you can say to me.”

“I’d prefer to talk to your dat .”

Of course he would.

Esther popped from her seat as if she’d been sitting on a tight spring. “ Ach , look at the time. I must get die kinner home for naps.” She motioned to the bench. “Take my seat, Enos.”

“I’m fine standing.”

Enos caught a glimpse of Esther’s legendary temper when she huffed out a breath and slammed her cup on the table. “Don’t be stubborn, Enos. Sit or you’ll get bunions.”

The movement was almost imperceptible, but Enos’s eyebrow rose a fraction of an inch.

Esther coughed self-consciously and lifted Junior from the bench. “Bunion. You’ll get a bunion.” Keeping her eyes down, she set Junior on the ground, took Winnie’s hand, and walked away.

It wasn’t until Esther was halfway to the house before Ada realized why Esther seemed so embarrassed. Enos only had one foot. Bunion . He wasn’t capable of getting more than one. For some reason, Esther’s mistake made Ada want to laugh, but she bit down hard on her tongue. Enos would probably think she was making fun of him.

Enos watched Esther walk into the house. “I’m not going to sit down.”

“Gute .” She could barely stand Enos Hoover at arm’s length.

“I want to apologize for my behavior the other day.”

Ada kept any surprise from her expression. Enos wanted to apologize? That was unexpected. Who knew someone so single-minded could have an emotion like regret?

“I didn’t mean to startle you,” he said. “I was taking some measurements, and I saw you climbing that sprinkler, and I was concerned for your safety. You fell because I caught you off guard. I take full responsibility.”

He was as stiff as ever, and he didn’t seem especially remorseful, but Ada dug deep and tried to give him a little grace. Just because he wasn’t inclined to show emotions didn’t mean he didn’t have any. “No harm done,” she murmured.

“I was cross that your fater hadn’t answered my letters, and then I was puzzled and irritated that you wouldn’t let me help you down. I feared you would hurt yourself.”

For a man who didn’t show emotions, he certainly knew how to describe them.

He folded his arms across his chest. “I may only have one foot, but I’m far from helpless, even if you think I am.”

Ada blew a puff of air from between her lips. “That is a simply ridiculous thing to say.”

A spark of genuine indignation flashed in his eyes. “What is so ridiculous about it? I get along very well with only one foot.”

Ada stood up so he wasn't looking down on her. "That's not what I meant. There is no way I could have known you were missing a foot when we first met. I don't care one bit about your foot. That's not why I wouldn't let you help me down. You created the problem and then you wanted me to congratulate you when you swooped in to fix it."

He drew his perfect eyebrows together. "I shouldn't have assumed you treated me that way because of my foot. In Pennsylvania, often it was the only thing people saw about me."

"Nobody in Colorado even knows." Ada leaned against the table behind her. "Ach , vell , I know. Esther knows, and Cathy knows, but no one cares. You're too tightly wrapped up in yourself to see that mostly no one thinks about you at all."

She hadn't meant to inflict pain, but that was exactly what she saw in his eyes—an intensely deep emotion she never would have expected from him. "That's the truth. No one thinks about me at all." The pain was gone almost before she could give it a name, and he pasted a pleasantly bland look on his face. "A man wrapped up in himself makes a small package."

In a different conversation, Ada might have used that proverb as ammunition against him, but he'd shown unexpected vulnerability, and Ada wasn't about to do anything to crush it. "That's right," she said. "And don't you forget it. You are not your foot."

The ghost of a smile played at his lips. "Very wise words." He glanced in his mamm's direction, then his gaze roamed around the Sensenigs' yard. "People are staring at us."

Ada didn't move, but she observed her neighbors out of the corner of her eye. Mattie Sensenig and Linda Kiem stood apart whispering into their hands and looking triumphantly at Ada and Enos as if a wedding was close at hand. Schwestern Edna

and Mayne Miller smiled smugly in Ada's direction. "Oh, sis yuscht . You're new, and I'm an old maedel . They're all hoping we're a couple. If only they knew nothing could be further from the truth. We hate each other's guts."

He seemed surprised and a little offended. "I don't hate you."

Ada cleared her throat. "Um, I suppose hate is against the commandments." Did she hate Enos Hoover? Nae , but she certainly didn't like him, and she refused to let him disarm her with a little honesty. "I'm going to the county recorder's office tomorrow. You'd be smart to leave the fence where it is until I get this mess sorted out."

His eyebrows loomed over his chocolate-brown eyes. "The mess is already sorted out. I start moving the fence tomorrow."

"If you know what's good for you, you won't touch a foot of that fence." Ada cringed. That sounded a little peevish, even to her.

"The fence is mine," he said. "It's one hundred percent on my property. I can do anything I want with it."

"You've got forty acres of your own. Why do you want to take more of ours?"

"Six acres is a lot of land, Ada, and I paid for it, fair and square."

Ada tried to tamp down the rising anger. She would not give Enos any excuse to accuse her of being too emotional. "Even if you get the land, we own the water rights, and without the water, the land is useless to you."

He narrowed his eyes. "The seller told me the two shares of water came with the six acres."

“He was lying to you, Enos. We own the water.”

He reacted as if she'd slapped him across the face. “I thought . . . but . . . I trusted him.”

The despair in his voice shut Ada right up. She didn't like Enos, but she wouldn't rub salt in his wounds. She was a better person than that. Maybe she had learned something from the sermons after all.

“Enos, get me out of this sun right now.”

Ada turned. Enos's mater hobbled up behind her, leaning heavily on her cane. Ada determined to be friendly and nonjudgmental. Enos's mater shouldn't be punished for Enos's bad behavior. “Hallo ,” Ada said, sticking out her hand. “You must be Enos's mater .”

The woman looked at Ada's hand as if Ada had offered her a slab of raw meat. “Shaking hands is quite familiar, don't you think?”

Because of Cathy's warning, Ada had been ready for anything, and Enos's mater did not disappoint her. Maybe she'd set out to give Ada a shock, but his mater didn't know that Ada, like Cathy, was pretty unruffle-able. “Not familiar at all,” Ada said, stretching a smile across her face. “I've never been snobby about such things.”

His mater closed one eye and glared at Ada with the other. “Jah , I'm sure. I don't see a speck of Amish dignity in this place.”

Amish dignity? Cathy was right. Enos's mater was a piece of work.

A slight flush of red crawled up Enos's neck. “Mamm, this is Ada Yoder. She is our neighbor to the west. Ada, this is my mater , Tabitha Hoover.”

Tabitha pounded her cane on the ground. “Why do you insist I meet all these new people, Enos? I won’t be staying here long enough to make friends.”

Enos’s gaze flicked in Ada’s direction. “It doesn’t hurt to get to know people.”

“I don’t want to get to know people. I miss my Pennsylvania friends. Every friend I’ll ever need is in Pennsylvania.” She raised her cane and pointed it at Ada. “This whole lot are vulgar and undisciplined. None of die kinner sat still in church, and their ministers are the most boring sermonizers I’ve ever heard. My ten-year-old grandson could do better than that.”

Ada was struck dumb. Tabitha was without a doubt the most abrasive person Ada had ever met. Enos Hoover was nothing compared to his mater. Ada had no idea what to say, even if she had been able to speak. It wouldn’t have done any gute to defend the gmayna . Tabitha was altogether too hateful and opinionated to be convinced otherwise.

Understandably embarrassed, Enos lowered his eyes and slid his arm around Tabitha’s shoulders. “Cum , Mamm. Let’s get you out of the sun and home to rest.”

“That shack isn’t my home. My home is in Pennsylvania, and I want to go back.” Tabitha looked at Ada. “Do you see what a stubborn, ungrateful son I have? He made me move to Colorado when everything I know and everyone I care about is in Pennsylvania. He hates me.” She held up five fingers in Ada’s face. “My two honorable sons are in Pennsylvania, and they’ve given me twelve grandchildren and one on the way. I could have been a big help to Ardy when the baby came, but nae , Enos dragged me out here. He said it would be an adventure, but the farms are run-down, there are sinful solar panels everywhere, and there’s hardly a tree in sight. I can’t live like this.”

Enos seemed to retreat into himself, even though he hadn’t moved a muscle. Ada felt

deeply sorry for him, and the six acres didn't feel nearly as important as this scene of family tragedy playing out before Ada's eyes. Enos cupped his hand around Tabitha's elbow. "Cum , Mamm, let's go."

Tabitha snatched her arm from Enos's grasp and glared at Ada. "What did you say her name was?"

"Ada, Mamm," Enos said.

"Well, Ada, you tell the fraaen in the district that they're not doing fellowship supper right. The old ladies should eat first. The bread was stale, the church spread was too runny, and whoever made the pickles used too much garlic. It was a disaster. Be sure to tell them." She tapped her cane to Enos's leg. "Drive me back to the house. I want to take a nap while you think on your sins. 'Honor your fater and your mater that your days may be long upon the land.'"

Without looking back, Enos led Tabitha away, and she was still complaining when they disappeared around the corner of the house.

A shard of glass lodged at the base of Ada's throat. Enos was stubborn and arrogant and as stiff as a flagpole, but he didn't deserve to be treated like that, especially not by his mater . Ada had nothing but fond, loving memories of her mater. Everyone should have such memories, even Enos Hoover.

From out of nowhere, Esther slid next to Ada. Beth and Sadie were close behind. "You're white as a sheet," Esther said.

Beth seemed unusually worried, as if she were the eldest schwester instead of the baby. "Are you okay?"

"Don't you think he's handsome?" Sadie said. "Kind of old, but also handsome."

Beth made a face. “Too old. He’s thirty-five. I heard him tell David Sensenig.”

Esther steered Ada back to the bench and sat next to her. Sadie and Beth sat across the table. “What did he say to you?” Esther said. “I’m sorry I ever thought he’d make a gute husband.”

Ada growled. “So you did want me to marry him.”

Esther pressed her lips together as if making sure nothing else incriminating would escape her mouth.

Beth studied Ada’s face. “Was he rude? Is he going to take our six acres?”

Ada swallowed past the sharpness in her throat. “It wasn’t him. It was her.”

Esther’s gaze turned in the direction Enos had taken Tabitha. “His mater ? Did she hurt your feelings?”

“ Ach , Esther, you know better than to think I could get my feelings hurt.”

Beth snorted. “That’s the truth. Ada doesn’t get offended by anything.”

“Then what?” Esther said.

“I never thought I’d say this in a million years, but I feel sorry for Enos Hoover.”

Sadie leaned closer and whispered, “Because he only has one foot?” She glanced at Beth who was giving her the stink eye. “What? Was I not supposed to say anything?”

“I told you not to tell.”

Esther's mouth curled into a reluctant smile. "It's not a secret."

Ada reached across the table and laid her hand over Beth's. "I was just thinking about Mamm and how kind and brave and steady she was."

Beth's eyes pooled with tears. "Like you."

Ada shook her head. "I'm not anything like Mamm. She was sweet."

"You're sweet," Beth said. "Think of all the children who adore you, think of all the people who depend on you to take care of them."

Ada was nothing like Mamm, but she didn't want to argue. "Mamm was sweet and kind. She could be firm when she needed to be, but we never doubted she loved us. Never."

Beth wiped her eyes. "Like I said, you're just like her."

Esther slid her arm around Ada's shoulder. "What did Enos's mamm say to you? You might not have been offended, but she made you very unhappy."

Ada's heart twisted into a tight knot. "I don't like Enos, but no one deserves to be treated the way his mater treats him."

Esther slumped her shoulders. "I saw as much. I was hoping she was just tired from her long trip. Cathy knew better."

"How did she treat him?" Sadie asked.

"As if she can barely stand him. She berated him and shamed him and called him a bad son, and he responded with nothing but respect and kindness. I was stunned.

Nobody should be treated that way.”

“Of course not,” Sadie said. “Not even your worst enemy.”

Was Enos Ada’s worst enemy? He had certainly thrown her well-ordered life into turmoil, but she couldn’t rejoice that his mother caused him so much suffering. She glanced at Esther. Tabitha had unknowingly insulted Esther’s father-in-law because he had given one of the sermons. Ada swallowed Tabitha’s disrespect. There was no use inflicting pain when Ada could absorb the hurtful words and make sure they didn’t hurt anyone else.

Beth laced her fingers together and propped her elbows on the table. “It’s really too bad about Enos’s mother, but did you talk to him about our six acres?”

Ada sighed. “He says he’s going to start moving the fence this week so the six acres will be on his side.”

Beth made a face. “I don’t know how he thinks he’s going to do that. The fence is too sturdy to be picked up and moved. He’d be smarter just to chop it down.”

Ada shot Beth a warning look. “Don’t tell him that.”

“What are you going to do?”

Ada pressed her hand to her forehead. “I don’t know.”

Beth’s eyes lit up, as if she’d just had a wonderful idea. “I want to help. Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.”

“There’s nothing you can do, Beth.”

Beth deflated slightly. “Don’t you want my help?”

Ada smiled reassuringly, even though she didn’t feel like it. “It’s not that. I don’t even know what I’m going to do.” Ada didn’t say what they both knew. Beth couldn’t even make her own bed in the mornings. She dragged her feet with every chore and turned up her nose at hard work. She thought she wanted to help, but she’d back away if Ada actually asked her to do something.

Sadie’s mouth formed into an O. “Beth says you have a rifle.”

Ada huffed out a breath. “I’m not going to shoot him, Sadie.”

Sadie scrunched her lips together. “You could scare him.”

It was a horrible idea, but Ada didn’t have anything else. “I scared off a coyote once.”

Beth nodded enthusiastically. “You were very brave, especially since the rifle didn’t have any bullets in it.”

“I’m froh the coyote didn’t know that.”

Beth squared her shoulders and pulled her cell phone out of her apron pocket. “I’m going to think of something.”

“Beth!” Ada hissed. “You know you’re not supposed to bring your cell phone to gmay .”

Beth didn’t look the least bit ashamed as she tapped on the screen. “I’m in rumschpringe . I can do what I want.”

“That’s not true.”

“I know. I’m teasing. I love seeing you get mad about it.”

Esther hooked her arm around Ada’s elbow. “Don’t do anything rash, like shoot Enos in his good foot.”

“I won’t. I’m not that desperate. Yet.”

“I’m froh you’re always so sensible.” Esther gave Ada a hug. “Don’t you think my fater- in-law gave an inspiring sermon this morning?”

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The sun was just peeking over the mountains as Ada tromped to the wooden fence that separated her property from Enos's. Her rifle was slung over her right shoulder, feeling heavier and heavier with each step. She'd stared at her rifle for ten minutes this morning before deciding to bring it, and now she was starting to think she'd made the wrong decision. It was heavy, and she had no intention whatsoever of using it. Did it make her look threatening? Or foolish?

She reached the edge of the fence where their property met the highway, because she figured that if Enos was going to dismantle it, he'd start at the end and work his way south. The property in dispute was a two-hundred-foot-wide swath that ran parallel to the fence and several hundred feet southward. Whoever had put up the fence had spent hours and hours and a great deal of money. Ada tapped her fist on the top of the first fence post. It was more than sturdy. Beth had been right when she said it would be incredibly hard to move. Lord willing, Enos wouldn't decide to take an ax to the whole thing and put up ugly metal and wire in its place. The farm already had enough chain link.

Ada propped her arms on the top rail and laced her fingers together. The Connor house had been vacant for five years. When Myra Connor passed away, her family fought over whether to sell the house, then they fought over who was responsible to clean up the property, then they fought over how to split the money. The house and property had deteriorated over the years, and Ada had always thought it was a shame that a nice family didn't buy the property and fix it up. Ach , vell , she should definitely be careful what she wished for.

Ada had a good view of the house from where she stood. It was on the west side of Enos's property and not two hundred feet from the fence. The siding had peeled to

the point that passersby wouldn't have been able to guess what color it used to be. But it looked as if Enos had already started making improvements. The door to the shed, which he was using as a barn, had been put back on its hinges, and a large, six-section solar panel sat in the front yard, ready to be attached to a pole that had been cemented into the ground. He was going to need help with that. Maybe Clay and Menno would be willing to give him a hand.

Ada crinkled her nose in disgust. Why was she thinking of helping Enos with anything? He was the intruder, and he wanted six acres of what was rightfully hers.

Ada eyed the sturdy old house. It had nice lines and good bones. She'd relish the chance to fix up a house like that. With enough love and hard work, it could be beautiful again.

"I told you it is a hesslich house, dirty and unlivable."

Ada caught her breath. Tabitha Hoover ambled toward her, strolling along the fence line with her cane. "Hallo, Tabitha. I didn't see you there."

Tabitha narrowed her eyes. "Ada Yoder, Enos says you won't give up the extra six acres he owns."

"It's all a misunderstanding. I'm sure we can work it out." She wasn't sure of any such thing, but Ada did not want to discuss the matter with Tabitha. She still had a bad taste in her mouth from yesterday's fellowship meal.

Tabitha smiled nastily. "He's up to his eyeballs in debt, you know. I warned him not to buy this worthless piece of property, but he wouldn't listen to me. It is always the way with him. He only honors his mater and fater when it suits him. He lost his foot when he was six because he disobeyed his fater and was horsing around the hay baler. I guess he learned his lesson. Gotte punishes those who pay no heed to their parents."

Ada drew back even farther. Tabitha blamed six-year-old Enos for an accident? She thought he deserved his injury because it was Gotte's punishment? Ada refused to believe that Gotte would ever chasten someone for a childish mistake. "I'm sorry you think so, Tabitha, but bad things happened to gute people all the time. Gotte makes his sun to shine on the righteous and the wicked. Gotte is love. He would never do a destructive, malicious, or unfair thing to any of His children. He is always and forever good."

Tabitha acted as if Ada's opinion was irritating, like a pebble in her shoe. "I never said He wasn't. I'm not talking about Gotte. I'm talking about Enos. He's stubborn and foolish, and he brought me here to this dry, desolate place against my will. I pray every day that Gotte smites him so he'll take me back to Bird-in-Hand."

Just in time, Ada remembered that Gotte loved Tabitha just as much as He loved Ada and Esther and even Enos. "You . . . you want Gotte to smite your son?"

Tabitha placed her hand on the top fence rail and smiled smugly. "Don't look so shocked. You want Gotte to smite my son too. He's trying to take your land."

When Tabitha put it into words, Ada realized she had been wishing bad on Enos. And that was wrong, no matter what happened with the farm. She would have to go home and repent right quick. "I don't want Gotte to smite anybody. I just want Enos to give up trying to take my land."

Tabitha nodded as if Ada had agreed with her. "I'm on your side. If this farm fails, Enos will move us back to Pennsylvania, and I'll get my old life back."

Ada's heart sank. Why had Tabitha said that? Ada didn't want Tabitha on her side. Tabitha didn't seem to be on the right side of anything. Now Ada was torn between fighting for her farm and giving up the six acres just to spite Enos's mater .

She'd never had such a dizzying conundrum.

"Mamm, are you all right?" Enos came jogging from the direction of the house with a shovel in one hand and a leather bag slung over his shoulder. He was breathing heavily when he reached his mater, and the concern in his eyes was deep and painful. He eyed Ada, and it surprised her to realize his concern was for her.

"Ada and I were just having a little talk," Tabitha said. "She wants you to go back to Pennsylvania where you belong. She thinks you're a bad son."

Enos looked at Ada as if he cared more about her opinion than what his mater thought of him.

Ada pried her tongue from the roof of her mouth. "I . . . I never said that."

Tabitha cackled. "But you were thinking it." With a disdainful look at Enos, she walked away, her cane dangling from her hand completely unused. Just how helpless was she really?

"Is everything okay?" Enos said breathlessly. "I hope she didn't say anything to hurt your feelings."

Ada felt like she needed to apologize to Enos for his own mater, but maybe that would embarrass him more than he already obviously was. "I don't let my feelings get hurt. Life is too short, and I have more important things to do."

He studied her face, then smiled weakly. "I wouldn't have expected anything less from you."

The way he looked at her sent a trickle of warmth down her spine. It was the most pleasant, unexpected sensation Ada had ever felt, and she wasn't in the mood. "It's

too bad your mamm doesn't like it here."

Enos grimaced. "She's just . . . she's not herself. It will take her some time to adjust to the elevation."

"It's probably none of my business, but the solution is easy, isn't it? Why don't you just take her back to Pennsylvania to live with one of your bruderen?"

He hooked his fingers around the back of his neck. "Ach, vell, that is the question I hear every day, and you're right. It is none of your business."

If Ada were inclined to be offended, his bluntness would have irritated her. But she appreciated his honesty, even if his lack of tact was a little irksome. "She . . . uh . . . she says she's on my side."

"I suppose you think that surprises me."

Ada had to laugh at the tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "Not at all." She pointed to his shovel. "Looks like you're ready to tear down my fence."

He motioned to her rifle. "Looks like you're ready to stop me."

"I wanted you to feel threatened. Is it working?"

"Nae. You're a very difficult woman, but I don't think you'd stoop to shooting me. I bet there aren't even any bullets in that gun."

Oh, sis yuscht. He was smarter than she gave him credit for. She stretched her lips across her teeth. "You don't know for sure, do you?" She leaned her elbows on the rail. "I came out here to stop you by any means necessary, but I can see you're not going to make any progress. It'll take you all day to dig up the first fence post. It's set in

cement. The fence job alone will take you all spring and summer. If you want to farm your land, you'll have to abandon your plan to move the fence."

He scrubbed his hand down the side of his face, acting resigned but not defeated. "I was hoping for some help from the gmayna , but it seems all the families are loyal to the Yoders. Everyone was very nice, but none of them want to come within a mile of this fence and our nasty feud."

Ada tilted her head to one side. "Hmm, very nasty."

He propped his shovel against the fence post. "Is Clay Markham related to you?"

"He's my bruder -in-law. Mary's husband."

"A former Englischer?"

"Jah ," Ada said. "His accent is quite bad."

"He's a big man. He was the first one I asked to help me with the fence. He could probably pick up the whole fence and move it by himself."

"Probably."

Enos swiped his hand across his mouth as if wiping away a smile. "He cautioned me to give up on the land. He said you are the strongest, most determined woman he knows and that you will have me curled up in a corner whimpering like a buplie in less than a week."

"Clay is now my favorite bruder -in-law."

"I told him I'd welcome the challenge," Enos said. Ada didn't know why, but her

heart beat a little faster. Enos palmed his forehead. “Menno Eicher is also related to you too, isn’t he?”

She nodded. “My other bruder -in-law.”

“He said you’d kill him if he helped move the fence, and he has two children and one on the way. He doesn’t want to get shot with that fancy rifle.”

“He’s wonderful smart.” Ada slid her rifle off her shoulder and propped it against the fence as a show of goodwill. “You have plenty of work to do on your own forty acres. Why do you want to take six of mine? The outside of the house by itself is a year’s long project.”

Enos turned and looked at the house. “It has gute bones, doesn’t it? I’m going to paint it and put on a green aluminum roof. It will be very nice, a place Mamm can be proud of.”

“I don’t wonder but you’ll take gute care of the property. You seem persnickety about such things.”

His eyebrow twitched. “Do I?”

“Persnickety in a gute way.”

A smile played at his lips. “You seem persnickety in a gute way too. I mean, the pleats on your church apron were ironed to perfection yesterday.”

Ada gave him an arch look as a warning to not tease her. “Beth hates it. Sometimes I make her do her bed all over again, and I can’t trust her to clean a toilet. I won’t live in unsanitary conditions.”

He nodded. "I bless my mamm for teaching me how to clean a toilet."

Ada kept her mouth shut about Enos's mamm. Ada couldn't see a reason to bless Tabitha for anything. "What color are you going to paint the house?"

"White, although I almost changed my mind when I saw the exciting house colors in Monte Vista."

Ada laughed so hard she snorted. "Did you see the pink house on the highway? Or the brown one with lime-green trim?"

"A little too fancy for my taste." Enos paused, then pressed his hand against the fence post as if seeing how hard it would be to push over. "I hate to disappoint you, but your bruderen -in-law can't discourage me. I'm even more persistent than you are, and if I get desperate, a box of matches will solve my problem in no time."

Ada felt her eyebrows crash into each other. "You can't burn down my fence. Cathy says it's quaint, and I think it's beautiful. Much prettier than chain link."

"It is pretty."

Ada folded her arms and propped her elbows on the fence rail. "Besides, Byler is dry as a bone. You'll start the whole county on fire if you try to burn down this fence. They'd throw you in jail and make you pay a fine."

"I guess a fire would be unwise." He leaned his arms on the fence rail, and there were barely five inches between their arms. Why did he have to be so annoying? "What I am supposed to do, Ada?"

She was momentarily distracted when she heard her name from his lips. It sounded almost like a caress, even though she was sure he hadn't meant it that way. A slug in

the arm was more his intention. “You can leave it where it is and give up trying to steal six of my acres.”

He surprised her when he smiled. “You’d like that. And so would my mamm .”

A small, very loud white car pulled off to the side of the road and backfired when the driver turned off the engine. A skinny young man in a suit and tie unfolded himself from the driver’s seat and loped toward them, smiling widely and holding an official-looking clipboard.

“Hello,” he called. “I’m looking for Enos Hoover.”

Enos stiffened like a bowl of Jell-O on a cold day. “That’s me.”

The man shook Ada’s hand, then reached over the fence and shook Enos’s hand. “Hello, Mr. Hoover. My name is Tyson Carruthers, and I am Miss Yoder’s representation.”

It took every shred of discipline Ada had to keep any expression from her face. She had never seen this person in her entire life.

Enos slowly turned his head and looked at Ada, a suspicious glint in his eye. She could tell he didn’t believe it, but as long as Ada kept a straight face, he couldn’t be sure. “Miss Yoder’s representation? Like an attorney? Sounds expensive.”

Tyson Carruthers pulled a pen from his suit coat. “I understand you are disputing Miss Yoder’s claim to the fence line.”

Ada pressed her lips together. Enos looked dizzy, like someone had hit him in the head with his own shovel. She felt a little dizzy herself.

Tyson Carruthers thumbed through the papers attached to his clipboard. “I regret to inform you that Miss Yoder is completely within her rights to dispute your claim to the property. Have you ever heard of boundary by acquiescence?”

“No.”

Tyson grimaced sympathetically. “Don’t feel bad. Most people don’t know about it. If two neighbors put up a fence between their property and no one claims the property beyond the fence for more than twenty years, the court considers the property owners to have acquiesced.”

Ada had no idea what Tyson had just said. He sounded like a walking dictionary. But he’d come here on her behalf, so it must be gute news. “Could you explain that more clearly to Enos?” And to her, though it was plain that she had to pretend to know what her lawyer was talking about.

Tyson nodded. “Of course. If a fence has been up for more than twenty years, it becomes the new and legal property line, no matter what the deed says.”

“Oh,” said Ada. Well, then. That was the solution to all her problems. It didn’t matter what Enos’s deed said. The property was hers.

So why didn’t she feel as happy as she thought she would? What was wrong with her? This was what she had wanted since last week when Enos had told her about his claim to six acres.

The answer was standing across the fence from her. Enos’s expression didn’t change one bit, but his knuckles whitened around the fence rail, and he drew in a deep breath as if he wasn’t expecting to breathe again ever. Ada wanted the land and she wanted the sturdy fence, but she didn’t want Enos to give up on his farm, and she didn’t want his mater to rejoice at her son’s failure. More than anything, she didn’t want Enos to

lose if it meant Tabitha would win.

Ada swallowed past the lump in her throat. Enos was strong and determined and thirty-five years old. Maybe he wasn't hurt by Tabitha's harsh words and critical judgments. Maybe Ada was assuming he had feelings he didn't really have. Maybe she felt bad enough for both of them. He certainly hadn't backed down when she'd insulted and chastised him. Maybe his thick skin went all the way to his heart.

Even so, she felt compelled to help him feel better. "You still have forty acres, Enos. That's a lot of alfalfa." She instinctively reached out to him, but pulled her hand away before she went too far. She wasn't usually so sympathetic. She told Beth to "buck up" all the time, and she never had trouble feeling justified when someone got their just desserts. "You still have forty acres."

He pinned Tyson Carruthers with an intense gaze. "What did you say this law about the fence was called?"

"It's boundary by acquiescence."

Enos took a small notepad from his pocket along with a stubby pencil. "Will you spell that please?"

Tyson had to think about it. "B-O-U-N-D-A-R-Y-B-Y-A-C-Q-U-I-E-S-C-E-N-C-E."

"Thank you very much." Smiling like he had a secret, Enos shook Tyson's hand. "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Carruthers. Where may I call you if I have questions?" He held his pencil at the ready.

Tyson's gaze flicked between Ada and Enos as if he had something to hide. "Uh, I guess you can call my cell phone."

He gave Enos the number, and Enos wrote it down. “Okay,” Enos said. “You can go now, Mr. Tyson.”

Tyson’s smile stuttered. “It’s Carruthers. With two Rs.”

Enos nodded. “I’ll call you if I need you.”

Tyson clomped back to his car, and it took him five tries to get it to start. Enos and Ada watched until he turned onto the highway and disappeared into the distance.

“That kid is not an attorney,” Enos said.

Ada was immediately on the defensive, though she didn’t know why. Tyson Carruthers was a perfect stranger. “You’re not as clever as you think you are.”

“But I’m more clever than you think I am.”

Ada couldn’t keep from laughing. Tyson had knocked her for a loop, like a buggy doing donuts in an icy parking lot, and Enos was not easily fooled. “To be honest, I’ve never seen that boy before in my life.”

“Don’t you think I guessed as much? You looked so surprised, I thought your eyes were going to pop out of your head.”

Ada’s mouth fell open in mock indignation. “I thought I did a fine job not showing any emotion.”

He looked at her as if trying to see through her skull to the back of her head. “I saw how the tiny lines around your eyes bunched up and your lips thinned. You can’t hide something that big from me.”

Ada looked away from the deep fathoms of his eyes. “To be fair, he said he was my representation. He didn’t utter the word attorney. And just because he’s not an attorney doesn’t mean he’s wrong about the boundary by acquittal thing.”

Enos glanced at his notepad. “Acquiescence. It is a very big word, and I intend to find out what the law really says.”

“So you don’t believe him?”

Enos sighed. “I think he’s sincere, and I think one of your friends put him up to this, but you can’t get rid of me that easily, Miss Yoder.”

When he said “miss,” he hissed like a snake and pumped his eyebrows up and down.

Ada laughed so hard, anyone might have thought she was on Enos’s side.

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A da pulled three bundles of goat cheese from the fridge and handed them to Joanna. “Denki for coming. I can’t keep up with the house and the farm and the goat cheese by myself, and Le Chez needs their order by two today.”

Joanna took one of the cheesecloth bundles and set it on one of three sushi mats they used to roll the cheese into logs. “You know, you could ask Beth to help you. She’s not half bad with the rolling.”

Ada scoffed. “I’m lucky if I can get Beth to milk the goats every morning, and she hates to get her hands dirty. I’d much rather do it myself than ask Beth.”

“Beth has grown up a lot since Menno and I got married. She might surprise you.”

Ada placed the second cheese bundle on another sushi mat. “Ach , vell , she would definitely surprise me if she did anything without being asked or without complaining.”

Joanna started rolling her cheese into a log and glanced at Ada. “You’re too hard on her, I think.”

“If anything, I’m not hard enough. If I had succeeded in making her feel guilty, she’d have changed by now, but she’s as lazy as ever.”

Joanna scolded Ada with her eyes. “If it’s not working, why do you keep doing it?”

Ada threw up her hands. “I’m open to ideas. I feel more like Beth’s mater than her schwester .”

“Mamm wouldn’t have given up on her.”

Ada frowned to herself. Joanna didn’t understand. Ada did her best. Beth wouldn’t or couldn’t step up and help Ada more. “I know I have my faults—impatience being one of them—but I think I do a gute job of running this house, especially since you and Mary have left me.” She held up her hand before Joanna could apologize or defend herself. “I wouldn’t want it any other way. All I care about is my family, and you and Mary are wonderfully happy. No need to apologize for that. But I’m always froh when you drop by to help with some of the cooking. I love seeing you and the girls.” Ada glanced out the window where Joanna’s two dochters , Rosie and Lily, frolicked around the backyard with Pepper and the goats. Every child, no matter how old, deserved affection and unconditional love. “I’ll try to be more patient with Beth.”

“You just have to make your mind up to do it. You’ve never failed at anything you’ve tried.”

Ada grunted her disagreement. “At least I’m not Enos Hoover’s mater . Beth could have it a lot worse.”

Joanna giggled. “That’s setting the bar quite low. From what you’ve told me, few people have it worse than Enos Hoover.”

“I’ve never seen anyone quite like Tabitha.”

Joanna shook her head and clicked her tongue. “It explains why Enos is the way he is.”

“Does it?”

“If your mamm did nothing but insist you were a failure, what would you do?”

Ada cut her cheese log in half. “I’d either moan and mope and hate myself, or I’d be more determined than ever to prove I could succeed.”

“That’s exactly what Enos is doing, I expect. Trying to prove his mamm wrong. It makes me wonderful sad.”

“It makes me irritated,” Ada said. “I don’t want to feel sorry for him. I want to crush him.”

Joanna gave her a wry smile.

Ada huffed out a breath. “You know what I mean. There’s no satisfaction in defeating someone who’s so wounded to begin with.”

Joanna’s eyes danced with amusement. “There shouldn’t be satisfaction in defeating anyone at all.”

Ada pounded her log of cheese with her fist and made a dent in it. “There should be, if he deserves it and he’s completely wrong and he’s arrogant enough to think he’s smarter than every woman in the gmayna .”

Joanna sprinkled Ada’s special herb mixture on her finished log of cheese. “Enos doesn’t sound like a wounded animal to me.”

“So you’re saying I shouldn’t feel guilty about crushing his dreams?”

“You should feel very guilty, but Enos doesn’t sound like the kind of man who will let you get away with anything. Maybe you’ll be the one to get crushed.”

“Well, that would be very rude of him.”

Joanna grinned and looked at Ada with a searching eye. “It sounds like a very interesting quarrel you two have going. I’m eager to see how it turns out.” She wrapped her finished cheese in the special paper and set it in the fridge. “Have you figured out who that Tyson guy is yet?”

“ Nae , but I suspect it was Cathy who sent him. She’s on the city council, so she probably knows all those weird laws. I bet she asked Tyson to come over and give Enos a property law lesson.”

Someone knocked loudly on the door, then let themselves into the house. “Yoo-hoo, is anybody home?”

“In here.”

Cathy Larsen wandered into the kitchen with her giant yellow purse and her electric blue sunglasses. “I’ve come to transport your cheese to Le Chez. I know I’m early, but I also wanted to get in some good gossip time before I left. I don’t repeat gossip, so you’d better listen close the first time.”

Joanna laughed. “I like your attitude, Cathy.”

Cathy pulled out a chair and sat at the table. “I have to repent for gossiping every Sunday before I go to church so the good Lord won’t smite me while I’m sitting in the pew. But I think He understands. If it weren’t for us old wives, there would be no tales, no recipes passed down from generation to generation, no home remedies for croup, and no glue to hold the community together. In my own small way, I’m doing the public a service. But please don’t thank me.”

Ada dusted her goat cheese roll with vegetable ash and smoothed it with her small spatula. “What gossip have you heard lately, Cathy?”

Cathy leaned forward. “What are you putting on that cheese? It looks like ashes from the fireplace.”

Ada smiled. “It’s called vegetable ash, and it gives a beautiful contrast to the white cheese. It’s perfectly safe to eat, and it doesn’t really taste like anything.”

Cathy looked impressed, in her grumpy sort of way. “Where are the girls? I have a present for them.”

Joanna squinted out the window. “They’re playing with Pepper and the goats, but I don’t want them to know you’re here until I finish the cheese, or they’ll be underfoot.”

“And how is the bun in the oven?”

Joanna laughed. “That’s an odd expression.”

Cathy searched around in her purse. “It’s something we old people say because we’re too prim to say pregnant.”

“I feel nauseous all the time, but at least I can function. Mary is in bed all day.”

“That’s too bad. My pregnancies were like that. I couldn’t look at food without throwing up, and I craved toilet paper.”

“Toilet paper?”

“Yeah, it was weird, I know. After I ate a whole roll, Lon put his foot down and made me go to the doctor. The doctor put me on some vitamins, and that cleared up the problem.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Joanna said.

Cathy pulled a protein bar from her purse and proceeded to try to tear open the wrapper. “I learned something new today, and I thought I knew pretty much everything. I met Tabitha Hoover at the Bent and Dent this morning, and she is a piece of work.”

“Was she by herself?” Ada asked.

Cathy kept working on her protein bar wrapper. “Oh, for goodness’ sake, no. She keeps Enos at her beck and call. She called him a bad son, ungrateful, and irresponsible all in the matter of one minute. If I had been Enos, I would have left her at the store and made her walk home. I don’t know how he stands her.”

Joanna grabbed a pair of scissors from the drawer and cut open Cathy’s protein bar. “She’s his mater . He has to honor her. It’s one of the commandments.”

“There’s a difference between honoring your mother and being a doormat.”

Ada didn’t know why, but she felt compelled to defend Enos. “He isn’t a doormat. I think he’s trying to be kind and long-suffering.”

Cathy leaned back in her chair and folded her arms. “Suffering is the right word.”

Joanna shrugged. “Jesus said to turn the other cheek.”

Cathy grunted. “I know, but what if you run out of cheeks? I’ve always wondered about that. My pastor can’t give me anything like a satisfactory answer. Enos might be trying to be a good son, but he’s stuck with a difficult mother. At some point he’s going to have to cut her loose.” Cathy shot Ada a stern look. “I warned you. There’s still time to change your quilt blocks.”

“I am in no danger of marrying Enos,” Ada said.

The front door slammed, and Beth and Sadie burst into the kitchen. “ Ach , Ada, we’ve got some terrible news,” Sadie said.

Sadie tended to be dramatic. Ada wasn’t going to panic just yet. “What is it?”

Beth curled her fingers around Ada’s upper arms. “Enos Hoover has hired Arthur Tripp and his cultivator.”

Ada drew her brows together. “I assumed he was going to plant alfalfa.”

Beth nodded as if alfalfa was a dread disease. “He’s planning to plant mostly alfalfa . . .”

Sadie jumped in. “But he wants to plant six acres of potatoes.”

Ada’s heart dropped like a stone in the lake. “On my six acres?”

Sadie pulled the bonnet off her head. “ Jah . That’s what Arthur Tripp told me, and he’s starting first thing tomorrow morning.”

Beth paced around in a circle. “I don’t know what he thinks he’s doing. Tyson said he put a stop to the whole thing.”

Ada looked at Beth as if she’d grown an extra ear. “ You sent Tyson Carruthers?”

Beth clapped her hand over her mouth and burst into laughter. “Oops. I wasn’t going to tell.”

Sadie joined in the laughter. “Beth, you are the worst at keeping secrets.”

Ada stopped Beth with a sharp look. “Beth, please explain.”

“Well.” Beth couldn’t contain the giggles. “Tyson’s dad is an attorney, so on Sunday night I called and asked him to help me. He looked it up on Google and said the six acres belongs to us. So I asked him to come over yesterday morning and talk to Enos.”

Ada ground her teeth together. “You should never ask someone to lie for you.”

Beth frowned. “Did he say he was a lawyer? Because he wasn’t going to do that. He wants to be a lawyer, but he’s still just taking classes at the community college.”

Ada pursed her lips. “I guess he didn’t call himself my attorney. He said he was my representation. Enos didn’t believe him.”

“Yes, yes, that was the word. He said it’s illegal to impersonate an attorney.”

Ada rolled her eyes. “I’m glad he won’t get arrested.” She frowned at Beth. “Why are you hanging around an English boy? No good will come of it.”

Beth swatted away Ada’s concern. “He has a girlfriend and asthma. I’m not interested in a boy with asthma.”

Cathy stared at Beth indignantly. “What’s wrong with asthma? Plenty of very nice people have asthma.”

Beth didn’t respond to Cathy. She pulled a chair out from under the table and sat down. “Why is Enos planting potatoes if the land isn’t his? Tyson was so sure.”

“Enos is clever. Maybe he’s figured out a way around the law. And maybe he’s planning to chop down my fence after all.”

Cathy's face puckered like a dried apple. "I've been here ten minutes, and you've called him long-suffering, clever, and kind. If you don't stop saying nice things about Enos, I'm going to have to insist you choose a new quilt block. I can't stand to think that insufferable woman might be your mother-in-law."

Ada ignored Cathy. She would not marry Enos in a million years. He was too . . . he didn't have any . . . he wouldn't . . . Ach , she simply wasn't going to marry him. "Even if he plants potatoes, he won't be able to water them. I'm not selling him my water rights."

Cathy finished off her protein bar. "I'm letting Enos rent two of my water shares this season."

Ada almost came out of her skin. "You're what?"

Cathy peered at Ada and clutched her purse a little tighter. "No need to get huffy. I feel sorry for him. He's only got one foot and a difficult mother. He's a stranger in a strange land, like Moses, though I'm pretty sure Moses had two feet and a nice mother. Enos's life has been a hard row to hoe, and I want to help him out. Besides that, I've made it my mission in life to spite his mother, and this will make her very mad."

"Did you stop to consider that it makes me very mad?"

"Sorry, I can only care about ticking off one person at a time, and right now, it's Tabitha Hoover."

Well, wasn't that just the most aggravating thing! "Don't you see I'll have to reconfigure my entire pivot irrigation system?"

Cathy shook her head as if it should be obvious. "Of course you won't. Enos can't

afford to put up a new fence. He's going to leave the old one where it is. It gives him a nice dividing line between his alfalfa and potatoes. You don't have to double-water Enos's crops, but you also don't have to move the sprinkler system."

Ada stabbed her knife into the third bundle of cheese. "What am I going to do now?"

Cathy shrugged. "I'm sorry, Ada, but that's not my problem."

Beth was more helpful. "We could plant something there before Enos does."

"It's a gute idea," Ada said, and Beth look pleased. "But Dat has rented a tractor for next week. I don't know if we could get them to come early."

Beth scrunched her lips. "It's probably Arthur Tripp driving it."

Cathy fished in her purse again and pulled out a small blue tube. "The solution is super glue."

Ada propped her hand on her hip, very out of sorts with Cathy and not eager to listen to anything she had to say. "Super glue?"

"It's what all the environmentalists are doing nowadays. They glue themselves to the road or a tennis match or a tree. The police have to come in and scrape off the glue so they can clear the road. You could glue yourself to the fence in protest."

Ada shook her head. "What's to keep Arthur Tripp from just going around me?"

Cathy furrowed her brow. "True. And then you'd be stuck until the police came or the glue wore off your hands. I've always thought the best way to treat the gluers is to leave them stuck to whatever they've glued themselves to. They'd regret it when they had to go to the bathroom."

“I could ask Tyson to talk to Enos again,” Beth said.

Sadie sighed. “It didn’t work the first time. I don’t think it’s going to work the second time. But he’s very cute.”

Cathy blew air from between her lips. “Enos doesn’t care if Tyson is cute.”

Ada caught her breath as an idea came to her. “I could set up a tent in the middle of the six acres so there’s no room for Arthur Tripp to drive around me.”

“That’s a wunderbarr idea,” Beth said, clapping as if she thought Ada was brilliant.

“Clay and Mary have an eight-man tent. It’s big enough to get in Arthur’s way.”

Cathy narrowed her eyes. “Who is this Arthur person? Would he feel guilty about running you over? He might get out of his tractor and drag you away by your hair. They do that with the environmentalists.”

Ada fingered the hair at the base of her neck. That would hurt. “I don’t know, but I think it’s worth trying. I could give it three or four days until Arthur and Enos both gave up.” She’d have to reconfigure the pivot irrigation system so it didn’t run over her tent, but surely Dat, Clay, and Menno could take care of that in a few hours.

Beth leaned forward, her eyes alight with panic and concern. “But, Ada, you’d have to camp.”

Ada’s stomach dropped to her toes. “I know.” She hated to camp. Camping was uncomfortable and dirty, and she liked being within ten feet of a bathroom, a bathroom with a flushable toilet. She refused to relieve herself in the great outdoors. She swallowed hard. Did she want her six acres back or not? Did she have the courage to see this through, or would she give up when things hadn’t even started to

get hard?

Beth's concern was deep. "How long do you think you'd have to camp?"

"Only a few days," Ada murmured. That was more wishful thinking than reality. "Or, I guess until Enos gives up."

"Ha," Cathy said, making everyone in the room jump. "You think Enos is going to give up? You'll be camping out there for months."

Ada was feeling less and less charitable toward Cathy. "If you hadn't given him your water shares, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Cathy brushed an imaginary piece of lint from her shoulder. "He's borrowing them, and I feel sorry for him."

Ada looked at the calendar on the wall. "I don't have to outlast him forever. His planting window will be gone in a week or so."

Sadie shook her head. "Nope. Sorry. We plant summer potatoes in March, but you can also plant winter potatoes through May."

Ada contemplated camping until May and just about lost her resolve. "Who invented winter potatoes? And why do they hate me?"

Beth hooked her arm around Sadie's shoulders. "Don't you worry, Ada. I can make the cheese and milk the goats and clean the toilets while you're gone. I'll take care of everything."

Ada couldn't even trust Beth to feed the dog every day. There had to be another way. Surely, surely Enos didn't know about winter potatoes, and surely Arthur Tripp was

booked solid for weeks helping Amish farmers get their crops in. “Maybe I’ll only have to camp for one night, and then Arthur won’t be available anymore.” Again, wishful thinking, but it was the only plan she had. “I doubt he can afford to pay Arthur Tripp to come back again and again.”

Cathy zipped her purse and stood up. “Look on the bright side, I always say.” Cathy never said that.

Joanna placed a hand on Ada’s shoulder, a look of amused concern in her eyes. “You’re going to be camping for quite some time, you know.”

Ada finished the last cheese log and placed all three in the small cooler Cathy used to transport their cheese. It was everything Ada could do not to glare at Cathy as she handed her the cooler. Cathy was kind enough to take their cheese to the fancy restaurant every week, and she didn’t ask for any payment in return. But it seemed disloyal for Cathy to help Enos, especially since Cathy rarely felt sorry for anybody and never felt sorry for Ada.

Ada squared her shoulders. She didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for her, and she was pretty sure Enos didn’t want anyone feeling sorry for him. So Ada wouldn’t.

She would fight for what was hers, and not feel sorry for either of them.

Enos wouldn’t want it any other way.

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A da didn't know how sneaky Enos would be, but she had to be sneakier. Four a.m. was much earlier than even she got up in the mornings, but it had to be done.

Her bruder -in-law Clay was not entirely happy about getting up that early to help her set up his tent, but Clay was a nice person, and he would have done anything for one of Mary's schwesteren . Ada had always liked him. Ach , vell , she hadn't always liked him because he'd driven his car into their barn, and Mary had been all too fascinated with him. But Clay had grown on everybody, and now he was one of the most loved people in the family, even though his Deitsch accent was atrocious.

About halfway through tent setup, Clay had looked at Mary and scratched his head. "Don't you think this is going a little too far for a measly six acres?"

Ada wasn't about to let him talk her out of anything. "It's the principle of the thing. Besides, what would you know? You're a peacemaker. Nobody likes a peacemaker in a fight."

Clay had flashed that brilliant smile of his. "'Blessed are the peacemakers.'"

"And blessed are those who don't quote scripture to a very angry woman, because they might get smacked."

Clay's tent was a spacious eight-man shelter with two rooms, five windows, and a flap on the roof so you could look at the stars at night. Ada didn't need that much room, but Arthur Tripp would have a harder time moving past a large tent.

Ada had brought her sleeping bag, a change of clothes, three sandwiches, several

mini bags of Fritos, and some chocolate chip cookies for her stay in the tent. If she ran out of supplies, she could sneak to the house and be back before Enos had a chance to take down her tent. Or burn it, as the case may be.

She had also carted over a load of firewood, a bag of marshmallows, and a box of matches. Ada had fond memories of roasting marshmallows as a child, and she could always start a campfire if she got bored.

Beth had assured her that she wouldn't get bored because Beth had supplied her with some appropriate romance books to read. Ada had never read a romance book, appropriate or not, but Beth had assured her that she would love them, even though Ada thought such things were frivolous and a waste of time. Sure she wasn't going to like Beth's books, Ada had also brought the Farmer's Friend seed catalog, Storey's Guide to Raising Goats , and seven old issues of The Budget newspaper she hadn't thrown out yet. The newspaper served two purposes. She could read it and then use it to start a fire.

After Clay had helped her set up the tent, Ada had spread out her sleeping bag, eaten a bag of Fritos for breakfast, and taken a short nap waiting for the sun to come up. She startled awake when she heard the soft hum of a tractor coming down the road. Was it Arthur Tripp? Was it light enough for him to see her tent before he ran over it?

Just to be safe, Ada jumped out of her sleeping bag and crawled out of the tent. If Arthur didn't see the tent, at least she wouldn't die when he plowed it under. Of course he might plow it under even if he saw it. Arthur wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed, and he had a little bit of a temper. Another good reason to be outside when he started with his cultivator.

The sun was just coming over the mountains when the tractor turned onto Ada's property about twenty feet west of the wooden fence. Ada couldn't see who was driving the tractor, but for sure and certain it was Arthur Tripp. He drove a green

John Deere with yellow wheel hubs and a bright yellow stuffed dog tied to his rearview mirror. Ada's heart started racing, and it annoyed her to no end. She wanted to be brave, not nervous.

Clay had set up the tent about thirty feet back from the road. Arthur could pull his tractor onto the property, but he couldn't get very far with the wide cultivator. Ada stepped around to the front of the tent and squinted into Arthur's headlights. Even though she knew it was coming, Ada jumped when Arthur honked his horn. She'd have to be less skittish. Arthur and Enos would sense her fear.

She folded her arms, squared her shoulders, and tried to make herself look testy and resolute. Arthur honked his horn again, three times. Ada just stood there, hoping against hope she was an intimidating presence standing in the field. More likely, Arthur saw her as a nuisance, but that wasn't a bad thing. Mosquitoes were a nuisance, but they could do a lot of damage.

Arthur obviously realized she wasn't going to move. He killed the engine and jumped down from the cab of the tractor. "Hey, lady, you've got to move out of the way. I've been hired to cultivate this field." He stopped a few feet from her. His eyes got big and round. "Ada?"

With some satisfaction, Ada saw a hint of hesitation in his eyes. Ada might be a skinny, averagely tall woman, but she had a bit of a reputation for being tough and putting people in their place. "This is my field, Arthur, and I have not given you permission to plow it."

Arthur's frown etched deep lines into his face. "Enos Hoover said you might say that, but he's got the legal deed that says it's his. You got no claim to it, and he'll pay me an extra hundred dollars if I finish it by noon."

How could Enos afford to pay Arthur extra for anything? "Enos is the one who's

wrong, and I won't let you plow this field today or ever."

Arthur took off his baseball hat and slapped it against his thigh. "I'm not going to argue with you. I got a job to do, and I want to get to it. I'm saving up for a new PlayStation."

"I'm not moving, Arthur. You can just turn around and go right back to where you came from. PlayStation is a waste of a promising youth."

Arthur must have seen his extra hundred dollars evaporating before his eyes. He stomped his foot and flung his hat to the dirt. "Move yourself and that tent right now or I'll run you over," he yelled.

Ada flinched but stood tall. She wasn't about to back down just because she met with a little resistance from Arthur. She hadn't expected this to be easy. Of course Arthur was going to yell and carry on. She just hadn't counted on her heart beating seventy miles an hour or her mouth drying out like the Great Sand Dunes National Park. Standing her ground took more resolve than she thought. "Go to town and get a library card. It's much more useful than a PlayStation."

She could see the heat travel up Arthur's neck. He stepped forward and got right up in her face, yelling as if he were fifty yards away. "I ain't never hit a woman before, but I'm tempted to teach you a lesson right here and now."

Ada's heart stopped. Arthur had a bad temper, but he was young, immature, and harmless, wasn't he? She'd told Joanna she was fighting for her land for the principle of the thing. Was she willing to take a punch on principle?

"Arthur, step back!"

Ada had never been so happy to see Enos in her life, which wasn't very hard because

she had never been happy to see him before. He came running from his side of the property and leaped the fence with a two-handed push off the top rail. He winced when he came down on the other side, but he didn't slow down until he got to Ada. His eyebrows loomed over his face like two dark storm clouds. "Arthur, what do you think you're doing? Back away."

Arthur took two steps back and pointed at Ada, his face drenched with indignation. "She won't get out of the way. What was I supposed to do?"

"You were supposed to keep your head and keep your voice down. There's no call ever to yell at a woman."

Arthur seemed to get more angry instead of less. "She won't get out of the way. Are you gonna make her move?"

Enos placed a firm hand on Arthur's shoulder. "It's okay, Arthur. I'll take care of this." He stuffed his hand into his pocket and pulled out some cash. "Here is the money I promised to pay you. You can go home, and I'll contact you later."

Arthur counted out the money in his hand, glanced at Ada, and walked back to his tractor. "Good luck, Enos. You're gonna need it."

Enos waved as Arthur started up his tractor and backed onto the road. Ada took her first real breath since Arthur had arrived. What would Arthur have done if Enos hadn't arrived when he did? Would he have pulled her off the property by her hair? She was froh he hadn't. She loved her hair. When she unpinned it, it went almost to her waist.

Enos gazed down the road, as if he hadn't noticed Ada standing right next to him. "That was dumm ," he said.

“I thought it was wonderful smart.” Ada’s knees suddenly felt like jelly, and she plopped ungracefully to the ground on her hinnerdale . Enos sucked in a breath and tried to catch her. He didn’t stop her descent but managed to grab her hand as she went down. His touch sent electricity all the way up her arm. She snatched her hand away.

Enos’s eyes flashed with irritation. “He could have hurt you.”

“Arthur? Ach , he’s harmless, like a big dog that barks at you but wouldn’t dare attack.”

“Even the friendliest dogs will bite if they’re provoked. Arthur really wanted that hundred dollars.” He folded his arms across his broad chest and peered at Ada’s tent. “I underestimated your stubbornness.”

“I underestimated your need to be right.”

“You probably mean my need to farm the land I paid for. All of the land.” He held out a shaky hand, and she reluctantly took it and let him help her up.

Why was he trembling? Had she scared him?

Ada brushed the dirt off her dress. “It doesn’t matter what the deed says, Enos. You heard my . . . Tyson Carruthers. The fence is the boundary by acquittal, and you have no right to the land on this side of it.”

“It’s acquiescence, and Tyson didn’t do enough research.”

“It seemed like a lot of research to me.”

“As soon as Tyson left, I went to the library in Monte Vista, and the nice lady at the

front desk helped me look it up. The courts are divided as to when to recognize boundary by acquiescence.”

Ada grimaced. Enos sounded smarter than a lawyer. He certainly sounded smarter than Tyson Carruthers. “That’s just ridiculous.” And aggravating.

Enos pulled the familiar notepad from his pocket and thumbed through it. “I copied it down for just such a time as this. ‘ Neighbors Sarah Johnson and Marva Tonks went to court for a property dispute over a fence. A surveyor found that the Johnsons’ fence did in fact encroach on the Tonks’ property.’ ” He looked up. “Like your fence is encroaching on my property.”

Ada ground her teeth together and tried to act as if she didn’t care. “Such a big word.”

He didn’t even take a breath. “‘ The evidence at trial was utterly devoid of any proof that any predecessor-in-interest to the Johnsons ever acquiesced in the fence as representing the true property line between the two properties versus being a barrier. ’ ”

“I have no idea what that means.”

“Neither do I, but the nice lady at the library said there is no proof that either property owner meant for the fence to represent the true property line. So my deed is the final word on who owns what.” He slid the notepad back into his pocket. “But it really was a nice try on your part.”

Ada caught her bottom lip between her teeth. She hated that Enos refused to surrender. But she wouldn’t surrender either, even if Enos had all the big words on his side. “Beth asked him to come.”

Enos wrapped his fingers around one of the tent poles. “Don’t you think it’s time to gracefully admit defeat?”

“You first” was all Ada could think to say.

His lips curled upward. “I like the tent. It shows commitment.”

“I’m not moving it. Our family had farmed this acreage for almost two decades. It doesn’t belong to you, Enos.”

“I have a deed that says it does.” He wiggled the tent pole back and forth. “It’s solid, but it won’t take but five minutes to pull it down.”

“Not if I’m inside it.”

His eyebrows traveled up his forehead, almost as if he was impressed with her determination. “You know I’ll just have Arthur come back as soon as you get tired of camping.”

“The planting season doesn’t last much longer. You’ll lose your window before I give up.”

He shrugged. “I can plant winter potatoes.”

Oh, sis yuscht . Enos knew about winter potatoes.

He walked around the tent as if inspecting it. “Are you sure you want to camp here for three whole months?” he said, unmistakable amusement in his voice. He thought she was bluffing.

Ada wanted to growl in frustration. She was bluffing. She couldn’t, just couldn’t live

in a tent for three months. She'd be lucky to last a week. She needed her comfortable bed and running water, and Beth would either burn down the house, cause a flood, or neglect the toilets. Toxic mold would probably kill them all in their sleep.

Ada squared her shoulders and decided justice was worth risking toxic mold. "I'll do it if I have to. It would be so much easier if you gracefully admitted defeat."

"You first," he said, his eyes dancing. That wasn't quite the reaction she expected. He seemed too confident in his victory. He turned and walked toward his house. "The water is coming down the ditch in four days. I hope you have a waterproof sleeping bag."

Ach , du lieva ! Enos Hoover was the most aggravating, horrible man in the whole world.

Maybe Gotte would take pity on her and smite Enos with a nasty rash.

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A car rolled down the road and disturbed Ada's fitful dream in which Enos stood outside the tent and splashed cold water in her face. She groaned, rolled over, and tried desperately to go back to sleep. It should have been easy considering how little she'd slept last night. She burrowed into her sleeping bag and held perfectly still, trying to imagine what it would feel like to have warm feet. She couldn't remember ever having warm feet.

She gasped when something small and creepy crawled across her face. Squealing, she slapped her own cheek and jumped out of her sleeping bag so fast, she turned it inside-out. Tripping over her own feet, she fell to the ground with a very unattractive thud, and pain rippled up her arm and into her shoulder. Ach , it had only taken one night in the tent to remind her how much she hated camping. She hated the dirt and the bugs and the lack of toilets. She hated the spooky sounds in the middle of the night and the wind that howled like a lonesome child.

Enos thought he was going to outlast her, and there was no reason to think he wouldn't. He slept in a nice warm house in a bed with sheets and pillows, and his bathroom was just sitting there anytime he wanted to use it. He didn't have to get up in the middle of the night and hike to Ada's house to use the toilet. His feet didn't feel like ice cubes, even wearing a thick pair of socks. Ach , vell , Enos only had one foot, so Ada stopped feeling sorry for herself and said a prayer of thanks that she had two.

Yesterday, after Ada had stopped Arthur from plowing the field, Enos had left her and gone to do other work on his own farm. She had eaten one of her chicken salad sandwiches and sneaked home to use the bathroom. Then she'd spent the rest of the day reading and spying on Enos.

He certainly was a hard worker. He had painted two sides of his house, mucked out the old shed that he used as a barn, fed and watered his horse, sharpened his tools, and prepared the fields where he was going to plant alfalfa.

At dinnertime, Beth had brought Ada some stew and a thick slice of bread. Ada had baked the bread before she'd set up camp, but Beth had made the stew all by herself. It was runny and the beef was tough, but she had been so proud of it, Ada hadn't had the heart to tell her what to do differently next time. Beth had also brought Ada a flashlight, which Ada used to finish one of the books that Beth had given her. Aggravatingly enough, Ada hadn't been able to put it down. It had cowboys and stagecoaches and thieves and even a shootout where the hero saved Liza, the woman he loved, and they lived happily ever after. Ada would never in a million years tell Beth or Cathy or anyone else that she had enjoyed a romance book.

Last night had been rough. Ada hadn't slept more than an hour at a stretch, and her sleep hadn't been very deep. Her commitment to her principles was wearing thin after just one night. She'd have to come up with another plan. Three more days and her tent would be flooded with irrigation water anyway.

She heard the soft thud of horse hooves in the dirt and something scraping against the hard dirt. What was happening out there? Was Enos up to no good? If he was, she couldn't be lollygagging in her tent. She'd hate it if her camping sacrifice went to waste.

Ada quickly fashioned her hair into a bun at the back of her head and put on a bandanna. She stepped into her flip-flops and unzipped her tent door. She had slept in her dress because she didn't want to get caught dressing and undressing in the great outdoors. There was only so much she was willing to do.

She paused to tidy her sleeping bag, turning it right side out, zipping it up, and pushing out the air pockets before rolling it neatly into a cylinder. She tied a perfect

bow with the string and propped her sleeping bag against the wall of the tent. Then she took her small shop broom and swept the floor. She might be camping in a field, but there was no reason to be messy.

When she'd finished cleaning, she stepped out of the tent and zipped it closed. It was still quite dark outside, but the eastern sky was tinged light pink. About thirty feet down the fence line past her tent, Enos was guiding a team of using horses behind a tine harrow. What? Where had he gotten the horses? Was he going to ready the soil and plant potatoes the hard way? With only one foot? Unlike the tractor and cultivator, the tine harrow was plenty narrow to get past her tent without plowing her under, but it was sure a whole lot more work. Here in Colorado where the ground was rocky and the water was scarce, the bishop approved gas-powered machinery for preparing, planting, and harvesting the crops. Some of the Amish still farmed with horses, but most rented equipment every year. It made farming so much easier.

Ada growled under her breath. No one made her blood boil like Enos Hoover did.

She jogged after the horses, tripping over dirt clods and collecting goat's heads in the soft rubber of her flip-flops. "Enos Hoover, what do you think you are doing?"

Enos pulled back on the reins and turned as if he'd been expecting her. "I've got to get this field plowed and planted before my water turn, and I can't use a tractor because there's a tent in the way."

"Don't you care that you are going to die of exhaustion before you get all the potatoes in the ground?"

A smile played at his lips. What was so funny? "Don't you care that you are going to get eaten by a coyote or trampled by a herd of cattle?"

"I won't get trampled. Cattle do not roam the pastures at night looking for victims."

“But there are coyotes out there. Cathy told me one of them attacked your niece last year.”

Ada frowned. That was a very bad memory. “Clay says the tent is coyote-proof.”

Enos arched an eyebrow. “We’d all feel wonderful bad if he is wrong about that. And I’d rather not find your mangled body on my property tomorrow morning.”

“You wouldn’t find it on your property. You’d find it on my property.”

“That makes me feel a whole lot better.” He took a deep breath. “Look, Ada. Camping is hard. It’s uncomfortable. It’s dirty and dangerous.”

“Dangerous?”

“You might be bitten by a tick and get Lyme disease. And we’ve already discussed the coyotes. I would feel terrible if you got hurt or sick or attacked.”

He was being sincere, and Ada wasn’t quite sure what to do about it. A warm, mushy spot grew right in the middle of her chest, while at the same time, her heart thumped against her rib cage like a bass drum. He was so concerned, she certainly didn’t want to argue with him, and she’d rather do just about anything than stay in that tent for one more night.

Then again, what would happen to the principle of the thing if she gave up after just one night? Then again, Enos had found a way to plant his potatoes anyway, even though the back-breaking work was going to kill him. Then again, Ada’s stubborn determination might still convince Enos to surrender.

“I’m going to plant this field whether you’re camping here or not, so you might as well go home and sleep in a warm bed. You don’t want those dark circles under your

eyes to get any bluer.”

Ada pressed her finger to the skin underneath her eye. “I do not have dark circles.”

“You do. It doesn’t make you any less pretty, but it’s a sign of poor sleep and failing health.”

Had he just told her she was pretty? She shoved that comment to the back of her brain. This was no time to get distracted. “I’m thirty-two years old, Enos. I am not in failing health.”

“You will be if you persist in sleeping in a tent much longer.”

She turned her face to the sunrise, drinking in the pinks and purples and oranges that painted a picture of light behind the mountains. “If you promise not to move my tent while I go home and shower, I will make you a strong cup of kaffee and a pancake.”

“Ada, didn’t you hear a word I just said?”

“Do you promise?”

He looked at her as if his patience was hanging by a thread. “I won’t move your tent right now, but you shouldn’t sleep here tonight.”

She was already halfway across the field. “I need time to think.”

She heard his growl of frustration even from a hundred feet away.

Pepper and the goats greeted Ada as she opened the gate that separated the backyard from Dat’s newly tilled fields. Smiley jumped up and down as if she were on a pogo stick, and Pepper barked and wagged his tail, begging to be played with. Ada gave

Pepper some love, then patted each of the goats on the head. For sure and certain Beth hadn't milked them yet. Ada would have to do it before she went back to the tent.

The smell of burned toast met her nose as she came through the back door. Dat sat at the table reading the newspaper with a piece of charred bread sitting on a plate in front of him. Beth was standing at the counter with her back to Ada, her hair covered with a blue bandanna, Ada's favorite apron around her waist.

Beth turned and bloomed into a smile, clapping her hands as if Ada only came to visit on holidays. There was a brown smudge on her cheek and a series of tiny red specks on her forehead. "Ada, have you come home for gute ? You didn't last very long."

"Nae , I'm going back."

Dat nodded. "I knew Enos Hoover couldn't break you that easily."

Enos could never break Ada, but camping might. "I just need to shower. And I can milk the goats before I leave."

"Ach , I already milked them." Beth's face turned a light shade of pink. "I spilled the whole bucket of milk on my way into the house, but I know what I did wrong and won't be so clumsy again." She motioned toward the table. "Sit down. I'm making eggs, if you want some. Would you like me to make you a piece of toast? I burned Dat's a little, but I know what I did wrong. I won't leave it on the skillet so long this time."

Oh, dear. How much longer before the house burned down?

Dat winked at Beth and picked up his blackened piece of toast. "Just the way I like it."

“ Nae , Beth, denki .” Ada pointed to Beth’s forehead. The red spots didn’t look exactly like a rash, but Ada couldn’t be sure. “What happened?”

Beth grabbed the edge of her apron and dabbed at her forehead. “ Ach , the bottle of ketchup spit on me when I opened it. I wiped up the counter but forgot to do my face. Lord willing, the towel won’t stain.”

Lord willing, there would still be a house to come back to when Ada moved out of her tent. Perhaps that should be today.

Beth studied Ada’s face and seemed to lose some of her enthusiasm. “I really don’t think the towel will stain, and the ketchup came off the walls just fine.”

“Of course it won’t stain,” Dat said. “That’s what bleach is for.”

What did Dat know about bleach? He’d never done a batch of laundry in his life. Was Ada the only one who cared about the farm and the house and the family? She was even willing to camp out in the field to save her farm. Nobody else in the room would do that.

Ada bit down on her tongue and tried for a smile. Enos had called her pretty, and she’d rather not get premature frown lines. “The towel will be fine. Next time, open it more carefully.”

“ Ach , I will. I know what I did wrong, and I won’t do it again.” Beth opened the fridge. “Look what I made.” She pulled out a blob of something wrapped in Ada’s special cheese paper. Beaming, she handed it to Ada. “Open it.”

Ada carefully peeled back the paper, revealing a lumpy, mushy log of cheese dusted with a reddish powder. “Oh, look at that,” she said, trying harder than she’d ever tried to put some enthusiasm in her voice.

Beth clapped her hands. “I know. I crushed some of our freeze-dried raspberries and rolled the cheese in it. It doesn’t look as smooth and neat as your cheese logs, but it tastes appetitlich . I’m going to ask Cathy to take it to Le Chez today.”

Freeze-dried raspberries? What was Beth thinking?

That was the problem. Beth didn’t think. She certainly had no business making goat cheese. If Cathy took that ugly log of cheese to Le Chez, the restaurant would never buy goat cheese from her again. “Beth, I know you want to help.”

“I really do.”

Ada took a deep breath. “But please don’t make any cheese unless I’m here to supervise.”

Beth’s smile sputtered and then went out, like a candle in the rain. “You don’t care if Joanna makes cheese by herself.”

“Joanna has more experience.”

“How can I get experience if you don’t let me do it? I have some gute ideas. Joanna wouldn’t have thought of raspberry dust on the cheese.”

Nae , she wouldn’t have. “I know I’m camping for a few days, but I just need to be here when you make cheese. I know what they want at Le Chez, and it’s not raspberry dust. Please don’t let Cathy take that cheese to them. We’ll just eat that batch on toast or something.”

It was as if she’d sucked all the light out of Beth’s life. “I’m useless around here. I’m not gute at anything, and you don’t trust me.”

“I . . . I trust you, Beth,” Ada said, hoping she didn’t sound insincere. She couldn’t think of one thing around the house or farm she trusted Beth to do. She glanced at Dat. He’d lifted the newspaper in front of his face. He was staying out of it.

Beth folded her arms and peered at Ada resentfully. “Really? Name one thing.”

Oh, sis yuscht . “Well.” Ada wanted to kick herself. Surely Beth sensed the hesitation in her voice. “You’re gute at milking the goats.”

Beth’s lower lips trembled. “I can’t be as perfect as you are, Ada.”

“I’m not perfect.”

“I don’t know why I even try. You don’t approve of anything I do because you can do everything better. I’m completely worthless in this family.”

Dat lowered his paper. “That’s not true, Beth. We would never have any fun if it weren’t for you. Isn’t that right, Ada?”

“That’s right. You’re a lot of fun, Beth.” Everything sounded hollow coming out of her mouth. She should probably just stop talking so she wouldn’t have to lie. “I need to go take a shower and go back or Enos might take down my tent.” He’d promised not to, but Ada needed an excuse to get out of here.

Beth nodded, her gaze to the floor, her hands clasped in front of her.

It was all Ada could do to keep from reminding Beth not to sell that cheese to Le Chez, but she couldn’t bear to see that wounded look in Beth’s eyes again. Surely Beth understood.

Ada ran upstairs, showered, and put on a clean dress. She quickly swirled the toilet

wand in the toilet bowl before going down to the kitchen. Beth and Dat were at the table eating eggs. Beth was picking at hers, and Dat was shoveling in hardy bites, probably to get them over with. Without a word, Ada filled their old percolator with water. She grabbed mugs and kaffee , supplies to make pancakes, and two paper plates and put them all in her sturdy canvas bag. She'd have to bring everything back and wash it once she was through, but there was nothing else she could do. Camping was so inconvenient.

“See you soon,” she called as she walked out the back door.

“Be safe,” Dat said.

Beth didn't respond.

When Ada approached her tent with her breakfast supplies, her heart sank. Tabitha was standing in the field yelling at Enos. They were too far away for Ada to understand much of what Tabitha said, but Ada could hear words like Pennsylvania and honor your mother and love and you're an embarrassment . Enos held onto the reins and patted his lead horse's neck, all the while replying to his mater with soft, calming tones that Ada couldn't understand and seemed to have no effect on Tabitha.

Ada just couldn't stomach the abuse. She set her bag on the ground next to the tent and marched toward Tabitha and Enos, practicing her friendly face as she got closer. “Tabitha, Enos, I'm making pancakes and kaffee over a fire this morning. Would you care to join me?”

Tabitha turned her glare on Ada. “You're my only hope, Ada. Dig up his seeds. Burn down his shed. Sow weeds over the ground. I don't care what you do as long as you convince my stubborn, ungrateful son to leave Colorado. There is nothing for me here.” She turned on her heels and hobbled away, stabbing her cane into the freshly tilled earth with every step.

Once again, Enos seemed more embarrassed and concerned for Ada than he did for himself. “I’m sorry about that. She’s just . . . It’s going to take some time for her to adjust.”

Ada had a feeling that Tabitha wouldn’t adjust even if she had a hundred years. She tamped down her churning emotions because Enos didn’t need her pity, her disgust, or her outrage. “She’s right about one thing. You are stubborn.”

His shoulders seemed to relax. “As if you don’t have the same character flaw.”

She scoffed. “It’s not a character flaw. It’s my best quality.”

“You can try to talk yourself into that if it makes you feel better.”

She pointed to the tent. “Do you want to give the horses a break and join me for a cup of kaffee and some chocolate chip pancakes?”

“Chocolate chip pancakes? That sounds more like a dessert than a healthy breakfast.”

Ada nodded. “It is.”

“Are you trying to soften me up so I won’t plow your field?”

“So, you admit it’s my field.”

His eyebrow twitched upward. “ Ach , nae . It’s definitely my field.”

“Okay then,” Ada said. “I’m trying to fatten you up so you won’t be able to plow my field.”

“You’d have to feed me a lot of pancakes.”

“I know. Fattening you up is going to be impossible. You’ll work yourself to skin and bone no matter what I feed you.”

He turned his face away and ran his hand down the horse’s neck. “Do I detect a bit of concern in your voice?”

He’d heard that? Ada gave him her best, sourest look. “Only concern for myself. I don’t want to have to drag your dead body off my field one day.”

“It’s more likely I’ll have to drag your dead body off my field one day. I don’t wonder but camping will kill you.”

“I’m tougher than that.”

“ Ach , you’re plenty strong. You’re the strongest woman I’ve ever met. But you’re also organized, tidy, and very responsible. You like strict schedules and sanitary conditions. Camping doesn’t suit you.”

Ada wasn’t fooled. It was Enos who was trying to soften her up now. The strongest woman he’d ever met ? Ha! “You must be getting desperate to stoop to flattery.”

“I don’t believe in flattery.”

She didn’t feel so tough when he looked at her like that. She felt like a bowl of warm chocolate syrup. And she had to put a stop to it. “So, do you want chocolate chip pancakes or not?”

“Give me a minute to unhitch the horses and take them to water.”

Ada didn’t know why, but she was more than pleased. She practically floated back to the tent and built a fire a few feet away. She mixed the pancake batter using some

water from the percolator, then she heated the skillet and the percolator over the fire. Pancakes from scratch were better than a mix, but in the great outdoors she had to be practical. She sprinkled some chocolate chips into the pancake batter then poured four batter circles onto the skillet. Steam rose from the pancakes and filled her nose with the earthy smell of cracked wheat and buttermilk.

Ada reached into her bag for some paper plates and a spatula, froh that it was large enough to hold everything she needed to make breakfast. She'd brought half the kitchen with her. She turned the pancakes, then measured kaffee grounds into the percolator.

Enos came tromping toward Ada, two camping chairs slung over his shoulder. Sometimes his limp was noticeable, sometimes she could barely see it. His stride was powerful and steady, as if no obstacle could stop him once he set his mind in the direction he wanted to go. Ada couldn't look away, which was a bad thing because she needed to pay better attention to her pancakes. She cleared her throat, remembered to breathe, and slid her four pancakes off the skillet and onto the paper plate, then poured more batter on the skillet.

"I've never seen such perfectly round pancakes," Enos said, setting the two camp chairs on the ground.

"I can also make alphabet pancakes in the shape of the first letter of your name." She pointed to the camp chairs. "That was very thoughtful of you."

Enos slid the first camp chair out of its bag and set it up. "Ach , vell , if we sit on the ground, we'll pack down the soil I just pulled up. I'd rather not make more work for myself."

Ada wouldn't let him get away with that. "Why don't you want anyone to know what a kind, considerate person you are?"

He concentrated very hard on setting up the other camp chair. “Because I’m not.”

“That’s just silly, Enos Hoover. You came running like a madman when I nearly fell off my irrigation system. You paid Arthur Tripp even though he didn’t do a thing, and you stopped him from yelling at me when I’m sure you wanted to yell at me yourself.”

Enos swiped his hand across his mouth, but he couldn’t hide the faint smile on his lips. “I didn’t want him to wake the neighbors.”

She handed him a mug and poured him some kaffee . “And you’re concerned about my health.”

He cracked a genuine smile. “I don’t want to have to drag your dead body off my property. It’s not the same thing.”

“I see how you treat your mater , even when she calls you terrible names. It seems you don’t have a vindictive or unkind bone in your body.”

His face hardened like cement. “She’s just having a hard time with the altitude.”

Ada couldn’t fault him for wanting to defend his mater , but she also couldn’t stand seeing how cruel Tabitha was to her son. “You’ve told me it’s none of my business, but I hate that she treats you that way. She calls you ungrateful, but she’s the ungrateful one. You give her a place to live and take care of her. If it were me, I’d take her back to Pennsylvania so you can have some peace.”

He gazed into the distance, taking a slow sip of kaffee . Had she made him angry? Ach , vell , Ada wasn’t one to shy away from a hard conversation. He needed to hear what he wouldn’t admit. “You feel the same way,” he said softly. “Mamm expresses it more loudly, but don’t you hate me too?”

“Does your mater hate you?”

“Jah ,” he said.

Ada had never heard so much pain in a single word. “I don’t hate you.”

He pressed his lips into a rigid line. “But you want me to pack up and go back to Pennsylvania.”

Ada found it almost impossible to breathe. “I don’t want you to go.”

He studied her face as if trying to decide if she was telling the truth. “I . . . I don’t want to go either.”

The words hung in the air like the sweet scent of cherry blossoms.

Enos propped his elbows on his knees. Ada’s heart did a somersault at his closeness. “I’m sorry if my mater ’s behavior hurts you.”

“It hurts me because it hurts you.”

That seemed to surprise him. “Ach , vell , don’t be concerned on my account. Her words don’t hurt me anymore. They used to hurt, but I’ve grown numb to them. Like losing my foot. I don’t even notice it’s gone anymore, except when the weather turns humid. I’m sorry that her behavior makes other people uncomfortable.”

“It does. Can’t she see it?”

“My mater has never been able to see it. All she knows is that she’s unhappy and that her life is not the way she wants it to be, so she yells and carries on and ignores how she hurts other people. She’s mad about being here. She’s mad that I came out here

this morning to plow the field. She thinks the more improvements I make on the farm, the less likely it is I'll take her back to Pennsylvania. She doesn't understand that I'm never going back. And she can't go back either."

"Why?"

Enos settled in his chair, a little less tense and a little less guarded. "Ach , so many reasons."

"And you're going to tell me it's none of my business."

"Well, you made me a delicious cup of kaffee and chocolate chip pancakes. I guess I owe you an explanation."

"You don't owe me anything, and you haven't tasted the pancakes yet." She handed him a plate and set two pancakes on it, then passed him a fork and the syrup. "And I've burned the next four." Growling, she picked up the spatula and flipped the hard, dark brown discs into the fire. "These are your fault. You distracted me."

"I don't know how I distracted you. I'm just sitting here."

Ada wasn't about to tell him that his mere presence made her heart sing five tunes at the same time. She poured more batter onto the skillet, this time forming the pancakes into an A and an E . "This always makes die kinner happy."

His usually solemn expression gave way to a boyish grin. "This is a sure sign you don't hate me. If you hated me, you wouldn't go to all this trouble to write an E in pancake batter."

Ada laughed so hard she snorted. "It's not all that much trouble, and I'm trying to butter you up so you'll spill all your secrets."

“I don’t have all that many secrets, and I certainly don’t have any interesting ones. You’ve gone to all this trouble for nothing.” He poured syrup on his pancakes and took a bite. “This is very gute , but I got a little dirt with my first bite. That happens when you’re camping.”

“Don’t bother trying to talk me out of camping. I already know how much I hate it.” She took a bite of her pancake. It was delicious. She hated to admit it, but there was something extra tasty about food cooked over a campfire. She pulled the E and the A off the skillet and set the E on Enos’s plate. It was a perfect golden brown. “I can think of one interesting secret you have. How did you lose your foot?”

“That’s more gory than interesting. My two bruderen and I were baling hay with my dat , and my leg somehow got caught in the pickup cylinder. It crushed every bone in my foot. There was nothing they could do but cut it off.”

“ Ach . That’s terrible.”

“I was six years old.” He grew unbearably serious. “My mamm says it was a punishment from Gotte for disobedience.”

“Surely you know that’s not true. You were practically a baby.”

He scrubbed his hand down the side of his face, and his frown went all the way to his toes. “I wasn’t the one who disobeyed my dat . My oldest bruder , Zeb, has a mean streak, and he shoved me toward the hay baler as a joke. He didn’t mean for me to get hurt, but he meant to scare me.”

Ada’s heart ached picturing Enos as a little boy in such excruciating pain. “It must have felt like a betrayal.”

“I suppose, but I was young. I probably couldn’t have put it into those words.”

“I’m sorry.”

Enos took a deep breath. “When Mamm was in labor with me, there were complications, and they had to do emergency surgery to save her life. She was never able to have more children, and she just became more and more bitter. She took her resentment out on me, I guess because once I lost my foot, she thought I was defective and not worthy of her love. I am the reason she couldn’t try again for more babies. Zeb is her favorite. She believes he can do no wrong, always has. Zeb felt smothered, and I sometimes wonder if he married Lilith so young just so he could get out of the house. Mamm liked John too, though she didn’t dote on him the way she did Zeb. Dat tried his best to soften Mamm’s bitterness toward me. He took me to physical therapy and paid for a prosthetic foot. He stood up for me whenever Mamm was mean, but he was always very kind, no matter if Mamm yelled at me or him. He gave me an example of how to treat someone who doesn’t treat you well in return.”

Ada blinked back hot tears. No matter how sad Enos’s story was, she would not cry. He wouldn’t appreciate her pity. “How can you stand it, Enos? It would be impossible for me to love someone who treated me so badly. I would have left her in Pennsylvania and said good riddance. And that probably makes me a horrible person.”

His lips curled upward. “We all should be so horrible.” He picked up his E and took a bite. “Who knows what you would do in my shoes? But Jesus was able to love everyone, even his enemies, even the men who crucified him. He would want me to try to love my mater as He loves her. ‘But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.’”

Ada shook her head in bewilderment. “I can see why you’ve got that one memorized.”

“I recite it to myself while I plow. And paint. And water the horses.”

She widened her eyes in mock amazement. “You’d probably be taken right straight to heaven if you weren’t trying to steal my six acres. Why didn’t you leave her in Pennsylvania with Zeb or John? It’s the only thing she wants.”

“Well, that’s the tricky part. Zeb and John won’t have her.”

“They . . . won’t have her?”

“Zeb got the farm when Dat died. It’s almost a hundred acres. John built a house right next to Zeb, and they farm the land together.” Enos threw his plate into the fire and stood up as if he couldn’t contain his agitation. “The plain truth of it is, they and their sons can work the land without me, and they don’t want me included because I would spread the profits too thin.”

Ada couldn’t wrap her head around such selfishness. “That’s terrible!”

He nodded in resignation. “It is terrible, but it’s just the way things are. I can kick against the pricks, or I can try to make the best of it.”

“I would kick against the pricks.”

“Jah . I know you would. It’s one of my favorite things about you.”

She grunted. “I bet it is.”

“When Dat died, I could see how my bruderen were going to squeeze me out of the farm, so I started looking for land in the west. It’s cheap, and I wanted to make a fresh start somewhere out from under the shadow of my bruderen and my mater . Zeb is the oldest. I thought he should be the one take care of Mamm. That was one of the

reasons Dat left him the farm.”

“Jah,” Ada said. “He’s the birthright son.”

Enos looked impressed. “That’s right. The birthright son gets more so he can take care of his family after the fater dies. But Zeb wouldn’t have it. One night, he and Lilith and John and Ardy sat me down and told me that when I left Pennsylvania, I would be taking Mamm with me. Lilith can’t abide my mater’s temper, and when my mater walks into John’s house, Ardy gets so anxious she can’t breathe. Lilith told Zeb that she would leave him if he let Mamm stay. She threatened to take die kinner and go live with her parents in Mount Hope, and she meant every word. She hates my mater that much.”

“Ach, du lieva. I’m ashamed to admit it, but I can understand why she feels that way, but still, it’s very harsh.”

Cathy Larsen had known. No girl in her right mind would want that woman for a mother-in-law. She’s a piece of work.

Enos stuffed his hands into his pockets. “Maybe Ardy would have given in if John had put his foot down, but he and Zeb were fed up with my mater’s temper and her meddling and the destructive way she talks to their children. They were sure she would ruin their happiness, and they were probably right.”

Ada was very indignant on Enos’s behalf. “But they were perfectly content to let her ruin your happiness.”

He nodded slowly. “They’ve never cared about my feelings.”

“Yet you still did what they wanted.”

“Mamm has two friends in Bird-in-Hand, but they couldn’t or wouldn’t let her live with them. Doing the gute deed fell to me.”

“Enos, a gute deed is helping an old lady load her groceries into her buggy. What you’re doing is not a gute deed. It is a life-changing, life-giving gift to your mater , even though she can’t begin to appreciate it.”

He held up his hand. “Please don’t say anything to her.”

That was exactly what Ada wanted to do. Tabitha needed to know what her least favorite son had done for her because her favorite son would not. “I . . . I won’t say anything. Of course I won’t.”

“It would crush her to know that Zeb and John don’t want her. She would never recover from the blow.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I left that to Zeb and John. I refused to make excuses for them. They told her there was no room, no place for her to stay, that Ardy’s health wasn’t good, and Lilith’s mater was going to move in with them eventually. They told her that I couldn’t manage on my own and that if she wanted people to think she was a gute mater , she would come with me and help me get settled in my new place. She didn’t want to budge, but when Zeb bought her a bus ticket and a new suitcase, she realized he was serious. They truly did want to spare her feelings, but unfortunately, they made the move sound temporary, and she wants to go back immediately. I think maybe deep down she knows why she’s here with me instead of in Pennsylvania, and she doesn’t want to face it. So she uses me as the scapegoat and feels justified in abusing me and calling me names.”

“ Ach , it must be a wretched way to live, always thinking the worst of the people

who love you most, always looking for reasons to be miserable instead of trying to be happy.”

Enos clasped his hands behind his back. “That’s why I don’t send her back or scold her for yelling at me. She makes herself more miserable than anyone else ever could. It wouldn’t matter if I moved her back to Pennsylvania tomorrow. She would still be utterly miserable. She’d just have a different set of people to blame. I rather let her blame me than let my bruderen and their wives hurt her. She thinks Zeb can do no wrong. I’d like her to keep on believing that. Her love for him is the only thing that makes her happy. The only thing that gives her hope. She has been a hard, uncompassionate mater , but she gave me life and I still owe her everything for that. I want her last years to be happy, with fond memories, not tainted by the fact that my bruderen hate her. That knowledge would break her.”

Enos was a gute , decent man, and his gute heart put Ada to shame. But why was sparing Tabitha’s feelings more important than Enos’s happiness? Ada couldn’t believe Gotte would require such a sacrifice. “I’m sorry, Enos. Gotte said, ‘For I know the plansI have for you. Plans to prosperyou and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future . ’”

“I’m impressed you have that memorized.”

“I stitched it on a pillow once. It means Gotte thinks you deserve better.”

He squatted next to the fire and set another log on the pile. “Do I? I am nothing, Ada. I have no worldly possessions, no one who cares about me, no reason to expect anything better. Why do I deserve more than Gotte has allotted to me?”

“Because.” Ada let the words fall out of her mouth, not even trying to pull them back.

“I care about you.”

His eyes filled with profound confusion and disbelief. “Why?”

His look was too intense, and her feelings were too muddled. Why had she said such a foolish, sentimental thing? She cleared her throat. “I . . . care because who would I argue with if you weren’t around to test my patience? How could I practice forgiveness without having someone I needed to forgive every day? How could I hone my camping skills if your stubborn claim to my land didn’t force me to camp?”

He casually warmed his hands by the fire, but she could tell he was as uncomfortable as she was. She had made things very awkward between them. There was only one thing to do. She stood up, ducked into the tent, and grabbed one of the cardboard boxes. When she came back out, she shoved a roasting stick into his hand. “Who else would roast marshmallows with me at eight o’clock in the morning?”

“I don’t want to roast marshmallows.”

“That’s too bad, because the only gute reason to camp is the roasted marshmallows. You wouldn’t want to disappoint me, would you?”

He stopped looking at her as if she had some dread disease. That was progress. “Do you have graham crackers and chocolate?”

“ Nae . The only way to eat a roasted marshmallow is right off the stick when it’s golden brown. You can’t taint it with chocolate and graham crackers.”

His mouth tilted into a smile. “I like banana boats.”

“Banana boats? Never heard of them.”

“You’ve never heard of banana boats? No wonder you hate to camp. You cut a long V out of a banana, load it with mini marshmallows and chocolate chips, wrap it in

tinfoil, and heat it over the coals. It is the best thing I've ever tasted."

Ada wasn't convinced. "You think these banana boats will make me like camping?"

"I wouldn't go that far."

Ada slid a marshmallow onto his stick, then one onto hers. Enos shoved his marshmallow into the flame, and it caught fire immediately. "What are you doing! That is no way to treat a marshmallow."

Enos lifted his stick and blew out the marshmallow fire. "This is the way I like them." He gingerly slid the black marshmallow off his stick and popped it into his mouth. "Dericious ," he said, his mouth full of ash.

Ada shook her head in disgust. " Nae , nae . You're doing it wrong." She squatted near the fire and nudged her marshmallow near the glowing coals. "Let me keep you from making a horrible mistake." Ada slowly turned her stick, so the marshmallow was evenly golden brown on all sides. She lifted the stick toward Enos. "Now, gently pull the roasted part of the marshmallow off the squishy insides."

"Like taking the skin off a sausage."

"Nothing like that."

Enos did as he was told, stuffing Ada's masterpiece into his mouth and flashing her a tentative smile.

Ada nodded, giving him encouragement for correctly following directions. "Now I'll roast the next layer." She bent down and roasted the tender insides of the marshmallow. "This way, you get the roasted flavor all the way down to the center. It's the only way to eat a marshmallow."

Once the second layer of the marshmallow was golden brown, she pointed her roasting stick at Enos, and he slid the whole thing off and ate it. “It’s very gute ,” he said, “but not worth the time. I could have plowed half a row in the time it took to cook that marshmallow.”

Ada eyed him teasingly. “That’s my strategy. To waste all your time roasting marshmallows.”

He tapped his roasting stick against his pants leg. “You sure went to a lot of work for ten minutes of my time.”

“I’m very dedicated when I set my mind to it.”

Enos chuckled. “ Ach , vell . I don’t regret it. It’s very pleasant wasting my time with you.”

Enos’s completely unexpected reaction knocked Ada off-kilter. Her face burned hotter than one of Enos’s burnt marshmallows. Enos stared faithfully into the fire, as if realizing that he was the one who’d made things awkward this time.

It was time to get back to safer ground, ground where Enos was scowling at her, and she was chastising him for trying to steal her land. “I’m going to sit here all morning and roast and eat marshmallows until I get sick. Would you care to join me?”

He cleared his throat. “I’d better get back to the field or I’ll be working past midnight.”

Ada gave him an arch, just-you-try-to-stop-me look. “No need to put the camp chairs away. I’m camping out another night.”

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A ch ! Sometimes Ada wished she weren't so stubborn or so determined to be right. She rolled over on her sleeping bag and groaned as pain shot up her neck, down her arms, and across her back. It was still dark, but she wasn't even going to attempt to go back to sleep. Her glow-in-the-dark camp clock said 4:45 a.m., and that was gute enough. She'd slept maybe a total of three hours during the night, and at some point, a body just had to admit defeat.

Sighing at her lot in life, Ada sat up and mentally listed all the things that weren't getting done at home because she was sitting in a tent trying to win an argument that she didn't even know if she wanted to win. If she won, Tabitha Hoover would win, and Ada didn't want to be on Tabitha's side about anything. Besides that, Ada was beginning to think she didn't want Enos to go back to Pennsylvania, even if that meant she and her family would lose the six acres that maybe they didn't need so badly. They certainly didn't need those acres as badly as Enos did. A rift between neighbors wasn't worth six acres.

Ada growled and punched her pillow. There was still the principle of the thing, and there was still the fact that Ada was in charge of the farm, and if she let Enos have the six acres, she'd not only be failing herself, but she'd be failing her family too. They depended on her to stay strong and make the right decision.

But it was getting harder and harder to stand on principle, especially when Enos gazed at her with those brown eyes or handled the horses as if he was born with reins in his hand or worked obsessively from dawn until dark. How could Ada oppose him when it seemed that the entire world was against him?

The brightest spot of camping so far, besides watching Enos work the horses with

those strong arms and broad shoulders, was the romance novels Beth had given her. Ada had spent the whole day reading the next book in the Liza series, where Liza's stubborn cousin met her match and then almost shot him before they decided they loved each other. This one featured a runaway train and a bad guy with a handlebar mustache. Ada had stayed up until almost ten reading with a flashlight. Beth would be delighted to know Ada liked her books. Ada wasn't about to tell her.

Ada dressed as quickly as she could, tying a bandanna instead of her kapp around her head. A bandanna was more appropriate for camping, and she didn't want her prayer covering getting dirty. She unzipped the tent, hoping to get to the bathroom and back before Enos came out to the fields and took down her tent. Outside, she glanced toward Enos's house to see if any lights were burning. She gasped, and her heart skipped three beats. Just on the other side of the fence stood a small, one-man tent with a faint light glowing inside.

Oh, sis yuscht ! He was the most aggravating, infuriating man in the whole world, and if she had a tomato, she'd throw it at his tent and teach him a messy lesson.

Ada found her spatula and her flashlight, stormed toward the small tent, and awkwardly and gingerly scaled the fence between them. For as much as both of them went back and forth, they really needed a stile. She'd have to get her bruder -in-law Menno on that.

Much as she didn't want to ruin what precious little sleep Enos got, Ada was madder than a wet hen, and if she woke him up, it would be entirely his own fault. She smacked the top of Enos's tent hard with her spatula half a dozen times, and whatever light was on inside bobbed up and down. Vell , she'd gotten his attention. Hopefully she'd made him as mad as she was.

"Ada," he groaned, in that deep bass voice that made Ada think of spun silk. He unzipped his tent and crawled out, fully dressed and gripping a flashlight in his fist.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“I asked first,” he said.

Ada propped her hand on her hip. “I’m so sorry,” she said sarcastically. “Did I disturb your sleep?”

He momentarily distracted her by running his fingers through his tousled hair. Ada hadn’t realized how dark it was. “As a matter of fact, you didn’t. I was just about to get up and start plowing. I need to have the horses back by tonight.”

“You borrowed them?”

“Amos Burkholder let me rent them for a couple of days.”

Amos Burkholder had plenty of land and plenty of money. Why was he renting his horses to Enos when he could afford to lend them out? He should take pity on a neighbor in need. “Did you sleep out here last night?”

“As you can see.”

“Why?”

Enos ran his thumbs down the length of his suspenders, making sure they were straight. “I told you. I don’t want to drag your dead body off my land. If a bear or a coyote or Arthur Tripp comes looking for a victim, I won’t be able to hear your screams from the house. The only way to make sure you’re safe is to sleep out here with my rifle and my ax.”

“Are you planning on using the ax or the rifle on Arthur Tripp?”

The corners of his mouth twitched upward. “I like how your one eyebrow goes up like that when you’re mad.”

“Oh, I’m not mad. I’m furious. You work your fingers to the bone, and you deserve a gute night’s sleep.”

He didn’t seem to care about getting a gute night’s sleep. “So do you.”

“There’s no reason both of us should be sleep-deprived. You work too hard. You need your rest.”

“But, Ada, I’m doing this for you. I don’t want you to die.”

“I’m not going to die.”

“We’re all going to die. I just don’t want you to die by frostbite, stampede, coyote, or wolverine,” he said, counting out all the horrors on his fingers.

“There are no wolverines in Colorado, and I don’t want you to die from lack of sleep. If you get sick from exhaustion or bad night air, who will take care of your farm? You can’t afford to be laid up in bed.”

“Unlike you, I enjoy camping, and I sleep very well in a tent.” He patted the top of his tent as if to prove how well put together it was. “It was nice and cool last night. I slept with the flap open.”

“Can you even roll over in that thing?”

“I don’t need to roll over, except to grab my rifle and my ax. They’re right next to my

sleeping bag and ready to go should you need me.”

Ada gave him a sour face. “I won’t need you.”

“You might.” He turned and tromped toward his house.

“Where are you going?”

“I’ve got to get those horses hitched to the plow. I’m burning daylight.”

Ada looked into the sky. “There is no daylight to burn, and you are going to kill yourself by working too hard.”

He turned and tilted his head to one side. “Go away, Ada. You’ve already proven to be a very sharp thorn in my side.”

Now he was just being contrary. “So, you admit it’s painful to sleep in a tent.”

“If my sleeping in a tent concerns you so much, you know what you must do. Choose wisely.”

“Very funny,” Ada said. She gave the back of his head the stink eye, then turned and walked as fast as she could to her house. She was as stubborn as he was and more determined than ever to be right. No one was awake as she went to the bathroom, poured more kibble into Pepper’s bowl, slipped two apples into her apron pocket, and made herself a peanut butter and jam sandwich. She took a bite and was halfway out the door when she changed her mind, turned back, and made Enos a peanut butter and jam and a peanut butter and honey sandwich, just in case he didn’t like one or the other.

She tripped quickly back to the field, where the sunrise colored the eastern sky a soft

shade of yellow. Enos had the horses hitched, and he was just pulling his work gloves from his back pocket. “Do you like peanut butter and jam?”

“Do you like bothering me?”

“That must be a yes.”

Ada handed him the peanut butter and jam sandwich, and he took a big bite. “Mmm,” he said. “Strawberry freezer jam. Probably one of my favorite things in the whole world.”

Ada didn’t know why his praise pleased her, except that she had made the jam herself and Beth thought it was too sweet. Enos didn’t seem to think there was anything wrong with it. She watched him polish off the sandwich in five bites, then handed him the one with honey. “Do you like honey?”

“Who doesn’t like honey?”

“Menno doesn’t. It gives him hives.” She gave him the sandwich, then pulled the apples from her pocket and fed them to the horses.

“That’s nice of you,” he said.

“I love how excited they are when they get a treat.”

Enos donned his work gloves. “Denki . That was a wonderful nice breakfast.”

Ada shut one eye and examined the plow. The tine harrow was light enough that Enos could guide it and the horses at the same time. The middle buster plow was another story. It had to cut deep into the dirt. Keeping it and the horses going in a straight line took an amazing amount of strength and, as Enos surely knew, two people. “It

wonders me how you are going to plow and guide the horses at the same time,” Ada said.

He was silent for several seconds. “I’ll manage.”

Ada guessed that his mater had refused to help, though maybe Enos hadn’t even asked her. But Ada wouldn’t say anything about that. Enos didn’t need to be reminded of his hardships. “Much as I want to sit in my tent and read all day, I’d be wonderful selfish not to help you.” She yanked the reins from his hands and moved to the left and a little in front of the plow. “Okay then. Are you ready?”

Ada would have slept in that tent a whole month to see Enos’s expression at that very moment, even though he barely moved a muscle. His eyebrows traveled a fraction of an inch up his forehead, and a faint smile tugged at his mouth like a thin breeze pulling at a kite string. “You want to help me? Your worst enemy?”

Did he truly believe he was her worst enemy? Was he? Ada squared her shoulders. “You may be my worst enemy, but you’re also my neighbor, and I finished the second book in the series last night so I don’t have anything new to read.” She decided not to mention that if it weren’t for her, Arthur Tripp would have had this whole field plowed by now. She gave him a wry twist of her lips. “Besides, this is my land. Who’s to say I won’t harvest the potatoes in the middle of the night and keep them for myself?”

He nodded as if he’d already thought about it. “That’s one of the reasons I’m sleeping in that tent, so you won’t try anything tricky. I’m a very light sleeper.”

“So do you want my help or not?”

Enos was too smart to refuse her offer. There was no way he could plow the field by himself. “You’ll need gloves.”

Ada handed him the reins and ran to the tent where she had some gloves she'd used to help Clay set up the tent. She put them on and ran back to the horses.

He looked at her as if she were an angel who had just descended from heaven. "If you were any other woman, I would ask if you know what you're doing, but I have no doubt you know how to do this."

Ada's heart felt as if it would leap out of her chest. "I know how to do a lot of things."

"Doesn't surprise me at all."

She turned away to hide a very wide smile. If Enos saw it, he'd know how to break down her defenses. "What are their names?"

"The horses?"

"Jah."

Enos pointed to the lead horse. "This is Jeddy. Trotter is the smaller one."

She held one rein in each hand. It was the best way to guide both horses. "I'm ready. Tell me if I go too fast or too slow."

He nodded and tightened his hands around the plow. He had the hard job—keeping the plow in the ground without letting the horses run away with it.

Ada jiggled the reins. "Hup, hup. Hup, Jeddy. Hup." The horses moved forward, with a slight pause when they met resistance from the plow digging into the ground. Ada's job guiding the horses was harder than it looked. She had to keep the horses moving in a relatively straight line, the fence her only guide. The ground was bone dry, and

the horses and plow kicked up a fair bit of dust.

She was breathing heavily after about fifteen minutes. She glanced at Enos. It was a cool morning, but sweat trickled down the side of his face, and his shirt would be soaked by mid-morning. Behind them, four gulls and seven or eight smaller birds snatched up worms and other critters unearthed by the plow.

When they got to the end of the row, Ada pulled back on the reins and pointed to the fence. “Look.”

A brownish red hawk sat on a fence post eyeing them with keen interest. Enos chuckled. “He’s waiting for us to dig up a mouse. You can see how dangerous it is to camp out here. That hawk could peck your eyes out.”

Ada shot him an exasperated look. “He’ll get you first. Your tent is a lot flimsier than mine.”

“But if he eats me, I won’t be able to protect you. You really should sleep at home for your own safety.”

After eight water breaks and a dozen more birds, they finished plowing the field. Enos propped his hands in his hips and gazed down the last furrow. “That went faster than I thought, even though we had to plow around your inconvenient tent.”

Ada folded her arms across her chest. “But it’s a very spacious tent and very comfortable to sleep in.”

He rolled his eyes. “It is not. You hate that tent, and I don’t wonder but you’re up half the night punching your pillow and adjusting your sleeping bag.”

He was exactly right. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Enos Hoover.”

They both turned as someone called to them from Ada's yard. Beth opened the gate and came trotting across the field. "I've been watching you plow all morning. Good job."

"Denki ," Enos said. "I couldn't have done it without Ada."

Beth grinned. "If it weren't for Ada, you wouldn't have had to do it at all."

Ada wanted to protest. Loudly. Beth was telling the absolute truth, but whose side was she on?

Enos looked at Ada as if he didn't care that all this extra work was her fault. "That's true, but sometimes we have to make sacrifices for what we think is right."

Did Enos agree with her little camping protest? Was he on her side or was she on his side? The lines of the argument were so blurred, Ada didn't even know what was right anymore.

Beth giggled as if the whole situation was the funniest thing she'd ever heard. "I'm not blaming anyone for anything. It looks like you two work very well together. I think it's cute."

Cute? What did Beth mean by "cute"? Ada didn't like it, and she didn't like the way the heat crept up her neck when Enos looked at her.

Beth pointed to Ada and then to Enos. "We don't really have time to figure out what this is. I've got yummasetti in the oven, and you are both invited to lunch."

Had Beth lost her mind? " Yummasetti ? You don't know how to make yummasetti."

Yummasetti was a traditional Amish dish with ground beef, cheese, and lots of

cream. It was appeditlich , but Ada rarely made it herself. She didn't want to give Dat a heart attack.

"I'm trying all sorts of new recipes from your recipe box. It's not private, is it? You never said it was private."

Ada bit her tongue. It wasn't private, but it was neat and well organized. If Beth had done anything to jumble Ada's orderly filing system, Ada was going to be very irritated. "Not private," she said, almost breathless at the thought of Beth filing yummasetti under C for casserole instead of D for dinner.

"Oh, gute ," Beth said. "So will you come? I made two pans of it, and I'm afraid I'll have tons of leftovers. Mary and Clay and Menno and Joanna are coming. Cathy Larsen was over earlier this morning, and I invited her too. She said she wants to see the fireworks, though I'm not sure what she means. I think she's excited to taste yummasetti. It's like a Fourth of July party in your mouth."

Enos concentrated too hard on unhitching the horses. "I appreciate the invitation," he said, without looking up, "but I need to make lunch for my mamm ."

Beth's face lit up. "She can come too. I made plenty."

It was obvious by his reluctant expression that Enos didn't want to bring his mater . She couldn't go anywhere without deeply embarrassing her son. Ada didn't want Tabitha to come either. She'd ruin lunch, for sure and certain giving everyone at the table indigestion.

But Enos deserved a stick-to-your-ribs meal for all his hard work this morning. Of course the yummasetti might not be edible, but at least it would be warm. And Enos didn't need the added burden of cooking for his mater , which was no doubt a thankless job. Ada had been with Enos all morning, but they'd barely said ten words

to each other. It would be very pleasant to sit down to a meal together and talk about farming and water and Amos Burkholder's fine using horses.

Would she rather have Enos and his mater , or no Enos at all?

A few days ago, Ada wouldn't have believed she was even asking that question. She most certainly wouldn't have believed the answer.

"Cum and eat with us," she heard herself say. "And bring Tabitha. You've worked hard this morning."

He gazed at her doubtfully. "So have you."

"Wunderbarr ," Beth said. "We're eating in half an hour."

"I'll have to bring the buggy. I don't think Mamm can walk that far."

Beth nodded. "Okay, we'll eat in forty-five minutes. Will that give you enough time?"

Enos pulled a watch from his pocket. "It should."

Ada's heart did a little jig. She'd have just enough time to shower, rub gute- smelling lotion on her hands, and put on her prettiest dress, though why she suddenly cared about such nothings was anybody's guess.

Enos patted Jeddy's head. "I appreciate your kind invitation, but if I'm not there at twelve-fifteen, start without me. I don't know if Mamm will feel up to it."

Ada's mouth felt as dry as sandpaper. Enos's mamm was the sourest, most abrasive person Ada had ever met. Tabitha would never feel up to it. They'd all be

disappointed.

Ada hated to be disappointed.

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Before Ada walked in the back door, Beth stopped her. “Um, just so you know, I’ve been cooking and baking all morning, and I haven’t had a chance to clean the kitchen, but as soon as we eat lunch, I’m going to do the dishes and mop.”

Ada braced herself for the worst as she went into the house. Ach , she was very glad she had. Dirty pans and bowls and spoons occupied every available surface in the kitchen, including on top of the fridge. The sink was full of dirty dishes, and there was a patch of something sticky on the floor that had turned gray because someone had tromped all over it with their dirty shoes. An overturned glass of milk lay on the table while milk dripped onto the floor, where Pepper was licking it up noisily. There were splatters of something green on the fridge, and a pot of burned and crusty oatmeal sat on the stove.

Beth caught her bottom lip between her teeth and smiled sheepishly. “Sorry. I know how you like a clean kitchen.”

Ada sighed. “It’s a mess, Beth. Didn’t you clean breakfast before you started on lunch?”

“I had to milk the goats, and I could tell Pepper was feeling ignored. It was more important to play with him than do the dishes.”

“Pepper gets plenty of attention. You can’t just quit running the household to give our dog some love.”

Beth put her hands behind her back and lowered her eyes. “I know, but I think it’s more important to have a happy home than a clean one. I was going to get to it as

soon as lunch was over. Aren't you proud of me for making yummasetti?"

The kitchen did smell gute , like melted cheese and buttered toast. Ada didn't know what to do. Part of her wanted to take a shower and make herself presentable because Enos was coming over. The other part of her wanted to clean the kitchen because Enos was coming over. She didn't want him to think they lived in a pigsty. Then again, she might be able to make excuses about a dirty house, but if she came to dinner stinky, Enos might not ever want to get close to her again.

Did she want him to get close?

"Dat milked the goats this morning, and I fed Pepper. Last night I made Yankee bean soup, and Dat said it was as gute as Mamm used to make. I haven't cleaned the toilets, but they look fine. No one needs to clean them as often as you do."

Ada could not stand a dirty toilet. Then again, she couldn't stand to sleep in a tent, but she could be resilient when it really mattered. Deciding she'd rather smell nice, Ada headed for the stairs. "I'm going upstairs to shower."

Beth wilted like a daisy in the heat. "Okay. I'll set the table."

"Don't use paper plates."

Ada felt better once she'd rinsed the layer of dust off her face and arms. She put on her favorite royal blue dress, brushed her hair into a bun, and put on a crisp white kapp . She pulled the tiny mirror from her drawer and looked at herself. She wasn't pretty, but she had smooth skin and a straight nose. Did Enos like straight, thin noses, or did he prefer girls with button noses and fuller cheeks?

Why did it matter what Enos liked? Ada had been sleeping in the tent too long. She was starting to think crazy thoughts. Besides that, it was unlikely Enos would show

up today. No doubt his mamm would refuse to come out of the house and associate with her neighbors, and Enos would be stuck making Tabitha a sandwich that she would criticize up one side and down the other. Ada could almost hear Tabitha's disdain. This sandwich would taste better in Pennsylvania. Don't they know how to make an adequate loaf of bread in Colorado? A gute son would never make his mater live like this.

Ada found the kitchen a beehive of activity. Mary was washing dishes, Clay was down on his hands and knees wiping up the sticky floor, and Joanna was wiping counters and all other surfaces. The green splatters on the fridge had disappeared, and the table had been set. Beth was drying dishes for Mary and chattering away about goat cheese with raspberry dust and how Dat liked her Yankee bean soup as well as Mamm's. Mary was nodding and smiling as if Beth were the most amazing girl in the whole world. Why didn't anyone ever acknowledge all the work Ada did every single day? She kept the house spotless so her schwesteren didn't have to swoop in and save her when guests came over. She made appetitlich goat cheese that brought in gute money, and she kept the farm running, making sure the seed was purchased and the tractor was scheduled.

Ada stood just inside the threshold watching her family get by without her. She'd never felt so underappreciated in her life. But Ada wasn't one to wallow. She liked being the glue that held the family together, even if nobody realized it but her. She was only gloomy because she'd been sleeping in a tent for three nights and she hadn't managed to kick Enos off her six acres. As soon as she settled the acreage problem, her family would realize how desperately they needed her and how badly they'd taken her for granted.

Menno came in the back door with Lily in his arms and Rosie skipping behind him. "Aendi Ada," Rosie squealed. She ran to Ada and hugged her around the waist. "I wuv you!"

Lily stretched out her hands. “Ada. Hold me, hold me.”

Well, at least two people in the family appreciated Ada. She took Lily from Menno and planted a big fat kiss on the little girl’s cheek. “I missed you, Lily. Have you been a gute girl?”

Lily nodded eagerly. “I help Mama gatter eggs.”

“Gute for you. I need lots of eggs to make cookies.”

“I made a batch of chocolate chip cookies yesterday,” Beth said, and it sounded like a bit of a boast. “They’re in Ada’s cookie jar.”

Ada set Lily on her feet, and both girls made a beeline for the cookies.

“Not until after dinner,” Menno said. Both girls slumped their shoulders and stared longingly at the cookie jar.

Joanna finished wiping what looked like flour off the front of one of the cupboards and turned around. “Ach , Ada, you look a little tired.”

Ada huffed out a breath. “I hate camping.”

Mary cleared her throat and eyed Ada doubtfully. “You’re doing Dat a great service, fighting to keep those six acres.”

Ada drew her brows together. “You don’t act as if you believe it.”

The look Mary gave Joanna did not escape Ada. “Do you think maybe you’re going a bit too far? It’s only six acres, and you’d rather go to the dentist than sleep in a tent.”

Ada had conducted this same debate in her head so many times, she didn't know what was what anymore. But she was in the mood to be contrary. "It's the principle of the thing."

Clay stood up, the filthy rag dangling from his hand. "If Enos is telling the truth . . ."

"He always tells the truth," Ada snapped.

Clay's eyes widened with surprise and curiosity. "Uh, okay. Enos says he's the rightful owner, and even though the Yoders have farmed this land for a long time, it seems the only honest thing to do is to let him have it."

"But there is the boundary by acquittal," Beth said.

Ada wanted to kiss her. "Jah . By acquiescence, the land is ours."

Someone knocked on the door, and Lily and Rosie rushed to the front room to get it. Ada's heart betrayed her. Probably the whole family could hear how excited she was to see Enos.

Instead, Cathy Larsen shuffled into the kitchen with both little girls holding on to her purse. "Wait a second," she said. "Let me sit, and I'll find you both a sucker."

Lily and Rosie cheered loudly. Ada had to smile. Neither Joanna nor Menno had the heart to tell Cathy she'd ruin the girls' supper.

Cathy sat down and fished around in her purse. Ada didn't know how she found anything in there. It was the size of a bed pillow. "Thank you, Beth, for inviting me to lunch. Lon is watching Family Feud reruns and didn't want to come. It's better this way because getting him and his oxygen tank to the car is a half-hour ordeal." Cathy glanced up. "Hello, Ada. I'm glad you could make it for lunch. Beth tells me you're

still camping on Enos's property."

"Still? It's only been three days, and it's my property."

Cathy pulled two huge pink suckers from her bag and handed them to Lily and Rosie. "I hope you like cherry flavor, because I don't know how long it will take me to find green apple or blue raspberry."

"Denki, Cathy," both girls said together. They ripped the wrapping off their suckers, and Rosie popped the sucker into her mouth. Lily daintily licked hers with her pinkie finger up in the air like a proper young lady.

Cathy zipped up her purse and set it on the floor before Ada had time to warn her that the floor was filthy. "Now, I've come on the pretense of eating lunch, but I really want to hear all the gossip about Enos and Ada's very bad decision to camp on his property."

Ada was proud of herself. She didn't even growl. "It's my property by acquiescence."

Cathy looked at Ada. "Whose ever property it is, camping was still a bad decision. You look like you've been in a fight with an egg beater."

Ada put a hand to her kapp. She didn't look that bad, did she? She'd taken a shower and combed her hair and applied a little lip balm because nobody liked chapped lips. "It's the principle of the thing, and everybody knows I have principles."

Cathy nodded her agreement. "I can appreciate that. I am a woman of principle too. That's why they love me on the town council. Unfortunately, principles will not solve Enos's problems. He is struggling to make payments, and he doesn't know if he can afford to hire a tractor to plant his alfalfa. I suppose I should be happy for your sake, Ada, but I sure hate to think his mother will get her way."

Mary looked as if she felt very sorry for the whole world. “His mother is such an unhappy person. I wish we could help her.”

“I wish we could send her on the next bus out of town,” Cathy said.

Ada’s heart hurt. Tabitha had said Enos was in debt up to his eyeballs, yet he had paid Arthur Tripp for nothing, and he’d rented horses to plow that field the hard way. His stubborn determination was his worst quality. And his best. One thing was for sure and certain. Enos needed help. “Clay, how busy are you with baseball season?”

With permission from the bishop, Clay coached the community college baseball team. “I don’t have much going on in the mornings.”

Ada pulled a notebook and pen from the drawer and sat down at the table, nudging aside the plate and silverware so she had a space to write. “Clay, I need you and Menno to organize the available men in the gmay to help Enos plant his alfalfa. If he can’t afford the tractor, surely we can find some available teams. Freeman Sensenig has a no-till planter that would cost a lot less to rent than Arthur Tripp’s tractor.” She wrote some notes on the paper. “Menno, I know Freeman will help, and Amos Burkholder has a team of two he’s willing to rent out. If he’s feeling charitable, he might let you use them for free, just so Enos can get his field planted.” Ada glanced up to make sure Menno was listening. Everyone in the room, including the two little girls, were looking at Ada as if she had a bird’s nest on the top of her head. “What?” she said.

Clay leaned against the counter. “We kinda thought you wanted to run him off.”

“I want to run him off my six acres, not his own farm.”

“But.” Mary fell silent and looked to Joanna, like she always did when she couldn’t find the words.

Joanna frowned in confusion. “We’ve purposefully not been helping Enos out of loyalty to you. Do you . . . now you’re saying you want us to help him?”

“Of course I do. Enos can’t plant his fields without help. We’re his closest neighbors. It’s our Christian duty.” Why were they all looking at her that way? She might have thought she had spinach or a raspberry seed stuck in her teeth, except she hadn’t eaten spinach or berries this morning, and she’d brushed her teeth not ten minutes ago. “What’s wrong? Doesn’t this make perfect sense to you all?”

Cathy raised her glasses to her eyes and leaned forward. “Nobody ever listens to me, but I’m not too polite to say I told you so.” She gave Ada the stink eye. “I told you so.”

Ada loved Cathy, she truly did, but sometimes Cathy sorely tried her patience. “Told me what?”

Mary looked positively stricken. “I never would have guessed.”

Cathy grunted. “I told her to be careful. I told her to make new quilt blocks, but would she listen to me? No.”

The quilt blocks? Cathy was still concerned about Ada’s choice of quilt block? It was absolutely ridiculous.

Cathy wagged her finger at Clay and Menno. “Let this be a lesson to you. You would all be better off if you just did as I said.”

Clay tossed his dirty rag in the sink. “I learned that by hard experience.”

Did Ada even want to try to make Cathy see reason? “The Bachelor’s Puzzle quilt block has nothing to do with this. I just want to help Enos with his farm. Can’t one

neighbor help another without everybody getting hysterical about it?"

Cathy narrowed her eyes. "I'm not hysterical. I am as calm as a summer's morning. What about you, Joanna? Are you hysterical?"

Joanna's gaze flicked in Ada's direction. "Kind of."

Mary wrung her hands. She never wanted to offend anybody. "I'm not sure what to think."

Clay's grin was wider than the Colorado river. "I'm hysterical if Mary is."

"I think it's wunderbarr," Beth said. "Ada can fall in love with whoever she wants."

Ada came out of her chair. "Fall in love! Who said anything about falling in love? I just . . . I want to help a neighbor."

Menno pointed to her mouth. "Are you wearing lip gloss?"

Ada gave Menno a look that could have curdled goat's milk. "My lips were dry, and it's ChapStick."

Menno wiped the smile off his face. "It looks pretty. Everybody wants soft lips."

"This is what I'm talking about." Cathy fingered the chunky string of beads that held her glasses. "I've watched enough Hallmark movies to know girls always end up falling in love with their worst enemy. You have no one to blame but yourself for that horrible mother-in-law."

Ada tried to remain calm, though it was one of the hardest things she'd ever done. If she lost her temper, everybody would think she was using her anger to try to hide her

true feelings, which she wasn't. She went so far as to tilt her head and smile, as if they were all discussing the weather or the price of goat cheese. "Cathy, you have nothing to worry about. I have no feelings for Enos Hoover, except maybe annoyance and frustration. I occasionally feel pity for him, but certainly not affection, admiration, or love."

"Right," Beth said, trying to be agreeable, "because he's trying to steal our land."

"I like Enos," Menno said. "Ada should be able to marry him if she wants to."

Ada lost any semblance of control and slapped the table. "Haven't you heard anything I've said?"

Joanna put her arm around Ada and smiled. "We hear you, but your eyes tell a different story."

Ada shut her mouth so fast, her teeth knocked together. What could her schwesternen see in her eyes besides utter exhaustion? And why was her heart galloping like a horse?

Another knock at the door. Ada couldn't catch her breath. Joanna said Ada had something in her eye and suddenly she was paralyzed?

Joanna tightened her arm around Ada. "Here he is. Everybody act natural."

Until twenty seconds ago, Ada would have had no trouble acting natural. Now she didn't even know what natural meant. She put on two oven mitts and pulled Beth's yummasetti from the oven, which gave her a chance to turn her back on everyone and collect herself. Enos Hoover was her adversary, not her friend. Tabitha would not be her mother-in-law. Enos did not like her, and she did not like him. In fact, Enos was the last man on Earth she would ever marry. He was stubborn, serious, and too

accommodating to his mater . He didn't know the first thing about roasting a gute marshmallow and had no respect for the boundary-by-acquiescence law.

By the time she turned around, she was feeling more herself and less like a giddy schoolgirl. Enos and Tabitha came into the kitchen, Enos with freshly washed hair and Tabitha leaning on her cane and scowling as if she had indigestion. Ada squared her shoulders. She would never stand for Tabitha as a mater -in-law. Thank Derr Herr she wasn't the least bit interested in Enos.

Enos hesitantly introduced Tabitha to everyone. Obviously he was uneasy that Tabitha might say something to embarrass herself. Or him. Or everybody else. He needn't have worried. Everyone in the room knew Tabitha by reputation, so they weren't likely to be surprised by her behavior. Then again, Tabitha's behavior had been outrageous enough to shock even Ada. There was no telling what would happen.

Joanna and Mary introduced their husbands, and Joanna introduced Rosie and Lily. "Those aren't your real children," Tabitha said. "They look nothing like you."

Irritation flashed in Joanna's eyes, but her face was the picture of serenity. "They're every bit as much mine as if I'd given birth to them."

Menno was very protective where his dochters and fraa were concerned. "She's a wonderful mother, and she showers our children with love, as a true mother should. I've seen real mothers who don't give their children enough love to fill a teaspoon." Except for Tabitha, they all knew who he was talking about.

Enos was smart enough to change the subject. He'd probably had a great deal of practice with it. "Where's your dat ?"

Ada opened her mouth but couldn't seem to force out the words. Beth wasn't tonguetied in the least. "He's shearing sheep in Estrella this week. He has his own sheep

shearing crew, and they travel all over in the spring.”

Enos pulled out the chair next to Cathy and motioned for his mamm to sit. Cathy froze like a Popsicle and crinkled her nose as if Tabitha had a bad smell. Tabitha acted as if she didn't even notice Cathy sitting next to her.

Everyone sat, Enos on Tabitha's right, Lily and Rosie next to Enos. Ada made a point to sit on the opposite side of the table from Enos because her family was watching too closely and she didn't want them to think she would ever consider marrying such a headstrong, stubborn man. Clay said, “Handt nunna,” which was the signal for silent prayer. Clay's accent was terrible, but everyone understood what he meant, even Cathy, who had eaten enough meals with the Amish to know what to do. They all put their hands in their laps and bowed their heads and listened for Clay to clink his fork against his plate or make some sort of noise to let them know the prayer was over. Clay liked very short prayers, and Ada had barely got the words “Denki for the food” out of her mouth before Clay picked up his fork.

Tabitha glared at Clay as if he'd committed some serious sin, probably of saying too short a prayer. Then she picked up her paper napkin and examined it. Was she looking for flaws, or did she disapprove of the pink and yellow flowers printed on the paper? “Enos tells me your appliances are powered by solar,” she said, with not a syllable about the napkins. “I'm shocked your bishop allows that. How does he expect to lead his flock to heaven when he's so permissive?”

It had been silly to think Tabitha might not come to lunch. Why would she ever pass up an opportunity to air her grievances in front of everybody?

Beth, of all people, seemed the least intimidated by Tabitha. She shrugged and gave Tabitha a smile she didn't deserve. “We don't get so uptight as all that. We are called to be separate from the world, and solar power is just as separate as liquid propane or wood-burning stoves. You could even say we're more righteous than the

Pennsylvania Amish because we use the source Gotte gifts us freely every day. The time we save gives us more time to read the Bible.”

Ada turned away to hide a smile. Beth was more apt to read a romance novel than the Bible, but she’d come up with a very clever response. It wasn’t fair or honest to compare their righteousness to the Amish in Pennsylvania, but Beth had put Tabitha in her place.

Or maybe she hadn’t. Tabitha scowled at the paper napkin in her hand. “Our lives are supposed to be hard, and we shouldn’t ever chase ease and leisure. The devil uses idle hands. I’ve told Enos he’ll hook us up to solar over my dead body.”

“So, Enos,” Clay said, passing the bowl of grapes to Mary, “Ada says you’re planting potatoes on the six acres we’re all arguing about.”

Menno poured his dochters some water. “I wouldn’t say we’re all arguing about it. Just Enos and Ada.”

Enos turned to Ada with a concerned look on his face. “Ada was kind enough to help me plow this morning.”

Tabitha grabbed a roll from the basket and eyed it suspiciously. “I don’t know what you think you’re doing. If you want Enos off the land, you shouldn’t help him plant it.”

Cathy pointed to the corn on her plate. “Is this dairy free?”

Joanna smiled mischievously. “We really can’t figure out what Ada is up to. First she sets up that tent, and then she helps Enos plow. It’s almost as if she can’t make up her mind.”

Enos poured his mother a glass of water. “I admire Ada’s strict integrity. She’s determined to camp on the principle of the thing, but can’t any of you talk her into sleeping in the house? I’m worried about her health and her safety. She barely sleeps at night, and I’ve heard several coyotes prowling.”

Ada grunted her disapproval. “What about your health? You work too hard, and you sleep in that tiny little tent. The coyotes will see you as easier prey.” Ada was once again acutely aware that her schwesternen and bruderen -in-law were studying her closely, as if she was a mystery to all of them.

“Curse those quilt blocks,” Cathy muttered.

Tabitha laid the unsuitable napkin in her lap. “If Enos gets sick and dies, at least I’d get to go back to Pennsylvania.”

Menno knew when a conversation was getting out of hand. “I’m planting potatoes too. Freeman Sensenig has been a huge help. I’m going to try a few sugar beets, but as far as I know there’s only one processing plant in Colorado, so it might not be profitable.”

“Will you plant alfalfa on the rest of your land, Enos?” Clay asked.

Again Enos gazed at Ada. His brown eyes had little specks of gold on the edges. What was going on in the deep waters of his mind? “If I can manage it.”

Menno nodded at Clay. “Don’t worry. It will work out.”

Ada’s heart swelled to overflowing. Clay and Menno would take care of Enos and his farm. She hadn’t liked either of them when they’d first come to Byler, but now she adored them as if they were her own flesh and blood.

Beth took the foil off the pan, grabbed a large spoon, and dished out yummasetti. Ada cringed. The yummasetti looked as if Beth had dropped it, scooped it off the floor, and dumped it back into the pan. It was a jumbled mess of peas, noodles, and ground beef. Beth obviously didn't know enough to be embarrassed. She cheerfully dished Tabitha a scoop and gave an even bigger helping to Enos. Tabitha examined the runny mess on her plate with the same critical eye she'd used on Beth's napkins. "I'm not eating this."

Beth's smile faded as if she didn't have the energy to keep it going any longer. "Don't you like yummasetti?"

Tabitha wrinkled her nose in disgust. "I like yummasetti, but this slop is not yummasetti."

Mary let out an audible gasp. Half the people at the table lowered their eyes in embarrassment. The other half stared at Tabitha in unabashed horror.

Beth cleared her throat and blinked rapidly. "It is my first time, but I think you'll like it."

Tabitha shook her head. "I don't think so."

Enos's face turned a dark shade of red. "I apologize, Beth. Mamm has a sensitive stomach."

Tabitha gave Enos a glare that would have peeled the paint off a barn. "Don't apologize for me. I don't have a sensitive stomach, and I haven't done anything but speak the truth. Honesty never needs an apology."

Ada finally found her voice. "Beth, this yummasetti is absolutely appetitlich ." She hoped Beth wouldn't notice she hadn't taken a bite yet.

Clay had already eaten half the yummasetti on his plate. “You’re really missing out, Tabitha. I love it, especially the cheese. Good job, Beth.”

Growing more and more red, Enos picked up his fork and took a huge bite of Beth’s yummasetti. “This is wonderful delicious,” he said, his voice a combination of forced enthusiasm and deep mortification.

Ada would have to eat everything on her plate if she didn’t want to see Beth disintegrate into a puddle of tears. She reluctantly scooped a small bite into her mouth and swallowed it. She widened her eyes. It was surprisingly gute , just the right amount of salt and not too much onion. She took a bigger bite, and the flavors did a dance on her tongue.

Enos must have taken heart from everyone else’s comments. “It’s really gute , Beth. Mamm just hasn’t adjusted to the altitude yet.”

Cathy propped her elbows on the table. “How long do you think it will take you to adjust, Tabitha? Twenty years?”

Did Tabitha hear the sarcasm in Cathy’s voice? “I’ll never adjust. I’ve got to get back to Pennsylvania before I die of altitude sickness.”

Cathy wasn’t long-suffering or polite, and at times like this, Ada was very grateful. “High altitude is no excuse for bad manners, and someone as old as you should know better. Did your mother raise you in a barn?”

Tabitha acted as if Cathy had tried to pluck out one of her nose hairs. “I’m not as old as you, and it’s not bad manners to tell the truth. I’ve lived a gute life. I deserve to spend my later years surrounded by people who love me, not strangers who’ve strayed from the Ordnung and the righteous way.”

Cathy had never been one to let an argument die. “I don’t know much about the Ordnung or the degrees of righteousness, but the Yoders seem like perfectly fine people to me, even though Menno takes some getting used to.”

“What do you mean by that?” Menno interjected.

Cathy didn’t even take a breath. “You are a hypocrite, Tabitha Hoover.”

Tabitha clutched her heart as if Cathy had poked her in the chest. Jesus condemned only two groups of people in the New Testament: lawyers and hypocrites. It was the highest of insults. “I am not.”

“You Amish are supposed to be forgiving and loving and submissive, but you strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”

“I do not swallow camels.”

For Enos’s sake, Ada should have stopped the conversation right there, but they were all mesmerized by the spectacle that was playing out before them. Enos’s lips were pressed together in a hard line, and he looked as if he were suffocating. Mary’s eyes were so wide, Ada would probably have been able to see the back of her head if she looked closely enough. Clay was the only person who didn’t look distressed. He was so good-natured, he looked at every problem as a blessing from Gotte.

Cathy jabbed her fork in Tabitha’s direction. “You’re indignant about their solar panels, yet I’ve never heard you say a kind word to your son. I’m pretty sure Jesus didn’t condemn solar panels, but He sure had a lot to say about love.”

Tabitha grabbed her cane and rose to her feet. “Enos, take me home. I will not sit by while my own son refuses to defend me against this abuse.”

Enos stood, his expression as hard as a stone. Ada had seen beneath the surface of that stone, and she wanted to weep for him. But what could she do? Tabitha was still his mater , and he truly wanted to be a gute son.

Tabitha grabbed the roll from her plate and hobbled into the living room. She turned and lifted her roll as if she was going to toss it to Cathy. “I am the sweetest, most loving mother in the world, but I will always correct my sons if they need chastisement. Enos has failed again and again to honor his mater , and he will hear it from me, several times a day if need be.”

Enos cupped his hand around Tabitha’s elbow and led her away. Ada had a gute view of the front door from her seat at the kitchen table. Tabitha yanked her arm away from him, waited until he opened the door for her, then walked outside like a high-stepping horse at the county fair. Enos glanced back at Ada, his face expressionless, his eyes filled with unimaginable pain. Then he was gone.

Everyone in the room seemed to let out a collective breath.

“That went well,” Clay said, with just a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

Ada felt sick to her stomach. “You’ll still help him plant his alfalfa, won’t you?”

Menno looked at Ada as if she’d said something ridiculous. “For sure and certain we will. We can’t punish the son for the sins of the mater .”

Clay slathered a whole tablespoon of butter on his roll. “I’m real glad Cathy said all the things none of us had the courage to say.”

Cathy didn’t look pleased by the compliment. Then again, Cathy never looked pleased about anything. “I shouldn’t have said anything. I embarrassed Enos, and he has enough troubles for three lifetimes. But I couldn’t let her say those things about

Beth's casserole. Even though the yummasetti isn't dairy free, it is very good, and Tabitha had no right to insult it. As a guest in your home, it's just bad manners. She goaded me beyond endurance, but I'm sorry it upset Enos."

Mary sighed. "I don't know if you could upset Enos any more than his mother already does. She's very unkind."

Joanna wrapped her fingers around Beth's wrist. "I'm sorry she hurt your feelings."

Beth slumped her shoulders. "She did hurt my feelings, but you were all so nice about it. I know it doesn't look very good. I couldn't get the layers right."

"It is delicious," Joanna said.

It hadn't looked very appetizing, but Ada was unselfish enough to admit she'd been wrong. "Beth, it isn't just good. It is even better than my yummasetti."

Beth's face lit up like a lantern. "Really?"

Ada took a bite just to prove she was sincere. "Really. I like that you didn't skimp on the butter."

Beth blushed. "I accidentally put in a whole cube instead of half."

"Ach, well, it's how we should make the recipe from now on."

Cathy picked up a pea from her plate with her fingers. "I like Enos a lot."

Joanna and Mary froze like statues. "That's nice," Joanna said.

"I'm going to change my strategy."

That didn't sound good. Cathy had a strategy? "What do you mean?" Ada asked.

"It's too late to make new quilt blocks, so we'll just have to make do with the groom we have."

Ada's heart tried to claw its way up her throat. "There is no groom, Cathy."

"If you say so." Cathy pinned Ada with an annoyed gaze. "You wouldn't listen to me before. Why would I think you'll listen to me now? I'm going to leave you out of it."

"Out of what?"

"My new strategy."

Joanna giggled. "What is your new strategy, Cathy?"

"I'm going to find a way to get Ada's future mother-in-law back to Pennsylvania and out of our hair."

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A da pounded on the top of Enos's tent with her spatula. "Wake up. Wake up. We have a very long day ahead of us."

All was quiet and still inside.

She pounded again. No answer. She jiggled one of the tent poles and sang a loud rendition of "Life's Railway to Heaven." Still nothing.

"Enos," she called. "Get up."

She jiggled the tent again and realized how easy it was to move. She could probably lift the whole thing with one hand. Enos wasn't in there. Ada hadn't even heard him get up this morning. Had she been that sound asleep, or had he been that quiet? She unzipped his tent flap and shined her flashlight inside. Sure enough, his sleeping bag had been neatly folded, his pillow fluffed, and his camp chair stowed in the corner.

She was torn between being mad that he wasn't getting a full eight hours at night and being pleased that maybe she was. If she hadn't heard him get up this morning, it meant she was sleeping more soundly.

Three days ago, after that horrible lunch with Tabitha, Ada had decided to sleep in the tent, at least until the potatoes and alfalfa had been planted. Enos needed her, and Beth hadn't burned the house down yet, though the toilets were in desperate need of scrubbing and the kitchen always looked as if there'd been a food explosion. As much as she hated to admit it, Ada liked being close to Enos. Despite their glaring differences of opinion, they had a pleasant, comfortable relationship, and she was always happier being with Enos than not being with him. He strolled to her tent every

night after dinner and sat with her by the fire. He reported on his day, and she reported on hers, which usually included reading another romance novel, ordering seed or supplies for her farm, or helping Enos in his fields. They roasted marshmallows together every night, and Enos had taught her how to make banana boats, which turned out to be the best thing since roasted marshmallows.

Enos, surprisingly, had solved Ada's irrigation water problem. Two days before the water was scheduled to come down the ditch, Enos had dug deep trenches around Ada's tent so the water could go down the rows without flooding her out. She was on her own little delta when it was Enos's turn for water. Clay and Dat and seven members of Clay's baseball team had reconfigured the pivot irrigation system so it didn't roll onto the disputed six acres but still watered Ada's entire field.

Ada had only seen Tabitha twice in three days, for which she was grateful. Tabitha left Ada with a bitter taste in her mouth. Enos was always respectful to his mater, but he surely could not be comfortable when she was around. She was too volatile and unpredictable. On two separate mornings, Tabitha had come out to the fence and called for Ada to come closer. Then she'd proceeded to instruct Ada on how to get Enos off her property. Ada was appalled that a mater could treat her son with such disdain, but she'd learned that if she just let Tabitha talk, Tabitha would soon tire of standing in the sun and go back to the house. Ada wasn't sure what she did in there, because Enos did the laundry, cared for his horse, and cooked himself and his mamm three meals a day.

Ada's gaze traveled to Enos's house. There was a light on inside. Maybe Enos was making his mamm breakfast. Maybe he was tiptoeing around, getting ready and trying not to wake Tabitha. She heard his front door open quietly, and her pulse raced in anticipation. It didn't help her breathing or her heart rate that he was so handsome. A girl could go a long time without seeing eyes that color of brown or muscles that toned.

He strolled to her spot by the fence. “Did you sleep well last night?”

“I think I did.”

“You’d still be so much more comfortable in your own bed.”

“So would you.”

He cupped his fingers around the back of his neck. “As long as you sleep outside, I sleep outside. That won’t change no matter how tired I get.”

“I know,” Ada said. “It’s very irritating.”

“Jah , it is.”

Ada did her best to corral a wide smile. “So. Planting alfalfa today?”

He peered out at his field. “Freeman is letting me borrow his no-till planter. I don’t know how much I’ll get done, but it’s faster than planting by hand.” He seemed to frown with his whole body. “I can’t work fast enough to get everything done. I may have to let most of my field lie fallow this year.”

Ada crossed her arms and leaned on the fence post, her spatula dangling from her fingers. “I think you’ll get all forty acres planted today. Gotte is smiling on you.”

Resentment traveled across his face. “Gotte doesn’t smile on me any more than He smiles on you or my mamm or anybody else. Bad things happen whether we’re obedient or not.”

Ada batted her eyelashes innocently. “So what’s the point of trying to be gute if not for the reward?”

“You’re being contrary again.”

“One of us has to be stubborn and difficult. You sound like you’ve surrendered, like you believe your effort is for nothing.”

He leaned against the fence. “It will be for nothing if I lose the farm, and it’s hard to have faith when my mater and my closest neighbor are working against me.”

His words stung just a little bit. She wasn’t working against Enos the way Tabitha was working against him, but what did it matter if she was part of the reason he lost the farm? “I like to think I’m working for a higher purpose. It’s the principle of the thing, and I still think Gotte is smiling on you.”

“I don’t expect much of Gotte. Either He’ll decide to help me, or He won’t. Either He’ll smile on me today, or He won’t. I’m going to work hard either way. Gotte might be ignoring me or He might be trying to teach me a lesson, but He’s not going to be much help.”

“I’ve never heard anything quite so hopeless.”

He shook his head. “I’m just being realistic.”

Ada tapped his elbow with her spatula. She wanted to give him a gute whack, but that probably wouldn’t be very nice, even if he deserved it. “Your realism is nothing but a lack of faith, and I won’t stand for it.”

Enos folded his arms. “You can’t do much about it sitting on your high horse.”

“My high horse?”

“It’s easy to have faith if your faith’s never been tested. It’s easy to believe Gotte

cares about you when you don't have any problems."

She gave him her best you-are-such-an-idiot glare. "There you go again, making assumptions when what you know about me could fit into half a teaspoon. Do you think it was easy to have faith when my mamm died?"

"I guess not," he said grudgingly.

"That's right, Bub. Not easy at all."

"Did you just call me 'Bub'?"

"Maybe you should get off your high horse and give me a little credit for knowing things through hard experience. My mamm's death was hard, but I never doubted Gotte."

"I'm sorry about your mamm."

"Don't say you're sorry. Just quit being such a bonehead."

"Bonehead?" He pursed his lips as if trying not to smile. "Why did you call me 'Bub'? Is it an insult?"

She growled. "The biggest insult in the world. You're a Bub because you can't see past the end of your nose."

"Now you're making assumptions about me, Babs. I see very well past the end of my nose, and I see that if I don't want to lose this farm, I'm going to have to work very hard. Gotte won't plow my fields for me."

Ada did her best to look wildly angry when all she wanted to do was laugh. "Did you

just call me Babs?”

“Jah, because you think you know everything, but what you know about me could fit in a medicine dropper.” He took off his hat and scoured his fingers through his hair. “I got up early to start on my fields, not to argue with you. I’m wasting all sorts of time, and Gotte does not smile on time wasters.”

She pressed her fingers to her forehead and quit fighting a smile. “You are the most difficult man I’ve ever met, and that’s saying something.”

“I hope it isn’t a contest, because you are not the most difficult woman I’ve ever met.”

She certainly hoped not. Enos’s own mother won that award. “Of course I’m not, and to prove it, I’ve asked Beth to come over this morning and help me plant your potatoes.”

His eyebrows shot up his forehead. She had managed to surprise him. “You’re going to plant my potatoes?”

“You work too hard, and I’m getting tired of romance books.” That wasn’t entirely true. She adored romance books, but reading was folly when Enos needed her help.

His eyes bored a hole through her skull. “I haven’t bought the seed potatoes yet.” He hung his head. Ada didn’t like seeing that sort of dejection on a man as strong and proud as Enos. “You might as well know. I spent my last penny on alfalfa seed, and now it might go to waste because I don’t have time to plant it.”

Much as she hated knowing Enos was discouraged, Ada bit down on her tongue to keep from giving away all her secrets. “I had to order alfalfa seed for my dat, so I ordered seed potatoes for you. You can pay me after harvest.”

She had never seen him quite so ferhoodled . “You . . . you . . . ordered . . . but why?”

“Gotte smiles on those who work hard, and you work harder than anyone I know. Besides, I didn’t want all our hard work plowing to go to waste.”

“That’s . . . very nice of you,” he said, as if she’d knocked the wind out of him. No doubt Enos was so surprised because no one in his own family treated him with a shred of kindness.

She pointed toward her house. “You’ll have to come and help me fetch the seed potatoes. They’re heavy, and I only have one wheelbarrow.”

His face glowed with gratitude, and he jumped the fence in a single fluid, athletic motion. “Show me.”

“That was impressive,” she said. “You might yet have a career in gymnastics.”

Enos drew his brows together as his gaze focused over Ada’s shoulder.

Ada turned and squinted in the dim light. Right on time, a procession of horses, men, and farm equipment turned off the highway and made their way down the road. She could finally give free rein to her smile. “ Ach . I guess I’ll have to get the seed potatoes myself. You’re going to be busy.”

“Who is it?”

Menno was driving the four-horse team and wagon at the very front with Clay sitting next to him. Ada waved her arm back and forth to get their attention, but it was still a bit too dark for them to see her. “It’s Menno and Clay with Levi and his brudereren . I think Amos Burkholder was planning to bring his sons and three teams of four. Cathy, Mary, and Esther are coming to feed everybody at noon. You should have

plenty of help. I hate to say I told you so, but if this doesn't convince you that Gotte is smiling on you, I don't know what will."

He stood completely still and absolutely silent. She glanced at him, and the intense fire in his eyes knocked the wind out of her. He shot out his arms, wrapped them tightly around Ada, and planted a swift and decisive kiss on her lips. She couldn't have been more surprised if the angels had shown up to escort her to heaven.

He let go of her and stepped back, which seemed a completely unnecessary gesture. Ada sort of, kind of, enjoyed the feel of his arms around her. Was that wrong? And did she care? He didn't seem to regret kissing her, which would have been Ada's first thought. She always worried what the bishop would say. But looking at him, she wouldn't have been surprised if he did it again. That was how intensely he was studying her face.

"You never cease to amaze me," he said.

"Me? Clay and Menno are the ones you should thank."

He chuckled, a rare and beautiful sound. "Forget it, Ada. I'm not kissing either of them."

The look on his face made Ada laugh. "That's not what I meant."

"That's not what I meant either. Who else but you would camp on my farm, then enlist the entire gmayna to help me plant it? You want to be tough and stubborn. You swing that spatula around like a weapon, but you have the most loving heart I've ever known."

"You just don't know enough people," Ada said, but her heart thumped wildly at his praise.

All kissing and conversations were over. Menno pulled even with them and whooped a greeting. Clay jumped down from the wagon and jogged to them. “Gute to see you, Ada.” He shook Enos’s hand.

“Denki for coming,” Enos said, with a slight hitch in his voice.

Clay grinned and shrugged. “I’m mostly dead weight because I’m not real good at driving a team yet. I’m here for brawn and moral support. My pitching skills are completely worthless on a farm. Menno can drive a team with his eyes closed.” He propped his hands on his hips. “We’ve got three teams, three no-till planters, and twelve men. We’ll be able to plant your field and milk your cow by the end of the day.”

Enos’s eyes glistened. “The gute news is that I don’t have a cow.”

“Even better,” Clay said. “Show us where you want us.”

Enos motioned Menno, then Amos and Freeman to the east side of his property where they could easily drive their teams and equipment into the back fields. Ada probably wouldn’t see him again until lunchtime.

Clay put a brotherly arm around Ada and gave her a squeeze. “I saw that kiss.”

“You did not!”

“Yes, I did, and I did a little cheer in my own head.” He raised his fists in the air. “We’ve got spirit, yes, we do. We’ve got spirit, how ’bout you?”

Ada laughed and cuffed him on the shoulder. “None of your Englischer traditions around here.”

He pretended she'd seriously injured his arm, but Clay was as muscle-bound as Enos. She couldn't even make a dent. He brushed off his shoulder as if getting rid of a piece of lint. "So are you guys a thing?"

Ada rolled her eyes. "I don't know what that means."

"Are you dating? Do you like him? I'm undecided, but Esther and Mary think you kind of like him. Beth thinks you're madly in love."

She was definitely not madly in love, but she felt so giddy, she could barely form a sentence. Surely that didn't have anything to do with the kiss and everything to do with the fact that Enos would get his field planted today.

"We're . . ." It had been many days since she had considered Enos an enemy, but she didn't quite know what they were to each other. "We're adversaries. How can I like my adversary?"

"That is a very fancy word, Ada. Adversaries don't usually go around kissing each other."

"He kissed me," she protested, but such weak reasoning wouldn't convince Clay of anything.

He leaned closer as if to hear her better. "And did you like it?"

"He caught me by surprise."

"But did you like it?"

"It happened so fast," Ada said.

Clay groaned loudly. “You are avoiding my question, dear sister.”

“Is it working?”

He laughed. “It’s making me more and more suspicious every second. I’ve changed my vote. I’m going with Beth. You’re madly in love.”

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Enos stood and threw his empty water bottle and his napkin in the garbage bag Cathy had tied to a camp chair. “Thank you for the sandwich, Cathy. Thank you for feeding everybody today.”

Cathy lounged in her deluxe camp chair, complete with cup holder, tote, and footrest, wearing her sunglasses and bright pink sweatshirt. She waved away Enos’s gratitude. “No need to thank me. I didn’t do much but drive the food here.” She pointed to Esther and Mary. “Mary felt much better this morning, so she and Esther made all the sandwiches. It was Ada’s idea to feed everybody lunch. You’ve all been working very hard out there.”

Enos’s eyes flashed with the intensity he’d shown right before he’d kissed her this morning. Ada pressed her lips together to keep from smiling at the memory. “Thank you, all,” he said, his gaze riveted to Ada’s face. “My throat is going to get sore from all the thanks I need to express. I just can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done for me today.”

Mary, Esther, and Cathy had arrived almost an hour ago with the prepared sandwiches, assorted bags of chips, and a case of bottled water to feed the men who were helping plant Enos’s field. Ada and Beth and Sadie Sensenig had spent the morning planting the seed potatoes and covering them with muck and dirt. Sadie was a little too chatty for Ada’s liking, but she was also a cheerful and hard worker, and she knew everything there was to know about planting potatoes. Ada would take Sadie’s help anytime.

“It looks like you’re making great progress,” Esther said, holding little Benny on her lap while trying to feed him some baby food.

Enos seemed reluctant to take his eyes off Ada. “Thanks to Levi and Clay and the others.”

Sadie sat in one of the camp chairs feeding cheese puffs to Junior. “My whole life is potatoes. I can plant them with my eyes closed.”

Enos brushed his hands down his trousers. “I need to get back to the field. Lord willing, we’ll be done planting hours before sunset.” Uncertainty pinched at his mouth. “Ada, will you see if my mamm might like something to eat?”

A heaviness of knowing settled between them. Ada didn’t want to talk to Tabitha any more than Enos wanted Tabitha to talk to her, but Ada knew her Christian duty. “I will see if she’d like a sandwich.”

Enos nodded, a thousand pounds of gratitude in that small gesture. “Denki . I’ve got to get back.” He jogged around the side of the house and disappeared.

Esther smoothed her hand down little Benny’s hair and glanced at Ada. “Who’s going to knock on the door?”

Cathy folded her arms as if settling into her chair for a long winter. “Not me. I don’t have the stomach for it today.”

Beth and Sadie looked at each other as if expecting the other one to volunteer. “I’d do it,” Sadie said, “but Enos’s mamm doesn’t even know me. She might think I’m trying to kidnap her or something.”

“I’ll go,” Ada said. Tabitha knew her best, and she had a thick skin where Tabitha was concerned. She ambled up the porch steps and knocked loudly on Enos’s door.

It took Tabitha almost a full minute to answer. She stared at Ada from behind the

screen. “You’re doing a terrible job of getting rid of Enos.”

“Tabitha, we made sandwiches. The men just finished eating. We thought you might like to come outside and eat with us.”

Tabitha peered out the screen door. “That woman out there called me a hypocrite. If she goes away, I’ll come out.”

Tabitha didn’t know how hard it was to get Ada to back down. “Cathy is not leaving, so you can either come out and abide her presence, or I can bring you a sandwich you can eat in the house.”

Tabitha thought about it so long, Ada wondered if maybe she’d fallen asleep standing up. “I refuse to sit by her.”

“We have plenty of camp chairs set up. You can sit where you want.”

“What kind of sandwiches do you have?”

“Chicken salad.”

“With grapes?”

“Jah ,” Ada said. “They’re very gute .”

“At least someone knows how to make a proper chicken salad sandwich.” To Ada’s surprise, Tabitha grabbed her black coat from the hook and picked up her cane propped by the door. “You’re going to have to help me down the stairs. Enos purposefully bought a house with stairs because he wants to make things as hard on me as possible.”

“Have you ever considered that Enos is doing his best to be a gute son?”

Tabitha sniffed. “A gute son would take me back to Pennsylvania and not make me live in the desert. My skin is drying up like a prune.”

Ada wanted to point out that if Tabitha stopped puckering her lips in a sour expression, she’d look less like a prune. Instead, she offered her arm and ignored Tabitha’s complaints. Ada suspected that Enos did much the same thing all the time. There was no arguing with Tabitha, and Ada would not give Tabitha any power over her feelings. It had been a perfectly wunderbarr day, and Ada intended to keep it that way.

They hobbled down the steps and over to the little circle of chairs where Esther, Beth, Sadie, Mary, and Cathy were sitting. Ada helped Tabitha to a chair and then sat between Tabitha and Cathy as if they were two squabbling children at church. Beth held the plate of leftover sandwiches in her lap. “Here you go, Tabitha,” she said, handing Tabitha a sandwich and a napkin.

Tabitha eyed the sandwich suspiciously. “Are you as gute at making chicken salad sandwiches as you are at making yummasetti?”

Beth blushed. “Ach , nae . Esther made these.”

Tabitha’s gaze flicked toward Esther. “At least you know well enough to add grapes.”

Esther seemed confused as to how she should react. “Uh, denki . I like chicken salad with grapes. It feels more healthy.”

Tabitha took a miniscule bite, as if making sure the sandwich was edible. She motioned toward Winnie and Junior playing in the dirt next to their mamm ’s chair. “These yours?”

Esther was obviously uncomfortable with Tabitha's sour disposition, but her face always lit up when she talked about her children. "This is Benny, Junior, and Winnie."

Tabitha took another teeny bite. "Winnie is fancy for an Amish name, ain't not?"

Esther cleared her throat. "Nae," she said, and left it at that. Winnie was short for Winter, which was altogether too fancy. Winnie had been named by her biological mater, Esther's schwester, Ivy. Ivy jumped the fence, got pregnant, and abandoned Winnie with Esther five years ago. Ivy had let Esther adopt Winnie, and Ivy eventually came back to the gmayna. No doubt, Esther didn't want Tabitha judging Winnie or Ivy or Esther's family. It was best to let the past bury itself.

Enos's mamm pinched another bird-sized bite off her sandwich. "The chicken is dry."

Esther pressed her lips together so tightly, they turned white. "I'm better at making quilts."

Cathy brushed some imaginary crumbs from her sweatshirt. "No need to defend yourself, Esther. These sandwiches are perfection. You're good at everything except holding your temper and making oatmeal, and I'm proud to have you as a friend."

"It's a sin to be proud." Tabitha seemed to love nothing better than to point out how sinful everyone else was.

Cathy stuffed a whole chip in her mouth. "It's not a sin for me to be proud. I can be as proud as I want, and my pastor doesn't care. It's a nice little perk of being a Methodist."

Tabitha looked way down her nose at Cathy. "Enjoy life while you can, Miss High-and-Mighty, because the proud go straight to hell."

“At least my feet will finally be warm,” Cathy said.

Tabitha caught her breath. “You don’t care if you go to hell?”

Cathy picked up her giant purse and fished through it. “Oh, I care about the next life, but I don’t care about your opinion of where I’ll end up. You’re not God, though I’m sure you think you could do a much better job than He’s doing.”

Tabitha was offended to the core. She clutched her chest as if she felt a heart attack coming on. “It’s blasphemy to say such things.”

Mary suddenly found the courage to speak, probably because she hated conflict and would do anything to put a stop to it. “Tabitha, would you like a bottle of water?”

Cathy pulled an orange sucker from her purse. “Here, Tabitha, eat this and stop talking.”

Tabitha stared at the sucker resentfully. “Sugar makes my altitude headaches worse.”

Cathy leaned forward as if delighted at the thought of altitude sickness. “I’m sure you have a headache every day.”

Tabitha sensed the sarcasm in Cathy’s voice. “Yes, I do, and it’s shameful of you to rejoice in my suffering.”

“It’s only right that you experience some of the discomfort you seem so eager to dish out to everyone else.”

Ada cringed. Cathy didn’t know how to hold her tongue, and she had a talent for saying what everyone else didn’t dare say, but such contention would only come back to hurt Enos. “Um, Tabitha, would you like some chips? We have small bags of

potato or corn chips.”

Tabitha glared at Cathy. “You have no idea how I suffer.”

“There might be one more package of Doritos,” Ada said.

Mary proved she was more of a true Christian than Ada could ever hope to be. “What can we do to help you, Tabitha? We want to help make your life here in Colorado a happy one.”

“Well, for starters”—she motioned toward Beth—“don’t let that girl near an oven ever again.”

In concern, Ada glanced at Beth. Instead of looking upset, Beth and Sadie sat with their heads together, their lips curled, and their eyes bright with amusement, as if they were about to burst into laughter. Ach , vell , at least Tabitha hadn’t upset either of them.

Cathy looked over the rim of her sunglasses. “No need to be rude.”

“You’ve been nothing but rude since I sat down,” Tabitha snapped.

Mary let out a mousy ahem . “Anything else?” she said.

Tabitha tossed her barely eaten sandwich into the garbage bag like a pro basketball player. Ada was grudgingly impressed. “Enos won’t listen to me. Nobody will listen to me, but the only thing I want is to go home, back to Pennsylvania and the people who truly love me. I have friends and grandchildren there. They need me. They care about me.”

Cathy seemed to soften around the edges. “I like my grandchildren better than I like

my own children.”

Tabitha paused and studied Cathy’s face. “Who will teach them proper behavior if not for me? Who will help them to be righteous and make sure they walk the straight and narrow? Lilith and Ardy are acceptable housekeepers, but they don’t know the first thing about rearing children. There’s no one else to do it by me. I’ve got to go back.”

Not for the world would Ada tell Tabitha she wasn’t wanted in Pennsylvania. Enos was willing to let her have her illusions, and Ada had to respect his wishes, even if it meant Tabitha believed Enos was the cause of all her problems. Even if she hated him for the rest of her life.

Tabitha pointed a gnarled finger at Ada. “For my sake, you’ve got to stop helping him with his farm, or I’ll never get back to Pennsylvania.”

“But doesn’t Enos deserve to be happy?” Beth asked. “He wants to farm here in Colorado.”

Tabitha sat back and folded her arms. “He doesn’t believe it, but he can be just as happy in Bird-In-Hand. And what is happiness compared to honoring your father and mother? He should put my needs above his own selfish desires. He can farm with my other sons and live in Zeb’s basement. He won’t bother anybody there.”

Mary’s gaze flicked to Ada. “Maybe he wants his own home and farm. Maybe he wants to get married someday.”

Tabitha scoffed. “Who would marry him? He’s a nobody. Thirty-five years old, with a missing foot and no comeliness.”

No comeliness? Enos was the most attractive man Ada had ever met. Tabitha’s

disregard made Ada's teeth hurt.

Beth's eyebrows inched up her forehead. "Maybe you could go back, and he could stay here."

That was impossible, but Enos had told Ada those details in confidence. She wouldn't betray his trust. Let Beth make her little plans. They would all fall through in the end.

"I don't dare travel alone, and Enos refuses to take me."

Ada nodded as if she had all the sympathy in the world for Tabitha. "It would be impossible for him to leave the farm long enough to take you back."

Tabitha's scowl drooped. "It's Enos's fault I'm here. Zeb is too unselfish. He insisted I come to Colorado because he said Enos would need me, but Zeb and die kinner need me more. I could go back and live with them."

Beth got more and more excited. "Enos is doing fine. You can tell Zeb he doesn't have to be unselfish any longer."

Cathy unwrapped her orange sucker and popped it in her mouth. Then she pulled it out and pinned Tabitha with a serious look. "Would you leave and never come back, even if Enos got married? Would you promise not to come to the wedding?"

Ada didn't know why her face was burning, but Cathy was talking about more than a hypothetical marriage.

It all seemed too much for Tabitha. Her glare returned full force. "I don't know about you Methodists, but we Amish don't make promises. 'Swear not at all,' the good Lord says."

Ada tried to let everyone down as gently and discreetly as possible. “I’m afraid you won’t be going back to Pennsylvania to live, Tabitha. Everything has been carefully arranged by your family so everyone will be as comfortable as possible. Maybe it’s time to submit to God’s will and be content where He has placed you.”

Everyone but Mary looked horrified, but they didn’t know what she knew.

“Ach , Ada,” Beth whined. “You don’t have any imagination.”

Tabitha looked at Ada as if she was her worst enemy. “God placed me in Bird-In-Hand. I will not be content until I’m back there.”

Cathy took another lick of her sucker. “Don’t resist the quilt magic, my dear. It’s a losing battle.”

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A da stepped back, leaned on her hoe, and gazed at her tent. It really was in the way, interrupting her perfect rows of little potato plants that had just peeked their leaves out of the ground. Enos had dug deep trenches around the tent so the irrigation water could go down the rows without flooding her tent. It had been a very nice thing for him to do, especially since her tent was in the way of everything and he told her daily how much he wished she'd pack up and sleep in her own bed at night.

She'd weeded the entire six acres in a week with her hoe, trowel, and durable leather gloves. Next time she would use the plow, but Enos wasn't there to help her, and they didn't have an extra horse.

Ada tried her best not to think about the kitchen sink and the toilets and the sticky floors that had been neglected far too long at home. Apparently, Beth didn't know what a scrub brush was, and washing dishes was completely beyond her ability. The mop sagged dejectedly in the corner, as if it felt sad it hadn't been used for weeks. Thank Derr Herr, Dat was taking sufficient care of the farm and Beth was at least milking and feeding the goats. But neither Joanna or Mary were feeling well enough to help, so no goat cheese was getting made, the bathrooms were a disaster, and Dat was probably eating cold cereal at every meal.

Ada gritted her teeth. Nothing but her deep concern for Enos kept her sleeping in the tent and ignoring the house. She couldn't abandon him. Enos needed her, and she was going to stay put for as long as she could be useful to him, even if mold and cobwebs took over Dat and Beth's living space.

Ada took off her gloves, wiped her brow, and squinted into the west where the sun was just sinking below the mountain peaks. Enos was going to join her for dinner

tonight around the campfire, and they were cooking tinfoil dinners and Dutch oven apple cobbler. Ada had invited Tabitha, hoping she wouldn't want to come, and she'd been pleased when Tabitha had told Enos that she would make her own dinner.

Tabitha's shouting was getting worse. Every time Enos went into his house, Ada would hear Tabitha yelling and carrying on as if Enos was the devil himself. The more improvements Enos made on the farm, the more upset Tabitha became. Ada had learned to tune Tabitha out. Her scolding was just noise, like the wind trying to topple a solid brick wall. But Ada wasn't the one who mattered. Did Tabitha's words pierce Enos to the core, or was he able to shrug them off as Ada was?

Ada certainly hoped so. It was painful to think that Enos carried wounds that would never heal because Tabitha kept opening them.

Enos had been out in the alfalfa field all day, so Ada hadn't heard any yelling earlier, but the worst of it usually started up at about sunset when Enos went in to make dinner.

Ada dipped her hoe in the bucket of water next to her tent and rinsed off the caked-on dirt. Then she dried the hoe with a cleaning cloth and buffed it down with a steel wool pad. She rubbed a thin coat of oil on the blade to keep it from rusting, then laid it in her tent with her other tools. She shared her sleeping space with a hoe, a shovel, two pair of gloves, three buckets, and a garden trowel.

She quickly built a fire and set two big logs on the kindling. They'd need a lot of coals for the Dutch oven and the tinfoil dinners. Ada ducked into the tent again and retrieved the cooler she'd taken from the house earlier today. It contained all the food supplies she needed to make dinner. Maybe she should have invited Dat and Beth to eat with them this evening. Anything was better than Lucky Charms. Ada felt terribly selfish, but she wanted to have Enos all to herself tonight. She'd invite Dat and Beth tomorrow night for sure and certain.

Ada pulled the ground beef from the cooler and heard hurried footfalls behind her. She turned, and her smile died on her lips when she saw Enos's face.

"Have you seen my mamm?"

"Your mamm? She's not in the house?"

Enos's shirt was soaked with sweat and covered in dirt. He'd just come from the fields. He clutched a piece of paper in his fist. "I went inside to shower, and she wasn't anywhere." He shoved the paper toward Ada. "She left me this, but I just can't . . . I just can't believe it."

Ada uncrinkled the paper and did her best to read the uneven handwriting. "Enos, you have disappointed me over and over again, and I can't wait any longer. I'm going home. Ada's sister and that Englisch lady have found a way to get me back to Pennsylvania." Ada gasped. "I'm leaving Colorado forever and going to live with Zeb. He will take gute care of me—better care than you have ever taken."

Ada pressed her palm to her forehead. "Is this true? Is she really gone?"

"I don't know." Enos studied her face. "Do you truly not know anything about this?"

Ada drew back. "Me? Of course not." Her tongue turned to dust. Beth and Cathy had asked Tabitha some very specific, very pointed questions when they'd last been together. "Ach, du lieva. That day we were all sitting here after lunch."

"What about it?"

"Cathy wanted your mamm to promise she would never come back to Colorado."

Enos's face blanched. "I don't understand."

“They were sniping at each other.”

“Cathy and my mamm ?”

“Jah . Cathy has no trouble telling anyone exactly how she feels.”

“My mamm has the same problem,” Enos said.

“My schwesteren and Esther and Cathy were all sitting there, and Mary asked Tabitha what would help her feel more at home in Colorado. Tabitha said what she always says, that she wouldn’t be happy until she was back in Pennsylvania. I think Cathy said something like, ‘If you get to Pennsylvania, do you promise never to come back?’ It wonders me if she was planning something even then.”

“Why would Cathy say something like that?”

Ada decided not to mention anything about the Bachelor’s Puzzle quilt blocks or Cathy’s ridiculous notion that Ada was going to be stuck with Tabitha as a mater -in-law. She cleared her throat. “ Ach , vell , your mater hasn’t exactly endeared herself to anyone in Colorado. Cathy feels sorry for you. Maybe she thought she was doing you a favor.”

Enos looked anything but pleased that Cathy was trying to be thoughtful. “We’ve got to talk to Cathy. Or Beth. Was Beth the one Mamm was talking about in her note?”

Ada shoved the ground beef back into the cooler. “ Cum . Let’s go find her.” They marched across the field and into Ada’s yard where the goats were playing while Pepper took a nap. Pepper woke up when Ada opened the back gate, but all Ada had time to do was wave hello and pat Blue on the head. They went up the porch steps, and Ada threw open the back door with such force, it banged against the wall behind it. Beth caught her breath and turned with a jerk. Ada’s heart plummeted to her toes.

Beth's fingers were goopy with white paste. She was making cheese even though Ada had expressly told her not to. Not only that, but the kitchen was even dirtier than it had been this afternoon when Ada had come home to use the bathroom and get a Band-Aid for a blister. Beth wasn't just making cheese. She was making cheese with raspberry dust, another sin Ada had commanded her not to commit.

"Beth, what are you doing?"

Beth shoved her hands behind her back, trying to hide what Ada had already seen. "I'm sorry, Ada," she said sheepishly, "but I'm not really sorry. I just couldn't let all this goat's milk go to waste."

"Beth, you never listen. I told you not to make goat cheese unless I can supervise, and what have you been doing all day? The kitchen is a mess. You're going to make Dat sick in these unsanitary conditions."

"Beth," Enos said, his eyes flashing with irritation. "Where is my mamm?"

His question pulled Ada back to the most important thing. She balled her hand into a fist to keep from reaching out and brushing a smudge of flour from Beth's cheek. "What do you know about Enos's mater and Cathy Larsen?"

Beth caught her bottom lip between her teeth and backed into the counter behind her. "I know they don't like each other."

Enos took off his hat and strangled the brim with both hands. "Do you know where my mater is? I'm concerned for her safety. She doesn't know the area very well, and I don't want her to get hurt."

Beth frowned as if she thought Enos was being unreasonable. "Ach, she's not going to get hurt. Cathy made all the arrangements. She's perfectly safe."

Ada hooked her fingers around the back of one of the kitchen chairs. “Beth,” she said, putting a heavy dose of reprimand in her tone. “What have you done?”

Beth seemed almost puzzled by Ada’s reaction. “I don’t know what either of you are so upset about. Tabitha wanted to go back to Pennsylvania, and we all wanted her to go.” Her eyes flashed with a reprimand of her own. “Don’t look at me like that, Ada. We all know you wanted it too. You’re always complaining about how mean Tabitha is to Enos.”

Ada didn’t dare meet Enos’s eye, but she felt him tense beside her . . . ach , vell , he got even more tense than he already was. She should have been a little less free with her opinion about Enos’s mamm . Every bit of gossip hurt Enos.

Beth wiped her hands on a paper towel. “Tabitha said she’d be happier in Pennsylvania, so Cathy and I decided to solve everyone’s problems.”

“Where is she?” Enos was barely holding on to his calm. Ada could hear it in his voice.

Apparently, Beth could too. She picked at her apron. “I don’t know why you’re so mad. You should be thanking us. Ada said you didn’t have time to drive Tabitha back to Pennsylvania. We just made life easier for both of you.” She could see Ada wasn’t convinced. “Do you remember Tyson Carruthers?”

“Ada’s representation?” Enos said, a double dose of irritation in his voice.

Beth grinned and nodded. “That one. He’s moving his schwester to New York City because she’s starting school there. Cathy asked if they could take Tabitha as far as Bird-in-Hand. Tabitha didn’t want to travel alone, and you didn’t have time to go with her. Cathy said it was a win-win, whatever that means. They left this morning, and Tyson is going to drop her off in Pennsylvania on Monday. Cathy is even paying

for Tabitha's hotel rooms along the way."

"That was nice of her," Enos said, his voice stiff and resentful.

Beth must not have recognized the anger in his tone. "I guess she has a soft spot for both Tabitha and you."

"How's that?"

"She said you'd be happier without Tabitha yelling at you all the time, and she said your mamm would be happier in Bird-In-Hand with all her grandchildren. Cathy just wants everybody to be happy."

Ada couldn't believe that for a minute. No doubt Cathy wanted Tabitha gone for several reasons, but one of them had to do with a certain quilt block and how Cathy thought she was protecting Ada from, apparently, a fate worse than death.

Beth lifted her hand and casually slid a half-rolled log of goat cheese farther behind her. "I like that about Cathy. She cares about people, and she's loyal to her friends. She said we girls have to stick together, even a girl like Tabitha, who doesn't like anybody, and would never take a favor, even if it had a handle."

Enos's anger was like an ice-cold shard of glass. "Since Cathy cares so much about people's feelings, why didn't she ask me what I wanted?"

Beth opened and closed her mouth like a fish gasping for air. "I guess she assumed you'd want your mamm to go back to Pennsylvania where she is happier and where she can't make you miserable."

"How do you or Cathy know anything about how I feel? Mamm and I were getting along just fine. I'm perfectly happy the way things are."

Ada didn't want to believe Enos was a liar, but the truth was so obvious, she almost called him out on it. In addition to alienating all her neighbors, Tabitha was most certainly making Enos completely miserable. Ada saw it every day in the way Enos carried himself after one of his mamm 's lectures. She saw it in the way he worked his fields, the way he cared for his horse, even the way he looked at Ada across the campfire, as if his burdens were on the verge of crushing him.

Beth acted as if she hadn't done anything worse than change into a clean pair of stockings. "I'm froh to hear that, but we all know you'll be much happier when Tabitha is gone, and Tabitha will be much happier too. Cathy says you can thank her as soon as you're done being mad, but I don't see how anyone could be mad about what she did."

"Beth, how could you?" Ada said. "Why don't you ever stop to think how your choices could hurt someone else?"

Enos's eyes flashed with pain and worry and a thousand different fears. He was a man of action, but it was obvious he had no idea what to do. "Beth, may I use your cell phone?"

Beth turned a bright shade of pink. Everybody knew she had a cell phone, but she was sort of embarrassed about it, like a teenager who still played with dolls. "I guess. I'll go get it."

"Who are you going to call?" Ada asked.

"Tyson Carruthers. Maybe I can talk him into bringing my mater back before they get too far away."

"Do you know his number?"

The ghost of a smile played at Enos's lips. "He gave it to me that day he pretended to be your lawyer. I memorized it."

"You memorized it? Why?"

He shrugged. "I'm gute with numbers. You never know when you're going to need a random phone number."

Beth was soon back with her cell phone, which she kept on her bedroom windowsill attached to a solar charger. She handed it to Enos. "Who do you want to call?"

Enos punched some numbers into the phone and put it to his ear. "Hallo ? Tyson? Yes, this is Enos Hoover. Do you remember me? That's right, you impersonated a lawyer. You can get in real trouble for that." Enos paused.

Beth glared at Enos. "He was doing me a favor. Don't even think about tattling on him."

Enos gave Beth a pointed look any ill-tempered teacher would have been proud of. "Can you be quiet for more than one minute?"

Beth folded her arms like a petulant child. "I'm just saying."

"Yes, Tyson. Is my mater with you?" Enos dug his fingers into the back of his neck. "Hold on. I want to put you on speaker." Enos pushed the button, then peered at Beth. "This was your plan. Can you talk my mater out of it?"

Beth shook her head vigorously. "Cathy planned the whole thing. All I did was ask Tyson to drive Tabitha to Pennsylvania. Tabitha hates me. She thinks I'm a bad cook. She says I'm just a silly girl with no talent and no faith."

They heard Tyson's voice loud and clear. "Hey, hello? Are you still there?"

"Um, hi, Tyson. This is Beth," she stuttered.

"Hey, Beth! We're making good time. We just passed through Manhattan, Kansas. A third of the way there."

Enos glanced at Ada. Manhattan was a long way away.

"Is Tabitha Hoover with you?" Beth asked.

There was a pause on the other end, and Tyson whispered, "Yeah. But thank goodness, she's asleep." Another long pause. "I don't want to be rude, but she's a drag to travel with. We try to listen to music, and she threatens to throw up. Then she complains about everything. I mean, it isn't the newest car, but we're doing her a favor, ya know? I mean, she could be little more grateful. Well, not more grateful, because she isn't grateful at all."

Enos listened stone-faced, but Ada could guess what he was thinking. "Can I talk to her?"

There was a soft groan. "I hate to disturb her. Can I call you back when she wakes up?"

Enos lifted his chin. "No. I need to talk to her now. Either that or you can turn your car around and bring her back to Byler immediately."

"Hey, man, we're nine hours out. We're not turning around."

Enos grimaced as if he'd been poked with a pin. "Okay then, I need to talk to her."

There was a thud and some shuffling, then Tabitha's voice on the other end. "I'm not talking to him. He has never listened to me, and he won't listen now. He can beg all he wants, but I'm going to live with Zeb and Lilith and my grandchildren."

Tyson came on the line again. "Uh, sorry, man. She doesn't want to talk to you."

Enos took off his hat and scrubbed his fingers through his hair. "Tyson, put me on speaker so she can hear me. She doesn't need to say anything, but I need to talk to her."

"Okay," Tyson said. "You're on, and I've got you turned up all the way."

Enos spoke loudly and clearly into the phone. "Mamm, I know you don't want to hear this, but there's nothing for you in Pennsylvania. Can you just . . . can you just wait in Kansas City, and I'll come get you?"

Tabitha must have reconsidered her silence. "You're jealous of Zeb. That's why you want to keep me in Colorado where I can't see my grandchildren or shower my other sons with the love you don't deserve. I've already told you a thousand times that I want to live next to my family."

That was certainly true. She'd told him at least a thousand times. As far as Ada could see, she spoke of nothing else.

"I'm never coming back, and no amount of talking on your part will convince me. You don't deserve it, but I hope you'll have a gute life." The line went dead.

Enos stared at the screen. "She hung up on me." He seemed surprised, though Ada was puzzled why he would have expected anything different.

The sense of being lost was written all over his face, as if he was too confused to

even put one foot in front of the other. Ada wanted to cry. Beth looked as if she was on the verge of tears as well.

Ada reached out to Enos to . . . she wasn't sure what. Comfort him? Show him some sympathy? He pulled back to avoid her touch, and he might as well have slapped her hand away. She felt the rejection clear to her heart.

Enos went to the sink, filled a glass with water, and drank the whole thing. Then he bowed his head and fell silent. Was he praying? Had Cathy's meddling left him paralyzed? Ada and Beth stared at him, both wildly curious what he would do next. He lifted his head, set his empty glass on the counter, and squared his shoulders. When he turned around to face Beth and Ada, he had become a different person, his spine ramrod straight, his head held high, a look of calm resignation on his face. Ada's blood coursed through her veins. This was the Enos she had grown so attached to, resolute, strong, and single-minded.

He pulled a chair far out from under the cluttered table and sat, motioning to Beth and Ada. "Please, will you sit?" he said, his emotions under complete control.

Ada sat on his left. Beth hesitantly sat on his right. He leaned forward, propping his elbows on his knees and gazing at Beth with something akin to kindness on his face. "Beth, you have no idea what you've done, but I don't hold it against you. You're young, and Jesus said to forgive everyone. What's done is done, and there's no going back. Your regret and my anger won't bring my mamm back."

Beth didn't look as if she regretted anything, but Enos could believe what he wanted. "I appreciate that, Enos." No doubt Beth still thought she'd done the right thing, and she believed Enos would come to believe it too.

"I need to get my mamm home before her whole world falls apart. You and Cathy have put me on the road to financial ruin. I must leave my farm and scrape together

bus fare to get to Pennsylvania, and I barely have enough to buy food for me and feed for my horse.”

“ Ach ,” Beth said. “I don’t see why you have to go get her. Why can’t you just stay here and she just stay there? It would be easier for everybody, and you’d save a lot of money.”

Enos sighed, as if giving up trying to make Beth understand. “I apologize. There is no need to burden you with my financial situation. My problems are my problems, not anyone else’s. I would appreciate it if you didn’t interfere in my family’s business ever again.” He stood up. “I’ve got to go.”

He walked to the back door with purposeful steps. “Ada, could you feed and water my horse, Goshen, while I’m gone? I have enough hay for a week. Lord willing I’ll be back before it runs out.”

Ada nodded. “Of course. We’ll buy feed if we need to.” There was still so much to say and no time to say it.

“I can pay you ten dollars a day to look after him. I hope that’s enough.” He walked out the door and closed it behind him.

Ada’s anger erupted like a five-alarm fire. Ten dollars a day!

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Enos Hoover was the most insensitive, proud, horrible man in the whole world, and she wasn't letting him get away without giving him a piece of her mind. Ada jumped from her chair, threw open the door, and ran down the back porch steps hot on Enos's heels. "Enos Hoover, how dare you!"

He turned around, shock completely overtaking his features. "How dare I what?"

She was so mad, she poked him hard in the chest with her index finger. "How dare you!"

He wrapped his hand around her wrist. "What are you doing?"

Pepper jumped to his feet and barked at Enos and then Ada and then both of them together. The goats ran around and around bleating and carrying on as if a coyote had gotten into the yard.

Ada yanked her wrist from Enos's grasp and almost fell backward. "How dare you pay me ten dollars a day to feed your horse."

He looked at her as if she was a crazy woman. "That's all I can afford, Ada, and I can't even really afford that."

She wanted to pull her hair out. She opted instead to try to fell him with her dirtiest look. "I'm your closest neighbor. I'm supposed to be your friend. You don't pay a friend to help you out. She does it because she likes you and wants to support you in your time of need. Do you have such a low opinion of me that you don't think I'd take care of Goshen unless you paid me?"

“I hate asking people for favors. I hate not pulling my weight.”

“Not pulling your weight? Enos, you pull ten times your weight plus four horses. I am your friend. There’s not much I can do, but when I can do it, I would appreciate it if you’d let me help. Has our friendship meant nothing to you? Am I no better than an employee? I’m so mad I could spit in your eye.”

“That doesn’t seem very friendly.”

“Oh, be quiet. You don’t know anything about anything.”

He dared to come close enough to wrap his hands around her upper arms. “If you’d stop throwing a fit, I’d be able to answer your twenty questions.”

“A fit? A fit ?” Ada nearly kicked over the goats’ water bucket before she realized that she was indeed throwing a fit. She stepped back and brushed an errant lock of hair from her face. She was better than this. She was a rational, no-nonsense, mature woman, and violence was not the answer, even if she wanted to kill Enos with her bare hands. He was too close. She shoved him away from her. “Ten dollars a day is probably the biggest insult I’ve ever heard. You, Enos Hoover, are the absolute worst.”

“The absolute worst what?”

She growled. “ Ach , it’s an expression Clay uses.”

“Ada, our friendship means everything to me, and I don’t want to take advantage of it.” He kneaded his forehead with the tips of his fingers. “You’re right. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“You were thinking that you are an island and that nobody cares about you.”

He nodded. "I'm sorry I offended you, Ada."

"You didn't offend me. I don't get offended."

"You could have fooled me."

She gave him the stink eye. "I'm not offended. I'm frustrated that you think you don't have a friend in the world."

Enos knelt down and gave Pepper a good pat. Pepper immediately stopped barking and leaned into Enos's hand. "No one except my dat has ever done anything for me without expecting something in return. It's easy to forget that not everyone is like my bruderen and my mamm."

Thank Derr Herr for that. Ada opened her mouth and let the words escape before she thought too hard about them. "Do you really have to go get your mamm?"

He narrowed his eyes. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Your mater and bruderen have despitefully used you over and over again. Your mater is so cruel, I can't stand the sound of her voice. Your bruderen have misused and mistreated you and have never cared about anything but themselves."

"That's why I need to take care of my mater. My bruderen don't care. She's a hard woman, but she deserves to be treated with respect and kindness, no matter how she treats me."

"But your bruderen need to learn that lesson too."

"Zeb doesn't have the patience," he said, "and John can't spare the time. Mamm doesn't realize it, but they will only disappoint her."

Ada laid a hand on Enos's arm. "Then let them disappoint her. You can't protect her from reality, especially when she is so mean to you. Your mater is determined to be miserable in Colorado. In Pennsylvania at least she thinks she'll be happy."

He swiped his hand across his mouth. "At least until my bruderen show their true colors. Her heart will break in two."

"And what about your heart? Your mater has already shattered it. Doesn't your happiness mean anything? Your mater will never be happy in Colorado, and you will never be happy if she is here. She's not going to be happy in Pennsylvania, but it would be gute for her to find that out on her own. Quit letting her hurt you. It's time to hand that burden to your bruderen and live your own life."

"Lilith and Ardy won't stand for it, and that's what it comes down to."

"I don't know, maybe I would feel the same way if I were in their shoes, but they're passing their problem on to you and making you feel guilty about it."

He flinched as if she'd spit in his face. What had she done to elicit that sort of reaction? "Like you said, I don't know anything about anything, but I do know that Gotte commands us to honor our parents. I know what I have to do."

"She doesn't honor you, Enos, and you can't save her from herself. She will never see you as the gute son, even though you are the only son who is even trying. It's time to pick up the pieces of your life and let your mamm be responsible for hers."

He seemed to hear her words with increasing resentment. "What do you know about me and my family? You don't understand, and you never will." The bitterness in his voice made her step back. "You camp out on my farm for weeks, and you think you have the right to tell me how to live my life?"

Ada backed away from her righteous indignation. Enos wasn't listening. "I'm sorry if you think I'm trying to tell you how to live your life. I was just making an observation."

Enos wasn't one to lose his temper, but his cold, formal stare and stiff posture were almost worse, as if Ada and her opinions weren't worth his time, as if he was the superior person in every way, and she was an annoying gnat in his ear. "An observation?" he said coolly. "Let me make an observation. My mamm criticizes everything I do. That is true enough, but you treat Beth the same way. Nothing she does is right. She can't get a kind word from you no matter how many cheese logs she rolls or potato seeds she plants. Her toilets are never gute enough, and the kitchen is always too dirty for your critical eye."

He couldn't have surprised her more if he'd lashed her across the face. Was that truly what he thought of her? "I don't . . . that's not true. I love Beth."

"But you're always waiting for her to do something wrong. She makes cheese in secret because she knows you don't think she's capable. I know how that feels, Ada, and it's exhausting."

If it had been his plan to put her on the defensive, he'd succeeded. "Are you saying I'm just like your mamm ? Ach , how you must hate me."

He looked down at his feet. "I don't hate my mamm ."

Everything he didn't say knocked the wind out of her.

She stood there looking at him. He stood there looking at her, breathing heavily as if he'd just run five miles. Ada couldn't have said a word if her life depended on it.

He balled his hands into fists, his tension pulling tight across his shoulders. "Don't

trouble yourself about my horse. I'll find someone else to feed him while I'm away.”
And with that goodbye, he was gone. Out the gate and out of her life.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

Ada's legs could no longer support her. She plopped ungracefully to the ground, and Pepper nudged his nose against her cheek and whined pathetically. Ada put her arm around Pepper's neck and nuzzled her face against his soft fur. She had never felt so completely devastated.

Beth ran out the back door and down the steps, her apron flapping as she came. "Ada, what happened? Are you hurt? I looked out the window and saw you fall down. Ach, you look ill. Cum, let me help you." Beth, the helpless schwester who couldn't function without Ada, put her arms around Ada and raised her from the ground. Clucking like a mother hen, she led Ada into the house and pulled a chair out from under the table so she could sit. She got Ada a glass of water and handed it to her. "Drink this. What happened? Did Enos say something to upset you? Or was it me? I'm sorry about Tyson and Cathy. I truly thought you'd be froh Tabitha was gone."

Ada held up her hand to stop Beth from apologizing for anything else. Lately, all Beth did was apologize, and the blame fell squarely on Ada's shoulders. Enos had been unkind, but he'd also been right, and Ada thought she might never breathe normally again. "Beth, please don't. It's my fault. Everything is my fault." Heartbreak and regret overwhelmed her, and the dam broke. Tears streamed down her face.

Beth gasped and sat down next to Ada at the table, hooking an arm around her shoulder and leaning in so their heads were touching. "It's okay, Ada. Everything is going to be okay. Enos can hop on a bus in the morning and go straight to Pennsylvania."

"It's not that," Ada moaned.

Beth squeezed tighter. “What can I do? How can I help you?”

Beth had her faults, but she never seemed to have trouble loving anyone, even when they made themselves very unlovable. She never held a grudge, she was always trying to help someone, and she was so eager to please. “Oh, Beth,” Ada sobbed. “After how I’ve treated you, I don’t deserve your kindness.”

Beth pulled back and frowned in confusion. “How you’ve treated me? What do you mean by that?”

“Enos says I’m just like his mater .”

Beth flinched. “What? You’re nothing like his mater . She’s mean and spiteful and can’t say a word without criticizing something.”

Ada took a shaky breath. “Enos says that’s how I treat you.”

Beth pursed her lips and shook her head. “Well, that’s just silly. You don’t like the way I clean toilets, and you get irritated when I don’t make my bed, but I know you love me and that you’re just trying to help me be a better person.”

It was Ada’s turn to embrace Beth. “You are too gute , dear schwester , and I’ve never known anyone more forgiving, but I’m too hard on you, and we both know it. Will you forgive me?”

“Of course I forgive you, if you’ll forgive me for making a mess of your kitchen, putting raspberry dust on the cheese, and sticking my nose into your love life.”

Ada hooted. “My love life? What love life?”

Beth cracked a smile. “I just . . . I can’t stand the thought of Tabitha as your mater -

in-law.”

Ada groaned loudly. “Tabitha is not going to be my mater -in-law. Enos and I are about as far away from marriage as you can get. He’s very angry with me, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he never spoke to me again.” A sharp piece of glass pricked Ada’s heart.

Beth made a face. “Of course he’ll speak to you again. He loves you.”

Ada felt her face get warm, but whether from embarrassment or hope, she couldn’t tell. “He does not.”

“Ada,” Beth scolded, “anyone who’s been around you two for more than five minutes can see it. The way he looks at you could melt chocolate. Besides, he’s been angry at you before, and that hasn’t seemed to affect how he feels about you. You set up a tent right in the middle of his six acres . . .”

“My six acres.”

“You made it impossible for him to move the fence.”

Ada sighed. “I think he realized it was impossible on his own.”

“You refused to give him your water rights.”

“ Ach , vell , that didn’t do any gute . Cathy lent him hers.”

Beth laughed. “I’m just saying that if he wanted to hate you, he’s had plenty of chances.” Beth stood and retrieved the kaffee pot from the cupboard. “So Enos accused you of being like his mater , and you were so horrified he felt the need to apologize to me?”

“That is exactly right. Will you forgive me for being critical and disagreeable? I don’t want to end up a lonely and unlovable old woman like Enos’s mother. I want to change. I want us to be best friends instead of always getting on each other’s nerves.”

“You don’t get on my nerves,” Beth said.

Ada grinned. “Well, you get on mine.”

Beth laughed. “Okay, I suppose you do get on my nerves occasionally, but you’re one of the four people I love most in the world. That’s what you do for the people you love. You forgive them. That’s why Enos will forgive you, and he’ll keep forgiving you over and over.”

“But will I forgive him?”

Beth smiled slyly. “I think you will.” She filled the kaffee pot with water and set it on the stove. “I don’t want you to change, Ada. You want the best for me, and when you criticize my mopping skills, I know you don’t think I’m a lost cause.”

“Lost cause? What a thought! Never.”

“If you thought I was a lost cause, you wouldn’t care if my cakes fell or my bed sheets turned gray.”

Ada grimaced. “They’re gray?”

“I like you just the way you are, except maybe a little less critical and a little less uptight.”

“Uptight?”

Beth pulled out the kaffee . Ada almost jumped up and took the package from her. Beth made horrible kaffee . But maybe now was not the time to point it out. “Ada, you think you have to be perfect. You think you have to earn people’s love, as if love is a reward for gute behavior. Love isn’t a reward. Love is Gotte’s law. We’ve already got His love. He asks us to help Him spread it.”

“But . . . but someone has to do something. I can’t just sit around loving people. The dishes would not get washed. The toilets would grow mold. What would have happened to our six acres if I hadn’t been willing to camp on the property all these weeks?”

Beth turned from the stove, tilted her head, and peered at Ada. “No one asked you to camp, Ada.”

“I did it for you and Dat,” Ada sputtered.

“Were you trying to earn our love?”

“Maybe. I don’t know that I was thinking about it that way.”

“You don’t have to be a martyr. Dat and I need you, but you wear yourself out doing things for us that we should do for ourselves. If all your time in that tent has taught me anything, it’s that you have sacrificed a great deal to make my life comfortable, and I have done almost nothing for you.” Beth drew her brows together. “I want to share the load and make your life easier instead of you always feeling like you have to coddle me.”

Ada sighed. “I feel bad that you lost your mater so young. You needed someone. I tried to replace her.”

“You lost your mater too. I don’t need a replacement mater . I need a schwester .

Schwesteren take care of each other.”

Ada felt the frustration clear to her toes. “I don’t know how to be any other way.”

“Then let’s start with this: sometimes you just have to bite your tongue, even though it hurts.” Beth checked the water in the pot. “And maybe you need to let me make my own mistakes.”

“Like raspberry-dusted goat cheese?”

Beth’s eyes lit up. “I hate to burst your bubble, but the chef at Le Chez loves it. He’s paying me four dollars extra for the raspberry flavor.”

Ada’s mouth fell open. “He isn’t!”

“Think how much poorer we’d be if I’d listened to you.” Beth poured the kaffee into the pot. She didn’t put enough in, but Ada was already expecting very bad kaffee . At least it would be weak bad kaffee . Beth’s lips twitched upward. “You’re dying to make the kaffee , aren’t you?”

Ada let out a breath she’d been holding. “Jah .”

“Come on, then.”

Ada didn’t need to be asked twice. She jumped from her chair and took the can from Beth. Then she squeezed her eyes shut in disgust. “I’m doing it again.”

Beth giggled. “I’d rather drink your kaffee . It was just a test.”

Ada growled and laughed at the same time. Her faults could fill a swimming pool, but Beth loved her anyway. It was a very gute feeling. “You are too clever for your own

good, Beth Yoder.” She measured out the right amount of kaffee and poured it in the pot. “I finished the Liza series.”

“And?”

“And I loved it. All five books.”

Beth squealed in delight. “I knew you would. Who was your favorite cowboy? Mine is Gavin. He’s so friendly and talkative.”

Ada put the lid back on the can of kaffee . “I like Joe. He’s quiet and serious and always does the right thing.”

“Hmm,” Beth said. “Sounds like someone we know.”

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

Goshen seemed a little down in the dumps today, and Ada felt much like he did. She smoothed her hand down the side of his neck and cooed her sympathy. "I hate to admit it, but I miss Enos too." No matter how difficult and stubborn and uncooperative Enos was, he had become a very important part of Ada's life, and she'd be shattered if he no longer wanted her in his. Had she ruined things between them? Ada had never been quite so unsure of herself or quite so wretched. Still, she couldn't regret telling Enos what he didn't want to hear. If that meant he never wanted to talk to her again, then that was his choice, not hers.

Of course telling herself that she'd done the right thing and living happily with the consequences were two different things, and the ache in her heart grew every day Enos was away. Ada used the pitchfork to dish up some hay for Goshen, then filled his water trough and gave him the special vitamin mixture Enos always fed him.

Enos had been gone four days, and Ada had been adamant that she be the one to feed and water Goshen, even though Enos was ferociously mad at her. The morning Enos left for Pennsylvania, Ada had marched over to his shed that doubled as a barn and found Gary Schmucker mucking out Goshen's stall. Gary was a nice boy, responsible and trustworthy, but Ada had told him that she would be feeding Goshen from then on. Gary was disappointed that he wouldn't be getting ten dollars a day, but Ada promised to make him a peanut butter chocolate pie as a consolation prize. Nobody was going to take care of Goshen but Ada, and there was nothing Enos could do about it.

Because he wasn't there.

Would he ever come back? And what would Ada do if he didn't?

Ada kneaded a tight knot at the base of her neck. She didn't even remember what it felt like to sleep in a real bed with fitted sheets and a fluffy pillow. Heaven help her, but she'd spent the last four nights in the tent for no reason. Enos wasn't there to take it down or be irritated or lecture her about safety. She wanted to be there when Enos came home, and with no way of knowing when that would be, she'd opted to sleep in the tent for a few more nights. Maybe she should have packed up her tent and moved home, but she and Enos hadn't parted well, and taking down the tent felt so final, as if she was abandoning him to the mercy of his mother. She wanted Enos to know that even though he'd hurt her feelings and even though she didn't like his mother, she would be there for him no matter what.

He probably wouldn't appreciate the gesture.

"What are you doing here?"

Ada nearly jumped out of her skin. She turned to see Enos eyeing her as if she were a complete stranger who was trespassing on his property. She winced when she saw his face. He was not happy to see her. "Enos, you scared me."

"Why are you here? I told you I'd find someone else to take care of Goshen."

"And I told you I'd take care of it."

He cocked his eyebrow. "And I told you I didn't want you to."

"Nae, you didn't. You just said you'd find someone else. You didn't say I couldn't do it. I wasn't about to let Gary Schmucker do the job I told you I'd do. I had to let him go."

He scrubbed his hand down the side of his face. "I'm not going to argue with you about this. I'm home. You can go now."

Ada's heart plummeted to her toes. She was being dismissed. If Ada had been Mary, she would have slinked away and nursed her wounds in the privacy of her own tent, but Ada wasn't that easy to get rid of. Surely Enos knew that by now. "How did things go in Pennsylvania?"

"I hoped you'd move your tent while I was gone, but I can see you're determined to be unreasonable." Still that cold, formal way of speaking. "You've proved your point, and now I want you off my property."

Ada folded her arms and glared at him, even though she wanted to throw herself on the ground and cry. "Ach , you're one of those men."

His eyes narrowed. "One of what men?"

"A man who thinks that any woman who disagrees with him is unreasonable."

"Ach , you're one of those women. The kind who doesn't care about anything but getting her way."

Like Tabitha? Did Enos really think she was so much like Tabitha? She lifted her chin. "I don't care about anything but doing what's right."

"Unfortunately for me, you think you're right even when you're not."

Either he was in a very bad mood, or he was still mad at her for saying what she'd said about his mater . She hated to ask the important question. It would remind him of their last conversation. "Did your mater come back with you?"

He turned as if he was going to leave. "Jah . You don't have to feed Goshen anymore, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't come onto my property unless you're invited."

She propped a hand on her hip. “So are you admitting the potato field is my property?”

“If that’s what I have to do to get you off my farm, then jah . It’s yours. You can stop camping, and you can stop interfering in my life.”

Ada should have felt some sense of victory, but all she felt was sick. Enos had gone to great lengths to keep his claim to that six acres, and now he was giving up? She might have been a little low, but Enos seemed completely and utterly defeated, as if he’d given up the fight and didn’t care about trying. Things were worse than Ada had anticipated, and she had no idea how to fix them . . . how to fix Enos.

He may have given up, but she hadn’t, even though it wasn’t much of a fight if she was the only one fighting. “Well,” she said, “aren’t you going to tell me about Pennsylvania? What happened when you got there? How is your mater ? How are you?”

“We’re fine.”

“Fine?”

He nodded, as if he didn’t feel guilty at all that he had just lied to her face. “I hope you will respect our privacy and keep your opinions to yourself.”

What a spiteful thing to say, as if she were a busybody who couldn’t resist sticking her nose into other people’s business. Enos had freely shared some of his most heart-wrenching secrets with her. She thought they were friends. Ada pressed her lips together to keep harsh words from escaping, either that or a sob from deep within her throat. Her worst fears had come true. Enos wanted nothing to do with her.

She knew better than to try to reason with him. She certainly wouldn’t try to coax

him into talking to her or being her friend. She had a shred of self-respect left. “You can talk until you’re blue in the face, Enos Yoder. How do I know you won’t try to move the fence in the middle of the night if I’m not there to protect my property?”

“I won’t. You have my solemn promise.”

Ada swallowed hard and willed her voice not to shake. “Swear not at all, but let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay.” She was trying to get under his skin, but it was very thick.

“Okay then, no promises. I won’t set foot on your property again. Your six acres are safe from me.”

Ada refused to concede. That tent was her only connection to Enos, and she wouldn’t abandon it. “I’m not leaving my tent.”

His eyes flashed with anger. “Well, I’m done sleeping on the ground, so I guess you’ll have to protect yourself. I won’t be there to save you when you get mauled by a coyote.”

“At least you’ll be getting a gute night’s sleep, which is what I have been urging you to do from the beginning. I’m froh you’re finally taking my advice.” That comment ignited another spark behind his eyes. She walked out of the barn and turned around at the door. “You’re welcome to come to dinner tonight at the campfire. We’re having a party for Clay’s birthday. I’m making Dutch oven chicken and dumplings.”

His expression softened for half a second. Then he went back to scowling. “Goodbye, Ada. Please don’t bother me again.”

Gmay was at Esther Kiem’s house on Sunday, and Ada didn’t hear a word the ministers said because even though Enos wasn’t there, she couldn’t stop thinking of

him and his broad shoulders and his brown eyes that were kind and serious and intelligent all at the same time. Not even Joe from the Liza series could compare to Enos. He was everything Ada imagined in the perfect man.

Esther and Levi held gmay in Esther's quilt shop, which they had stripped of quilts and shelves and tables to make room for the church benches. Neither Tabitha or Enos had come to gmay this morning, and someone had spread the word that Tabitha wasn't feeling well. Maybe she wasn't feeling well, or maybe she was moping. Enos had brought her back to Colorado. She couldn't have been happy about that.

Ada hadn't seen or heard from Tabitha since she'd left for Pennsylvania with Tyson Carruthers last Saturday. The yelling had completely stopped, and as far as Ada could tell, Tabitha hadn't left the house for three days. She was definitely moping. Maybe she was giving Enos the silent treatment. She didn't know that Enos would probably consider that a blessing.

Ada did her best to concentrate on the words of the hymn, even though all she could see on the page was Enos's face. After that day in the barn, Enos had barely said three words to her, even though they were in painfully close proximity. Enos had not been true to his word, because he was still sleeping in the little tent that was in no way ample space for him and couldn't have been comfortable. Ach , vell , she knew what she had to do to induce him to sleep in his own bed, and she wasn't willing to do it. Camping on those six acres was the only connection to Enos she had left. She held onto it like a lifeline.

Would he ever forgive her? Did he think about her night and day like she thought about him? Did he still want to be friends, or would he prefer things between them stay awkward and adversarial? Ada didn't know anything anymore except that there was a big hole in her chest, and she could see no end to the emptiness.

When services ended and the men started moving benches outside, Ada hurried to the

kitchen to be with Esther. Since gmay was at Esther's house, Esther was supervising the fellowship supper, and she'd asked Ada to help her. Women sliced bread and cheese and pulled pickles from jars and set them in bowls. They walked in and out of the kitchen to serve food and collect empty plates.

Esther filled pitchers with water, which she gave to some of the teenage girls to take outside. Ada helped her with cups and napkins. Ada had, of course, told Esther all about Enos and Tabitha and her plan to camp for probably the rest of her life. Esther glanced at Ada and clucked her tongue. "You are miserable, Ada. I'm so sorry."

Ada frowned. She'd been doing her best all day to look nauseatingly cheerful. "How can you say that? I'm just standing here folding napkins with a bland smile on my face."

"You're trying too hard, and since when did anyone ever fold napkins for fellowship supper?"

Ada grunted her irritation. "Ach , vell , I thought everyone would appreciate folded napkins."

Esther took Ada's chin in her hand. "The light's gone out of your eyes, heartzley ."

Ada scrunched her lips together. The light had also gone out of her life. "I'll get over it."

"Will you?"

"I'm not a wallower. At some point, no matter what bad things happen to us, we've all got to get on with life."

Esther studied her face doubtfully. "I suppose that's true."

The front door slammed shut, and Cathy Larsen came around the corner into the kitchen carrying her huge yellow purse and panting heavily. “Cathy?” Ada said. “What are you doing here?”

Cathy sat down at the kitchen table and tried to catch her breath amidst the hustle and bustle of a dozen Amish women around her. She said hello to Hannah Kiem and Mayne Miller and waved to Erda Sensenig, then pointed at Esther. “I’ve got to talk to both of you, but this is horrible and shocking gossip, so we need to be alone. Can we go in the living room?”

Esther filled another pitcher with water. “We’re right in the middle of fellowship supper.”

Cathy’s wrinkles bunched on top of each other. “I know. I know, but this is even more important than fellowship supper, and I’m so irritated I could pull all my hair out.”

Esther looked doubly annoyed. Hosting gmay was one of the most important days of the year for an Amish fraa . “Being irritated isn’t a good reason to interrupt fellowship supper.”

Cathy stood up and hooked her elbow under her monstrous purse. She gave Hannah, Esther’s mater -in-law, something that passed for a pleasant look. “Hannah, I’ve got to talk to Ada and Esther. Could you supervise fellowship supper until I get back? I won’t be more than thirty minutes.”

“Thirty minutes?” Esther squeaked. “I can’t be gone for thirty minutes.”

Cathy headed down the hall. “You’ll change your tune when you hear what I have to say.”

Esther glanced at Hannah, who nodded and laughed. “We’ll be fine. Most of the food is already served.”

Ada and Esther followed Cathy into the relative quiet of Esther’s front room. It was where Esther used to have her small quilt shop. Cathy sat down on the couch and leaned back as if she’d gotten there just in time. “Some days I wonder if I’m too old for this.”

Ada and Esther sat on either side of her, and their gazes connected. Ada was confused, but Esther seemed nothing but irritated. “What is this horrible gossip you want us to hear,” Esther said, no doubt in an effort to hurry the whole thing along so she could get back to her kitchen.

Cathy opened her purse and rummaged through it. “I was at church today. Did I tell you I go to church in Alamosa because the pastor there is a really good speaker and gives very short sermons. We’re in and out of there in forty-five minutes.”

“Cathy, I’ve really got to get back.”

Cathy clamped her hand around Esther’s wrist when Esther tried to stand up. “Really, Esther, you’ve got to learn patience. I’m not even fifteen seconds into my story.”

Esther folded her arms and sat back. “Okay, you’ve got forty-five more seconds to make this interesting or I’m leaving.”

Cathy pulled three suckers from her purse and handed one each to Ada and Esther. “Try these. They’re from a fancy boutique in Colorado Springs, and they are the best thing I’ve ever tasted.”

Had Ada imagined it, or had Esther just growled? Ada unwrapped her sucker and popped it into her mouth. It was delicious, but Ada had no idea why Cathy had given

her one. Esther left the wrapper on and tucked the sucker behind her ear.

Cathy unwrapped hers. “There’s a man at church, Wilford Brenchly. He sometimes drives the Amish places.”

“I know him,” Esther said, again trying to hurry the story along. “He drives me into town sometimes when you’re not available.”

“Wilford told me that he got a call last night to drive an Amish woman to the hospital, and guess who it was.” Cathy stuffed the sucker into her mouth.

Esther was more cross than interested. “Who?”

“Tabitha Hoover.”

Ada’s heart tied itself into a tight knot. “Enos’s mother?”

Cathy nodded. “I’m offended Enos didn’t call me to take his mom to the hospital. Apparently, he doesn’t think I’m trustworthy.”

“What is wrong with Enos’s mother?”

Cathy pulled the sucker from her mouth with a soft pop. “She told Wilford she was going into the hospital to die of a broken heart. Enos let slip that Tabitha has been refusing to eat. Wilford said she was so weak, Enos had to find a wheelchair to get her into the hospital.”

Esther sat up straight, as if she was suddenly interested in Cathy’s story. “Neither of them was at church today.”

Ada couldn’t conceive of such a thing. “She’s refusing to eat?” Her heart broke for

Enos. If Tabitha died, he'd never recover.

Cathy waved her sucker in the air. "It makes me so mad. I've always said that woman is a piece of work, but this time she's gone too far. We've got to put a stop to it."

Ada lost her appetite for the very gute sucker Cathy had just given her. "I agree, for Enos's sake. But what do you think we should do?"

Cathy zipped up her purse. "Much as I hate to say it, we girls need to stick together. We've got to go to the hospital and give Tabitha a reason to live."

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S urely they looked ridiculous, three grown women sneaking into the hospital like thieves, but Cathy had a way of convincing people to do crazy things that they would never dream of doing in more rational moments.

When Cathy told them about Tabitha, Esther had dropped everything, left Hannah in charge of the fellowship supper, Levi in charge of the children, and Beth and Sadie Sensenig in charge of the cleanup. Ada could not imagine the cleanup going very well, but she was trying to let Beth learn from her mistakes, so she just smiled when Beth told of her plan to wash the dishes out on the lawn with a garden hose.

They had brought Mary's husband, Clay, along as a decoy, because they needed Clay to get Enos out of the hospital room and away from his mater , and they didn't want Enos to know they had been there. Enos had asked Ada to give him and his mater some privacy, and sneaking into Tabitha's hospital room was an appalling breach of that request.

Nothing short of an emergency would have induced Ada to do such a crazy thing. But this was definitely an emergency, and Tabitha needed to be set straight.

They had borrowed Beth's cell phone and given it to Clay so he could communicate with them. Clay had gone up to Tabitha's room, and the plan was for Clay to talk Enos into visiting the hospital cafeteria to talk about the alfalfa market and how Enos could get more money for his crop. Cathy, Ada, and Esther crowded into a little alcove next to the elevators and waited for Clay's text telling them they could safely go up to Tabitha's room.

Cathy held her phone at the ready, as if she was going to need to throw it at

somebody. “Clay’s been up there for almost ten minutes. What’s he doing?”

“Probably trying to talk Enos into leaving his mother’s side,” Ada said.

Esther fingered the sucker that was still tucked behind her ear. “Enos is the most devoted son I’ve ever met.”

Cathy stared at her phone. “Even though his mother is a piece of work.” Her phone lit up, and she was so startled, she nearly dropped it. She recovered her composure and read the text. “He says they’re on their way to the cafeteria. Now’s our chance.”

Ada’s heart pounded like a drum in a rock and roll song, partly because Cathy was being so sneaky, partly because she was worried about what she would say to Tabitha, partly worried about losing her temper, and mostly because she was afraid Enos would catch them and be so mad, he’d sell the farm and she’d never see him again.

They quickly got in the elevator to the fourth floor. Esther and Ada followed Cathy out of the elevator and down the pleasantly bland and antiseptic hall. Without even knocking, Cathy unapologetically opened the door to Tabitha’s room and ushered Esther and Ada inside. It was all so secretive and daring and foolish.

Ada and Cathy had decided on a strategy. Cathy said she’d do all the talking, and if Ada needed to chime in about Enos, Cathy would let her. If there was a chance of helping Enos, Ada was willing.

Tabitha lay on the bed, her eyes clamped shut as if she were exerting a great deal of effort not to open them. She wore a hospital gown and her kapp, but her hair was disheveled, and her face looked even more gaunt than it always did. An IV bag hung on a tall pole, and clear liquid slowly drip-dripped into the tube attached to her arm.

“Is she asleep?” Esther whispered.

Cathy stood at the foot of the bed and rested her hands on the bed frame. “Of course she’s not asleep. I saw her peek when I opened the door.”

“Go away,” Tabitha said without opening her eyes. “Can’t you see I’m trying to get some rest?”

“You’ve had plenty of sleep, and we need to talk.”

Tabitha rolled over, turning her back on them. “I’m dying, and it’s cruel to taunt a dying woman.”

Cathy pulled a chair up next to Tabitha’s bed and sat down. Ada sat on the window seat, and Esther sat on a little round rolling stool in the corner. “You’re not dying,” Cathy said. “You’re pouting.”

Tabitha opened her eyes and sat up as if she’d never been sick a day in her life. “Pouting? I’m not pouting.”

“You are too pouting, and it’s very unattractive on a seventy-year-old woman.”

Tabitha glared at Cathy. “I’m sixty-six.”

“Then start acting like it. Right now you’re acting like my grandson who’s thirteen and a huge pain in the neck. We’re thinking of sending him away to military school.”

Tabitha poked Cathy’s arm, which was resting on her bed. “How dare you mock my grief. You’re the nastiest person I’ve ever met.”

“The feeling is mutual,” Cathy said. “You are the nastiest person I’ve ever met, and

I've been around a lot longer than you."

Tabitha seemed disappointed that her insult hadn't leveled Cathy to the ground. "I'm grieving. Where is your compassion? My ungrateful children have broken my heart. I wish I was dead."

Ada couldn't let that comment go unchallenged. "Gotte has given you the gift of life, and it is a grave sin to wish to throw it away. Enos would be devastated."

Tabitha shot daggers at Ada with her eyes. "The best revenge for an ungrateful son. He hates me. They all hate me. Won't they be sorry when I die."

"Please spare us the dramatics. Of course they won't be sorry. They'll be relieved." Cathy was the perfect person for such a moment as this. Nothing ruffled her feathers, and she was willing to speak the very unpleasant truth. "It's rough when your chickens come home to roost."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means you complain and criticize and make yourself very unpleasant, and now nobody wants to be around you, including your children. Especially your children." Cathy fished in her purse and pulled out a protein bar. "Did Tyson tell you that me and Ada's sister Beth were the ones who arranged to get you to Pennsylvania."

Tabitha folded her arms and eyed Cathy resentfully. "A lot of good it did me. They didn't want me." Her voice cracked, and her eyes pooled with tears.

Though Ada wanted nothing to do with Tabitha, for Enos's sake, she slid off the window seat and took Tabitha's hand. She half expected Tabitha to snatch it away, but she didn't. "What happened in Pennsylvania, Tabitha?"

Now she pulled her hand away. “Wouldn’t you like to know, so you can gloat over my humiliation.”

“I don’t want to gloat. I want to understand.” To understand why Enos had come back a cold, unbending stranger.

Tabitha’s gaze flicked between Ada and Cathy, probably trying to decide if she could trust either of them. She sighed and lay back on her pillow. “That Tyson fellow dropped me off at what used to be my house. An hour later, Zeb found me a hotel room and sent Enos an overnight letter. He wouldn’t let me stay there because Lilith says she gets heart palpitations when I’m around. She ordered me out of my own home, wouldn’t even let me say hello to the children, and told Zeb to take me to McDonald’s for dinner, even though she had something cooking on the stove. I could smell it. What kind of a daughter-in-law treats her husband’s mother that way? One of Zeb’s children fetched John, and the two of them drove me to a hotel to stay until Enos could come and pick me up. I told them Gotte would surely smite them dead for dishonoring their mother. Zeb said the commandment to cleave to his wife came first. Ungrateful little buzzards.”

Ada never thought she could feel sorry for someone as petulant and noxious as Tabitha, but she’d been deeply hurt by the people who should have been the most loving. That kind of betrayal cut deep. Enos had known what would happen, and he had also anticipated how devastated his mater would be. “That was very harsh. I’m sorry.”

Tabitha practically spit venom from her mouth. “Are you?”

Cathy smacked the bed, and everybody jumped. “No need to snap at Ada. She was trying to be nice.”

Tabitha glared at Cathy and shut her mouth.

Cathy poked her finger in Tabitha's direction. "Ada would never stoop to gloating, but I'm not that charitable. You brought this on yourself, and you deserve everything you get."

Tabitha wasn't one to take criticism meekly or well. She pushed herself to sitting once again. "I'm their mother. I don't deserve to be treated like that."

"That is how you treat your children and their spouses. Do they deserve to be treated the way you treat them?"

Tabitha opened her mouth, then promptly closed it, maybe actually considering the truth of Cathy's words.

"Your own children don't want you near them because you're mean and nasty and you use God as a weapon."

Tabitha scoffed. "A weapon? How ridiculous."

"You invoke God when you want to get your way, when you want to control the people you say you love."

"You're wrong," Tabitha protested. "It's always been my job to raise up righteous children and grandchildren. Their sins will be on my head if I do not train them well."

"I hate to tell you this, Tabitha," Cathy said, "but you are not God's messenger. Neither does God ask you to judge anyone—not your children, not your grandchildren, not anyone at church. It is none of your concern if the Colorado Amish have solar power. It is also none of your concern how your sons raise their children. You've made them miserable with all your interference and criticism. I barely know you, and I can't stand you. I can only imagine how much worse it is for your children." Cathy had never looked more fierce or more grumpy or more breathtaking.

Her eyes glowed with righteous indignation and her wrinkles were exclamation points around her mouth. “Let God make the judgments. It’s your job to love everyone.”

Tabitha wasn’t ready to give up trying to be right. “Love doesn’t accomplish anything. I love my boys and my grandchildren up one side and down the other. That hasn’t stopped them from rejecting me.”

Ada wouldn’t let Tabitha get away with such an excuse. “You’re wrong, Tabitha. Love is the only thing. Just ask the Apostle Paul. If you don’t have charity, you are nothing.”

Tabitha lifted her chin and blinked back tears. “All the more reason to dry up like a pile of leaves and blow away.”

Cathy sighed. “Now, now, Tabitha. We don’t want you to die.”

Tabitha sniffed. “I don’t believe you.”

“Well, it’s true, whether you believe it or not. We girls have to stick together, but we also have to choose love.”

Tabitha grabbed a tissue from the box next to her bed and blew her nose. “You really don’t want me to die?”

“Of course not,” Ada said. “There is still so much good you can do, so much life to live.”

Tabitha dabbed at her nose. “I was hoping to spend my last years with my grandchildren. They bring me so much joy, but Zeb and John are determined to keep me away.”

Ada tried to tiptoe up to the subject of Enos. “You say you love them, but do you treat your grandchildren the way you treat Enos?”

“Of course not . . .” Tabitha said, before realization dawned on her face. “I’m . . . I’m nice to my grandchildren.”

Cathy popped a glob of protein bar into her mouth. “So you admit you’re not very nice to Enos?”

“He . . . he’s never been a good son. Zeb is tall and handsome. John is smart and good with numbers. Enos is damaged, with a missing foot and no real talents.”

Ada wasn’t going to argue with Tabitha’s assessment of Enos’s qualities, even though she couldn’t disagree more. Enos was a hard worker, patient, kind, and protective. He exuded quiet strength and humility. He was quite literally the most wunderbarr man in the world. “Enos is the only son kind enough to take care of you. I would think you could show a tiny bit of gratitude. You abuse him, but he still loves you.”

Tabitha folded her arms. “He doesn’t love me.”

Cathy nodded. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to agree with Tabitha. Enos doesn’t love her.”

Tabitha’s eyes widened. “I thought you came to make me feel better.”

“I always try to speak the truth, even if it’s hard to hear.”

Tabitha scowled at Cathy. “He takes care of me because he’s afraid he’ll go to hell if he doesn’t.”

Cathy blew air from between her lips. “It seems neither of your other sons are afraid of going to hell.”

“Their wives have poisoned them against me. I told Enos if he loves me, he’ll never marry and bring another horrible woman into the family.”

Esther’s troubled gaze connected with Ada’s.

Ada’s heart tried to claw its way up her throat. Tabitha had warned Enos never to marry? Was that why he’d been so distant? Surely that wasn’t the reason. Enos would never consider marrying Ada. She had given him entirely too much trouble, and he thought she was a horrible schwester . Tabitha was in no danger of having Ada for a daughter-in-law. “Enos loves you, though I don’t wonder but his love will grow cold if you can’t show him a little consideration. You treat him very badly, and he doesn’t deserve it. He doesn’t deserve it , Tabitha. He is so good to you. He didn’t want you to go back to Pennsylvania because he knew Zeb and John would hurt you. He wanted to protect you, and you threw it in his teeth.”

Tabitha’s frown etched itself deeper into her face. “If I didn’t complain, no one would pity me.”

Ada took a deep breath. Truly wanting to understand this difficult woman, she asked. “Do you want people to pity you?”

“I want someone to care. Something horrible has happened, and no one cares.”

Ada had never felt so sorry for someone in her whole life. Tabitha’s eyes were dull, and she looked small and fragile in that hospital bed. “What is the horrible thing that has happened, Tabitha?”

“I got old,” Tabitha said, as if she was admitting to a terrible crime. She squeezed her

eyes shut, no doubt to stop any tears that thought about escaping. “I’m useless to my children, and no one cares if I live or die.” Her voice cracked, and the tears trickled down her face.

It was the most honest, heartbreaking thing Ada had ever heard Tabitha say.

To Ada’s surprise, Cathy reached out and grabbed Tabitha’s wrist as if saving her from drowning. “That feeling of being old and worthless, it presses down on your chest until you feel like you can’t breathe. All day, every day.”

Tabitha studied Cathy’s face, and it was as if the pile of bricks she’d been carrying for years fell off her shoulders. She sobbed in anguish and sighed in relief at the same time. “Yes. That’s just what it feels like.”

Cathy sat there, holding onto Tabitha’s wrist. Ada closed her mouth and let silence overtake all of them.

Cathy handed Tabitha two more tissues, and Tabitha mumbled a quiet “Thank you.” It was the first time Ada had heard Tabitha say thank you for anything.

Cathy pulled her hand away and started rummaging through her purse again, though what she was looking for was a mystery. The only thing that might help Tabitha at this point was a fountain of youth. “So, Tabitha, what are you going to do now?”

Tabitha wiped her nose. “There’s nothing to do. Everyone would be better off if I were dead.”

Cathy’s eyes danced with amusement. “Oh, honey, if they want to stick you in a box, don’t volunteer to climb in.”

Tabitha drew her brows together. “You mean my coffin?”

“Not your coffin. Don’t let anyone tell you you’re too old for anything. You’re only useless if you think you’re useless. It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks.”

“But what good am I if I am no use to my family?”

“Never try to be useful to your family. My kids and grandkids love me because I stay out of their business and give them space to make their own mistakes. I don’t give advice unless it’s an emergency. The only thing I freely give them is love. Just love. And when my grandson Dewey was in a fight with his mom, guess who he called. When my granddaughter wrecked the family car, guess who she told first. They get nothing but love from me because love is the most powerful force in the world. It’s every grandma’s secret weapon.”

“But my sons don’t love me. They won’t let me see my grandchildren.”

“You have to sort of sneak up on them. They’re like Little Bo Peep’s sheep. Leave them alone, and they’ll come home. Don’t make them the center of your world because, like it or not, you are not the center of theirs. Once I figured that out, it was like someone turned on the light. I don’t need other people to tell me I’m useful. I already know it. I play pickleball, make quilts, watch Law and Order reruns, and go driving with Lon. And I enjoy my grandchildren. They are my reward for not killing their parents when they were children.”

Tabitha pressed her fingers to her mouth. “I . . . I can’t do it. It’s too hard.”

“Letting go of what your life used to be is the hardest thing you’ll ever do. But I promise you, the best is yet to come.”

Tabitha raised her finger. “Swear not at all.”

Cathy cocked an eyebrow. “No more of your criticism. It only irritates people.”

Tabitha smiled, but the expression looked a little rusty. “I enjoy irritating you.”

“Well, I have a pretty thick skin, but don’t try it on anybody else.” Cathy glanced at Ada.

Ada nodded. “You know, Tabitha, you have one son who is hungry for your love. He would never abandon you, never treat you like John and Zeb have treated you.”

Cathy looked anywhere but in Ada’s direction. “Even if he married some beautiful and highly capable woman, you would always have a place with him and his family.” Cathy cleared her throat. “As long as you choose to be nice.”

Tabitha grunted. “Enos will never marry . . . he’s not good enough . . . he’s . . .” She stopped and narrowed her eyes at Cathy. “Do you have someone in mind?”

“If I do, you would put your son’s happiness over your own, because that’s what a good mother does. Then you’d get out of his hair by living your own life and staying out of that box.”

Tabitha threw up her hands. “You make it sound so easy, but I’m too old to change. I don’t know how to change.”

Cathy scolded Tabitha with her eyes. “You’re only too old if you think you’re too old.”

“First of all,” Ada said. “You need to quit starving yourself.”

Tabitha puckered her lips peevishly. “That was all for show. I like food too much to actually go through with it. I wanted Enos to suffer. I wanted them all to suffer.”

“Well, stop it. The only one suffering is you.” Cathy pulled a sandwich bag from her

purse. “I stole this from the fellowship supper. It’s that sickly sweet church spread between two slices of homemade bread.” She handed the sandwich to Tabitha. “Then you need to find some hobbies. Do you knit or crochet?”

Tabitha took a bite. “Our church spread in Pennsylvania is creamier.”

Cathy slapped the bed. “Stop it.”

Tabitha made a face. “You don’t have to get so testy. I’m just stating a fact.”

“If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all. At the very least, keep your mouth shut.”

Tabitha took another bite of the not-creamy sandwich. “Back in Pennsylvania, I was considered a very good quilter. My stitches are so small, you need a magnifying glass to see them.”

Esther managed a small smile. “Then you’re invited to my house anytime you want. I’ve always got a quilt on the frames.”

“So do I,” Cathy said. “And I always have a bowl of suckers set out for my quilters.”

“Sounds delicious,” Tabitha said, a thread of sarcasm in her voice.

Cathy glared at Tabitha. “If you’re so picky, bring your own treat.”

Tabitha looked ten years younger than she had when they’d first entered the room. “I make wonderful-good shoo-fly pie.”

“I hate shoo-fly pie, but knock yourself out.” Cathy’s phone dinged, and she glanced at the screen. With greater speed than Ada would have thought possible, Cathy

clutched her purse and jumped from her chair. “Enos and Clay are on their way. Let’s get out of here.”

Ada’s heart lurched. Enos mustn’t see any of them. “Please don’t tell Enos we came by.”

“Why?” Tabitha wanted to know.

“He told me to mind my own business.”

Tabitha cackled. “Good for him. Can’t have the gossips wagging their tongues.”

Ada grabbed Esther’s arm and they raced toward the door as if they both urgently needed to go to the bathroom.

Cathy pressed her hand to Tabitha’s arm. “I’ll be by your house tomorrow morning at eleven to pick you up for quilting, so you’d better be out of this hospital by tonight. Don’t let me down.”

Tabitha flashed her I-just-ate-a-lemon expression, but it appeared she was trying for a devious smile. “I’ll be out of here within the hour. You know how determined I can be when I want to get my way.” Tabitha took another bite of her sandwich. “The bread is dry. How do you expect me to eat this?”

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

Ada doused the campfire, sat back in her chair, and gazed at the stars. The constellations seemed especially bright tonight, as if the sky was rejoicing with her. The Big Dipper pointed to the North Star, which winked and danced merrily as if putting on a show just for Ada.

It was entirely too late, but she had a feeling she wouldn't be able to sleep even if she crawled into her sleeping bag and curled up tight. Her mind was racing in a thousand different directions, and no matter how exhausted she was, she couldn't turn it off. Hope could do that to a person. Would Tabitha stop being such a pill? Would she quit blaming Enos? Would Enos finally have a chance to be happy? Would Cathy and Tabitha be at each other's throats when they quilted tomorrow? Cathy was very picky about whom she let take stitches on her quilt. Had she extended the invitation to Tabitha just to be nice? Cathy wasn't the "nice" type, but she certainly cared deeply about right and wrong and doing the right thing, even when it was inconvenient or downright painful.

Ada glanced toward Enos's house, bathed in dim starlight. Wilford Brenchly had brought Tabitha and Enos home from the hospital late this afternoon. From the zip-up window in her tent, Ada had watched Enos help Tabitha out of the car and into the house. Tabitha hadn't been smiling, but she hadn't been frowning either as she'd hobbled up the steps, her cane tapping an uneven rhythm on the wooden porch. Enos had looked his same serious self, so Ada hadn't been able to tell how he was feeling.

Tabitha was home, and the best Ada could hope for was that Enos's mater wouldn't end up in the hospital again in a few days. Maybe she had taken Cathy's words to heart, but Ada couldn't be sure with Tabitha. She had sixty-six years of bad habits to overcome, and surely there wouldn't be much improvement in a few hours. At the

hospital, Tabitha had been surprisingly willing to listen. Maybe she was also willing to change.

Enos's tent was still standing just on the other side of the fence, but Ada hadn't heard him leave the house, so maybe he'd come to his senses and decided to sleep in his own bed tonight. She certainly hoped so. He had to be exhausted from spending all night at the hospital.

Was it time for Ada to take down her tent and quit bothering Enos? At least he'd sleep better if she wasn't camping out in the potato field. Her head told her she needed to put his health before her own selfish desires, but the thought of moving back home left her empty. She just wanted to be close to Enos. Was that so wrong?

Probably. Enos needed his sleep, and he needed his field, and Ada was getting in the way of both. She really was a horrible person, just as Enos said she was.

Her heart weighed as heavy as a stone. Maybe it was time to give up whatever it was she was holding on to, but right now, she was too tired to make any sort of rational decision. Lord willing, she'd have more clarity in the morning.

Ada stood and stamped out a glowing coal with her boot. Then she turned on her flashlight to illuminate a path to her tent door. "Ach !" A wave of shock and disbelief washed over her, and she sucked in a breath. Coiled right outside the opening to her tent was a huge rattlesnake, as thick as her arm, its rattler raised and hissing, its head poised to strike.

Ada slowly stepped backward, her heart pounding against her chest, her vision blurred. How fast could a rattlesnake slither? How far away could she get before it decided to attack?

She backed into a tall, immovable wall. "Ada, get behind me."

If she hadn't been staring down a rattlesnake, Ada would have turned around and argued with him about putting himself in danger, but her only thought was to do as she was told. She jumped behind Enos, who was clutching a shiny silver shovel in his hands, his attention riveted to the snake in front of him. After one breathless heartbeat, the snake lunged at Enos with a speed Ada could not comprehend. Enos shoved Ada backward, and she fell hard on her hinnerdale but still managed to keep hold of the flashlight.

Enos used the shovel as a shield and a weapon, smacking the snake on the side of its body, then hitting it away from both of them. Before Ada could take a breath, the snake glided rapidly away, disappearing into the darkness among the potato plants.

Enos heaved his shovel to the ground and roughly pulled Ada to her feet. With trembling hands, he drew her to his chest. "Are you okay? Where are you hurt?"

Aside from a very bruised backside and a scrape on her hand that she was sure was bleeding, she was okay. She hadn't been bitten, and she hadn't died, and Enos was standing on her property where he swore he'd never set foot again. All was right with the world. Sort of. "I'm okay. Denki for saving me. I don't know what would have happened."

He abruptly nudged her away from him and scowled. "What are you still doing here, Ada?"

"Uh, you mean right now or in general?"

"I told you your stubbornness was going to get you hurt. It's a gute thing I heard you call out, or you'd be dead."

"I don't know that I'd be dead. With a rattlesnake bite, if you get immediate medical attention, you should be okay."

He scrubbed his fingers through his damp hair. “You think that makes me feel better?”

“I guess not.” Ada clasped her hands together, feeling sheepish, but not wanting to admit it. “Except I didn’t get hurt, so you can’t really say ‘I told you so.’”

“You think that makes me feel better?” he asked again, anger flashing in his eyes. “Ada, I’ve tried to be patient, but there is a limit to my goodwill. So now I’m demanding you go home and sleep in your own bed where there aren’t any snakes or coyotes or bad men lying in wait to harm you.”

Ada was too shaken up to be mad. Surprisingly, all she felt was an overwhelming sense of love for this man who always, always tried to do the right thing, even when Tabitha or Zeb or Ada fought him on it. But she had to be contrary, or Enos would have suspected she was ill. “You know better than to demand anything from me. I always dig in my heels.”

Enos was beside himself with frustration. “I’ve already said you can have your six acres. Go home and leave me alone.”

“I can’t go home, Enos.” It was a very inconvenient time for her voice to crack. “Don’t you see I can’t go home? You need me.”

“I need you?” He paced back and forth in front of her tent. “Are you saying this because you think I can’t take care of myself and my family?”

Ach , but he was pigheaded. “ Nae .”

“Do you feel sorry for me because I’ve only got one foot? Or do you pity me because I’m so deep in debt all you can see is my hair above ground? I’ll never be gute enough, will I?”

Ada wanted to both pull her hair out and kiss that wounded look off his face. “Shut up, Enos. Just shut up.”

He looked at her as if she had lost her mind.

Maybe she had, but not for the reasons he imagined. “Quit talking about yourself like that. You are strong and capable and not someone people feel sorry for.” She huffed out a breath. “I said you need me, but I said it wrong. What I really mean is that I need you .” She swallowed hard and decided to risk raw, vulnerable honesty. “The truth is, I love you,” she said, hoping she wouldn’t come to regret it. “And there’s nothing you can say to make me change my mind.”

He looked as if she’d smacked him in the head with his shiny new shovel. “What?”

“I’m sorry if you find the thought unpleasant, but I’m too tired to spare your feelings.” She squared her shoulders. “I know you think I’m a bad sister and an irritating, devious neighbor, but I have come to see you as the kindest, most faithful, best man in the world. I love you, and you can burn down my tent, but I’m not leaving.”

He studied her face as if seeing her for the first time. His eyes shone with pain and hunger and defeat. “Ada,” he whispered. “I can’t.”

Drawing a breath was impossible. A crushing weight pressed into her chest like a vice tightening its hold. “I’m . . . I’m froh you didn’t kill the rattlesnake. It’s illegal in Colorado.”

He reached out his hand. She took a step back. “Ada, it’s not what you . . .”

“Don’t be upset, Enos. I understand. You can’t love me back. How could I expect you to? I’m critical and stubborn, and I’d rather argue than submit. I’ve insulted you

several times, I stick my nose in your business, and you yourself pointed out how unkind I've been to Beth. Who could love that?"

He grimaced. "Shut up, Ada. Just shut up and listen for once."

It was her turn to be stunned into silence.

He came at her as if he was going to tackle her, clamped his arms around her waist, and kissed her as if he couldn't bear the pain of being apart. Ada had never experienced an emotion so heart-wrenching and urgent, as if every hope and longing was in that one kiss. She didn't know how to react to such a kiss, especially from a man who didn't love her and had no right to make her knees buckle as if they were made of gelatin. He drew away from her slightly but kept a tight hold on her waist. "Ada," he whispered. "I refuse to let myself hope."

"Hope what? That I'll shut up and listen?"

His lips twitched upward. "I'd be deerich to hope for that." He pressed his lips together. "I am deeply in debt. The farm will most likely fail, and I'll have nothing to offer you."

Nothing to offer her? "I don't need anything. I already have six acres, a tent, and a field of potatoes."

He released her and turned his face toward the fields. "It doesn't matter. I will not come into a marriage empty-handed. I would feel like less than a man."

Her pulse was off to the races. Ada hadn't said anything about marriage. Enos had brought it up, and she wasn't about to derail his train of thought. "That's just your pride talking."

“Jah, it is.” He hooked his fingers around the back of his neck. “Ada, I love my mater, but I won’t ask any woman to shoulder the burden of her bitterness. Lilith and Ardy can’t do it. I don’t blame them, but neither can I do what they have done. I can’t abandon her. It would destroy her if I were to marry. She said so herself. I know you think I shouldn’t let her control me, but I can only do what I think is right. I know that frustrates you, but I am who I am. Take it or leave it.”

“I’ll take it,” she blurted out, but he was too deep in his own thoughts to hear her.

“I promised my dat I’d look out for my mamm. It’s the only thing I can do to honor his memory.”

She tilted her head to look at him. At that moment, he looked so young, so sad, so trapped by his own devotion. “Is this why you were so snippy with me that day you came back from Pennsylvania?”

He smirked. “Snippy? You make me sound like a dog.”

“You were snippy, and you should be ashamed of yourself for talking to me like that.”

“After being in Pennsylvania and seeing how dead-set Zeb and John were against Mamm, I didn’t see a way forward for you and me, so I decided to give you up. It shattered me.”

“I’m sorry.”

He brushed his fingers tenderly down her cheek. “You have been in my heart ever since that day you fell from your irrigation system. You weren’t being very careful, and I got frustrated.”

Ada's heart soared to the heavens. Enos loved her! She could die a happy woman. "I was being careful. You startled me."

He chuckled, but there was anguish below the surface. "You can blame everything on me if it makes you happy. You're wrong, but I want you to be happy." He gathered her into his arms. "Ada, I want to marry you so bad, my hair is turning gray and I've chewed my fingernails to stubs, but I don't see any way forward for us. I won't abandon my mater . Even more important, I'm not gute enough for you. You're wasting your time loving me. There are dozens of boys you could marry, and it's time to give me up and find someone to make you happy."

Ada protested loudly, not caring if she woke up the goats in her barn. "You're the only one who could make me happy."

"And you are the only one who could make me happy, but it doesn't matter." He took several steps back and put what seemed like a mile between them. "Can we just be friends?"

Did he have any idea what a slap in the face that question was? She felt the sting clear to her toes. How could he be so cruel?

Ada balled her hands into fists. She'd camped out for weeks, eaten too many tinfoil dinners to count, plowed Enos's fields, planted potatoes, and gotten sixty-one mosquito bites. Everything she'd done had been for Enos. She'd fought for him when he didn't have a friend in the world. She'd defended him and worried about him and cared for his well-being. She didn't need thanks, but she longed for an acknowledgment that she meant something to him. Obviously, she wasn't going to get it.

She took a deep, purposeful breath and determined not to waste one more tear or minute on Enos Hoover. If she had less self-respect, she would try to cajole him into

loving her, choosing her, marrying her, but begging was beneath her, and she refused to talk him into something he so clearly didn't want to do. She choked on her answer but said what he wanted to hear. "Jah , of course we can be friends." She forced an insincere and painful smile onto her face. "I'd like that very much." It was the worst moment of her life.

And the finest.

Without giving him a second glance, she ducked into her tent and grabbed her pillow and her fuzzy blanket. By the time she emerged, her composure was nailed firmly into place. "I'll come by in the morning to take down the tent and clean up my campsite. Lord willing, we'll both get a better night's sleep this way."

He didn't look entirely comfortable, but she was done trying to make him feel better for anything. His happiness was no longer her concern.

She turned away and set her face and her flashlight toward her house where people loved her and the goats were always happy to see her. As soon as she was out of earshot, she indulged in a sob and a thousand tears, but no one would ever know that her heart had broken into a million pieces.

She didn't and wouldn't look back.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

A da winced when Esther brushed the alcohol pad against her open wound. “Ouch, Esther. Do you have to press so hard?”

“I barely touched you,” Esther said. “And if we don’t get it clean, for sure and certain you’ll get an infection. Maybe we should soak it in some apple cider vinegar before putting on a bandage.” Today Esther had a pencil behind her ear, which wasn’t that unusual except that the pencil had a bright yellow pom-pom where the eraser was supposed to be. She looked as if she had a dandelion growing out of the side of her head.

“Does it hurt, Aendi Ada?” Winnie said, childlike concern shining in her eyes.

Ada nodded. “It hurts very bad.” The worst pain she’d ever felt, and it ached clear to her heart. “But don’t worry, it will only hurt for a little while. Your mamm is taking care of me.”

Cathy, Beth, Sadie, Esther, and Ada sat at the kitchen table, all eyes focused on Ada’s palm which looked positively horrible and outrageously painful. She hadn’t realized how bad it was last night, being so caught up in Enos’s kiss and his ultimate rejection. By the time she’d made it to the house, blood was dripping from her fingers, and the heel of her hand was completely numb. Her pillow sported a wide bloodstain that Ada wasn’t sure was washable.

Benny sat on Cathy’s lap, perfectly happy sucking on the beaded chain that held Cathy’s glasses. Junior stood next to Winnie, studying Ada’s hand as if he were a doctor. The table was clear of dishes, but only because Esther had piled all the dirty things in the sink and swiped a rag across the surface before she’d sat down to look at

Ada's injury. It seemed every dish in the house was dirty, but there were three raspberry-dusted cheese logs in the fridge waiting to be taken to Alamosa this afternoon. Gotte had spread the talents around in the family, and Beth's talent was not cleanliness.

Cathy ran her hand over the top of Benny's feather-soft head. "Tell me how this happened again?"

Ada sighed. "Enos was trying to save me from a rattlesnake, and he pushed a little too hard. I fell backward and must have met with a piece of glass or a sharp rock."

Sadie shook her head. "How scary! I'm glad you didn't get bitten. One time I found a rattler in our potato field, and Dat chopped its head off with a hoe."

Ada hissed when Esther plucked a tiny piece of gravel from the wound. "I washed it as best I could last night, but it was late and I was tired." Not that she'd been able to go to sleep. The pain kept her awake most of the night, even in her comfortable, dirt-free bedroom.

"It's a good thing I came over today so the doctors won't have to amputate." Esther set her bloodstained washcloth on the table. "It wonders me if we shouldn't soak it. Draw some of the dirt out."

Cathy leaned closer and put on her glasses. Benny reached for the beads. "It's deep. You need stitches. Esther could give you some."

Esther raised her hands as if to stop traffic. "No, thank you. I did it once for Ben, and it was very stressful. But something good came out of it. In exchange for stitches, he agreed to ask Linda if he could drive her home. They eventually got married. God works in a mysterious way."

Winnie took Junior's hand. "Can we go see the goats, Mamm?"

"Of course. Don't let Junior pull any tails." Die kinner walked out the back door hand in hand.

Beth watched them go, then gushed like a chocolate fountain. "I'm sorry you almost got bitten by a rattlesnake, but it is very romantic that Enos saved you. It says a lot that he was willing to risk his life for you."

Ada pretended to concentrate on her injured hand. "I guess it does." There was no reply on Beth's side of the table. Ada looked up. Everyone stared at her as if she only had a few days to live. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Beth nudged Sadie's arm. "I told you. Look how miserable she is."

Ada frowned. "Miserable? What . . . what are you talking about? I'm just fine except that my hand hurts, and I'm probably going to need stitches."

Beth acted as if she had Ada's whole life figured out. "She moved out of the tent last night and back to the house."

Esther winced. "Oh, dear."

Ada turned on Esther. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Esther pinned Ada with an intense gaze. "You've been committed to that tent for weeks. Even when you didn't need to keep staying, you kept staying. What happened last night?"

"I told you. I was just about to climb in my tent when I saw the snake. Enos heard me and came running with his shovel. Thank Derr Herr he was there."

“And?” Esther prodded.

“He got mad at me for sleeping in the tent. He told me to go home and sleep in my own bed.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Beth said. “He tells you that all the time. He’s worried about you.”

That was Ada’s chance to change the subject. “I should have been more careful. I thought snakes would be too scared to come close to my campsite. Did you know it’s illegal to kill a rattlesnake unless your life is in danger?”

Cathy eyed her suspiciously. “What else did you and Enos talk about?”

Ada exhaled a deep breath. These women had stuck by her through a lot of troubles. Beth had made enough goat cheese to feed the entire population of Alamosa, and she’d kept the house running, sort of, while Ada camped. Cathy had driven her hundreds of places, and Esther had helped her make quilts for charity. Not to mention Cathy and Esther had sneaked into the hospital with her and listened to her whine about Enos too many times to count. She owed them her trust. “He said he can’t marry me. End of story.”

Cathy’s eyes grew as round as dinner plates. “Well. That’s a big leap. One minute you’re talking about rattlesnakes and the next minute you’re discussing marriage.”

Esther’s frown etched itself into her face. “Ach , Ada. What happened? What is he thinking?”

“He’s not thinking,” Cathy said. “It’s typical male behavior.”

Ada was too numb to cry, thank Derr Herr. “He commanded me to go home and sleep

in my own bed, and I told him I wasn't going anywhere because he needed me. Then he accused me of pitying him, and I just came right out and told him I love him. He kissed me."

Beth squeaked in delight, then clapped her hand over her mouth.

Ada gave Beth the stink eye. "He kissed me, then he told me he would never betray his mother, and then he proceeded to tell me why he wasn't good enough for me. He ended by saying he just wants to be friends."

"Oh, dear."

Beth couldn't believe it. "He kissed you. He loves you. Surely he told you he loves you."

Ada searched her memory. "He didn't. He said I've been in his heart from the first day we met, but he didn't say anything about love."

"He said you've been in his heart? It's the same thing," Beth said weakly. Even she wasn't convinced.

Ada picked up the washcloth and dabbed at her hand. "I don't think so."

Sadie didn't give up. "But he kissed you, Ada. Of course he loves you. Of course he wants to marry you. We've all seen it. Go talk to him. Tell him he has nothing to worry about. Of course he's good enough for you, and you are willing to work things out with his mother. Love will find a way."

"I won't do it."

"You won't?" Beth asked.

Ada stood and walked to the sink, turning her back on everyone. She couldn't stand the puzzled stares. She had done the right thing, and she wasn't going to second-guess herself. "I believe in taking people at their word. Enos believes he's not good enough for me. Until he learns to love himself, he will never love me enough to fight for me."

The silence behind her compelled her to turn around. Sadie and Beth were looking at each other in concern, and Esther fingered the pom-pom on the pencil behind her ear.

Cathy nodded as if she was in wholehearted agreement. "You've made the right choice. No one wants Tabitha for a mother-in-law. A whole bushel of grief."

Esther's mouth fell open. "How can you say that? You invited Tabitha over to quilt later this morning. She's going to change, and I don't wonder but she'll be a delightful mother-in-law."

Cathy shrugged. "Maybe, but Enos seems more committed to Tabitha than to the woman he loves."

"He might love me, but it's not enough."

Esther went to the sink and put her arm around Ada. "You can't give up on Enos. He's been beaten down his whole life, and he's learned it's easier to stay quiet, to be a peacemaker, to try to control what he can so he won't get hurt. He doesn't know how else to behave. Maybe he won't fight for you because he doesn't know how to fight. He certainly doesn't know how to open his heart to the possibility of love. He probably doesn't believe anyone could truly love him."

"Like I said, if he can't love himself, he won't find the strength to fight for me, and I'm not waiting around for him to figure it out. I slept in that tent for weeks. That is enough sacrifice for a lifetime."

“Yes, it is,” Beth said. Beth was sweet like that, always supportive of Ada’s opinion, no matter how adamantly she disagreed. She slid to the other side of Ada and nudged her with her elbow. “We all need to stop picking on Ada.”

Cathy groaned. “Nobody’s picking on Ada. I agree with her. It’s time to forget Enos Hoover and move on to greener pastures.”

Ada didn’t want to move on to greener pastures. She just wanted her life to go back to how it was before she’d met Enos. Unfortunately, she was pretty sure there was no going back. Her only regret was that she hadn’t appreciated how gute things had been before Enos came into her life.

Enos had spoiled her for regular days. And special days. And holy days.

She’d love him forever and be ferociously mad at him for even longer.

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Ada's hands were actually trembling, which was a ridiculous reaction to standing on Enos's doorstep at one in the afternoon. It had been two months since Ada had encountered that rattlesnake and Enos had declared his undying, aggravating friendship. Since then, Ada had avoided him like a bad case of the flu. She took comfort in the thought that it was highly unlikely she'd see Enos today. Maybe she'd get lucky and he'd be out in the fields or off to Monte Vista for supplies. Surely he knew she was coming. Lord willing, if he was home, he'd lock himself in his room until Ada left.

"Well, go ahead and knock," Cathy urged, which was easy for her to say because she wasn't in love with Enos, and she didn't have to work hard every day to keep him from creeping into her thoughts.

Esther gave Ada a kind, pitiful smile, stepped around her, and knocked on the door herself. She had a stalk of celery tucked behind her ear, no doubt a tidbit left over from lunch. None of her kids liked celery, and it often ended up behind Esther's ear for safekeeping.

To Ada's relief, Tabitha—not Enos—answered the door. "You're five minutes early," Tabitha grumbled. "That's almost worse than being late. What if I'm not ready for you?"

Cathy pushed her way into Tabitha's house as if she lived there, like she did with everyone in her circle of friends. "Close friends don't get worked up when visitors are early. It just gives us more time to quilt and visit."

Tabitha's frown twitched, as if maybe she liked the idea of being someone's close

friend. "It's good I was ready for you then." She motioned for Ada and Esther to come in, because they usually waited to be invited inside someone's house. A spectacular blue-and-white Lone Star quilt top stretched across some quilt frames in Tabitha's front room. Tabitha's couch and easy chair had been pushed up against the wall, making room for the quilt, which took up most of the space. One folding chair stood on each side of the quilt, waiting for the quilters to sit and get started.

Esther ran her hands along the fabric. "Tabitha, this is beautiful. I love the colors."

Tabitha's frown softened around the edges. "Ach, it's nothing special. Enos took me to the fabric store in Alamosa, and I chose some scraps that I thought would look good together."

"You have a good eye."

"I've been told I have the best eye in Lancaster County, but I'm not one to brag." Tabitha pointed to Ada. "Well, we came to quilt. Sit down and pick up a needle. I want a stitch in the ditch, and make them small. Unpicking puts me in a bad mood." She pulled a small box from the bookshelf behind her. "Enos bought three extra thimbles just in case."

Ada flinched at the sound of Enos's name. Couldn't Tabitha leave him out of the conversation? Being in his house was torture enough.

Cathy sat down on one of the folding chairs and fished through her purse. "I always bring my own thimble, Tabby. It's specially fitted to my finger."

Tabitha made a face. "Did you just call me Tabby?"

Cathy found her thimble and slipped it on her middle finger. "That's your quilting nickname. Everybody needs a quilting nickname."

Esther gave Cathy a wry look. “I don’t have a quilting nickname.”

“Neither do I,” Ada said.

Tabitha scowled at Cathy. “What’s your quilting nickname?”

Cathy seemed unconcerned that Tabitha was irritated. “Cathy. My real name is Catherine.”

“That’s just your nickname,” Esther protested. “It’s not specifically for quilting.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Cathy said. “That’s what people call me before, during, and after quilting. Tabitha sounds so stuffy. Tabby says, ‘I’m carefree and hip, and I own three cats.’”

“I don’t like cats,” Tabitha said, not acting like she minded a quilting nickname all that much.

“Well, you should.”

Ada sat down, but she couldn’t be comfortable. Enos might appear at any minute and give her that indifferent, unemotional look that always twisted her heart into a tight knot.

No matter what Enos wanted, Ada didn’t want to be just friends, and she didn’t want to help Enos feel better about himself. He wasn’t making it easy. Without fail, he tried to engage her in unemotional and trivial conversations after gmay , but when she saw him coming, she’d walk as fast as she could in the other direction. Sometimes, if he got too close, she’d run into the kitchen or lock herself in a bathroom and wait for him to give up. Maybe the running was beneath her, but she didn’t trust her heart not to betray her. She was in love with Enos, and she couldn’t expose herself to a

moment of weakness.

Enos was smart enough to know she wanted to avoid him, but he was also persistent, and unfortunately, someday, he was going to catch her. Lord willing, by the time that happened, she would be recovered enough to have a civil conversation with him without melting into a puddle of regret.

Ada threaded her needle and stuck it into the fabric. She glanced across the quilt at Tabitha, who was arguing with Cathy about cotton versus polyester batting. The change in Tabitha since she'd come home from Pennsylvania was stark. She had quit using a cane, and she moved like a woman her age instead of someone twenty years older.

She was still grumpy and pessimistic and critical of just about everything and everyone, but her criticisms had lost their bite, and she was more inclined to talk about quilts and fabric than she was about the lack of scenery in Byler or her ungrateful children. She was like a cat without claws. She still hissed and carried on, but she no longer hurt people with her words.

Tabitha and Cathy had struck up a strange friendship, and Cathy always pulled Tabitha back from the edge if she got cross or petulant and said something unkind.

The biggest change was that Tabitha never said a bad word about Enos, at least to the other women in the gmayna . Ada didn't know what went on at home because she wasn't living in the tent anymore, but she hoped Tabitha was coming to appreciate what Enos had done for her and had softened her heart in his direction.

Ada wanted gute things for Enos's sake.

She sighed to herself. She'd have to quit thinking about Enos, or her hands would keep shaking and her stitches would be uneven. Unpicking put Tabitha in a bad

mood. “Where is Enos today?” she said, proud that she’d said his name without a hint of emotion in her voice.

Tabitha was threading a needle with two pairs of glasses perched on her nose. “He’s getting ready for the men to come tomorrow for the second alfalfa harvest, doing whatever they do to get ready. He’s sharpening his tools or moping around in the shed. All he does is mope nowadays. I suspect he also wants to avoid our little quilting bee. Men think it’s all foolishness. He won’t be so smug when Esther sells this quilt at the shop and he sees our profit.”

Ada let out the breath she’d been holding. She was safe from Enos, at least for the time being.

They all turned their faces toward the front window when they heard a car pulling into the yard, gravel popping under its tires. Tabitha set down her unthreaded needle with a huff. “You’d think people would know better than to interrupt us when we’re trying to quilt.”

The expected knock came at the door, and Tabitha answered it, grumbling and groaning about the inconvenience of having to get off her chair. Wilford Brenchly, who sometimes drove the Byler Amish, stood at the front door with a hesitant expression on his lips. “Hello, Tabitha. It’s good to see you again.”

Tabitha shook her head. “I can’t imagine that’s true. You drove me to the hospital, and I told you your car was a piece of garbage.”

Wilford cleared his throat and laughed at the same time. “You surely did, but my wife tells me the same thing.” He looked beyond Tabitha. “Hi, Cathy. Did you ever get that knee fixed?”

Cathy waved to Wilford. “Not yet. I’m trying acupuncture first. I don’t want surgery.

People go in with one problem and come out with ten more.”

Wilford smiled. “Ain’t that the truth.” He glanced behind him. “Miss Tabitha, is Enos here? There’s someone out in the car who wants to talk to him.”

That was strange. Who would find it too much trouble to come to the front door himself?

“Who is it?” Tabitha wanted to know.

“Um, he doesn’t want me to say. He just wants to talk to Enos.”

Wilford sure knew how to pique everyone’s curiosity. Cathy cocked an eyebrow. Esther pulled the celery stick from behind her ear and took a bite. Ada craned her neck to see past Wilford and into his car. The back window was tinted, and she couldn’t make out a thing.

Tabitha was obviously just as interested as any of them, but surprisingly, she didn’t press Wilford for answers. “He’s in the barn, but you can’t drive the car around. There’s broken glass and old nails everywhere. You’ll get a flat tire.”

Ada knew for a fact that Enos kept better care of his property than that. There wasn’t an errant nail or piece of trash on the whole farm. It seemed Tabitha had a plan.

Wilford formed his lips into an O. “Okay. I sure don’t want a flat tire.”

Tabitha nodded her agreement, closed the door, and practically flew to the picture window, motioning for the others to join her. She peeked out through a slit in the curtains. “Come, come. He’s going to get out of the car.”

Cathy moved very fast for an eighty-something-year-old, joining Tabitha at the

window before she'd even quit talking. Esther and Ada jumped up and went to the other side of the window to peek. Wilford got back in the car and said something to the person in the back seat. The back passenger door opened slowly, and a man dressed in Amish clothes got out. His head was bent, and he held his hat so it covered his face from view. He was trying to hide his identity.

Tabitha gasped.

"Do you know who it is, Tabby?" Cathy asked.

"It's Zeb," Tabitha whispered, shocked and angry and hurt all at the same time.

Cathy glanced at Tabitha. "Zeb? Your son?"

Pain saturated Tabitha's features. "He came all the way from Pennsylvania and doesn't want to see me?"

With his hat still pulled over his face, Zeb trudged around the side of the house in the direction of the barn. Tabitha snatched her bonnet from the hook and stormed into the kitchen. "Come on. I'm going to see what that ungrateful little buzzard has to say to Enos. We're going to spy on him. Out the back door, everybody."

Cathy didn't hesitate for a moment. "I'm with you, sister. Slow down or you'll trip. And be quiet. We don't want them to hear us."

Ada and Esther looked at each other and shrugged. "I guess we should follow them," Esther said.

Ada was the last out of the house. How did she get roped into such things? First it was sneaking into the hospital, now it was spying on Enos's bruder .

The four of them tiptoed to the barn, staying low and hopefully out of sight. They stopped below the wide-open window, Cathy and Tabitha on one side, Ada and Esther on the other. Ada leaned as close as she could without risking being seen and held her breath in hopes of hearing the muffled conversation going on between the two bruderen . Was it a sin to eavesdrop? Ach , vell , it was too late for second thoughts. She would just have to repent later.

“ . . . and I won’t allow it. I have Lilith’s health to think of,” Zeb was saying.

Ada’s heart leapt at the sound of Enos’s buttery smooth bass voice. “You came all the way out here to tell me this? Mamm is fine. We have no plans to move back to Bird-in-Hand. Your family is safe.” Safe had a little bite to it. She couldn’t blame Enos for his resentment.

There was some ruffling of paper. “Mamm sent me this letter a few weeks ago. She said she’s going to starve herself until we let her come home.”

“And you waited two months to rush down here? I can see you’re concerned.”

Zeb didn’t seem to notice the chastisement in Enos’s voice. “That’s not why I was concerned. Mamm is nothing but bitterness and bluster. I knew she wouldn’t go through with it.”

Ada glanced at Tabitha. Her mouth was pressed into a hard line, her eyes flashing with anger. Maybe it was better to be angry than devastated.

“I’m more concerned about this part of her letter. ‘ Enos is deep in debt,’ ” Zeb read aloud. “ ‘ He’s going to lose the farm, and then it won’t matter if you don’t want me. I’ll have to come back, and so will Enos. As a gute son, you’ll have to let both of us live with you. You are the eldest. It is your responsibility. ’” Zeb growled. “Mamm keeps throwing my responsibility in my face, as if I asked to be born first or wanted

to be saddled with my miserable bruder . I have my own family to think about, and you and Mamm are not part of us. Mamm has made herself unbearably unpleasant, and Lilith can't stand to have her in the house. I want you to stay away."

Ada was stunned at such malice. Then again, Zeb was Tabitha's son. It seemed he was quite a bit like her.

"Believe me, bruder ," Enos said. "Much as I respect you, I would rather stay away. I never feel less like a man than when I'm with you and John. You have a talent for making me feel small."

"You are small, little boy. You have no fraa , no children, no money. You're a cripple, and you live a small life with small goals. I have a prosperous farm and seven fine children. I refuse to take care of you and steal food out of my children's mouths."

"Is this why you came all the way to Colorado, to tell me what you think of me? You shouldn't have bothered. I already know." Enos sounded utterly defeated. It was all Ada could do to keep from jumping out of hiding and storming into the barn to give Zeb a stern lecture and a gute kick in the shins.

Tabitha's face turned ashen. Was she thinking the same thing? Or maybe she saw herself reflected in her oldest son's harshness. Was she coming to a reckoning of her own?

"I came to make sure you and Mamm never return to Pennsylvania," Zeb said. More soft movement. "Here is a check for ten thousand dollars. Pay down your debts and make things work here in Colorado."

Ada covered her mouth to stifle a gasp. Ten thousand dollars! It wouldn't solve all Enos's problems, but it would take some of the pressure off.

“You have ten thousand to spare?” Enos said, skepticism dripping from his tone.

“Dat asked me to use it to take care of the family.”

“His family or yours?” It was obvious to both Enos and Ada that Enos’s dat had meant the money for Tabitha.

There was a long pause. Zeb was clearly weighing his words. “I have seven children. I need it more than you do.”

“You got the farm and the house, Zeb.”

“I also have a happy fraa and a peaceful life, and I want to keep it that way. I’m giving you this check as payment for taking Mamm off our hands.”

The silence between them stretched for several seconds. A single tear carved a path down Tabitha’s cheek. Cathy puckered up her face, pulled a cherry-red sucker from her purse, and handed it to Tabitha.

“Ada was right,” Enos mumbled.

Ada almost fell over. She wasn’t sure if it was surprise of hearing her name or Enos’s admission that she was right about anything.

“Who is Ada?” Zeb asked.

“She said I deserve better.” The sound of footsteps. Was Enos pacing? “And I do. I do deserve better.” He stopped moving. “I won’t take that money, Zeb. You just want to soothe your conscience, and I refuse to be paid for Mamm’s care, as if I’m an employee instead of her son. It is my privilege to take care of her. She gave us birth and reared us as best she could. She lived through tremendous heartache and lost Dat

too early. I will not abandon her.”

“All right then, dig your own grave. If you lose this farm, you and Mamm are on your own. We won’t take you back. I have my fraa and kinner to think of.”

Enos held firm. “You are choking on your own hypocrisy, Zeb. ‘But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.’”

Ada caught her breath as something thick and solid banged against the wall. She peeked a little farther into the barn. Zeb was clutching Enos’s shirt and pressing him to the wall. “How dare you say that to me? You are nobody, Enos, and you never will be.”

Enos placed his palms on Zeb’s chest and shoved him back, hard. Zeb nearly fell over. “Don’t touch me again, Zeb. You may be older, but I’m bigger and stronger, and I will defend myself, even though violence is against the Ordnung. Ada says I deserve better, and starting now, I will stand up for myself.”

Ada should have pulled back. She was risking being seen, but she couldn’t look away. Enos’s face glowed with purpose and resolve. She’d never seen such a formidable sight in her life. “I won’t let you or John bully me ever again. Gotte loves me just as much as He loves you, even though I don’t have a fraa or children or a penny to my name. I deserve better, and I’m going to start living for Gotte and praying for gute things to come into my life. ‘For I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ Gotte wants to prosper me, and I’d appreciate it if you got out of the way.”

Ada pulled back from the window and smiled to herself in spite of the terrible scene playing out inside the barn. She’d shared that scripture with Enos one morning around the campfire. How nice that he’d taken it to heart.

Zeb was breathing heavily, whether from anger or exertion, Ada couldn't tell. "I'd appreciate it if you stayed out of the way."

"Gladly, bruder ." She heard Enos walk toward the barn door. "I suppose you don't want to say hello to Mamm before you leave."

"She'll only get hysterical. I'd rather not deal with it today."

Both of them walked out of the barn and into the front yard.

Tabitha pressed her fingers to her lips and blinked rapidly to quell her rebellious tears.

Cathy growled. "I couldn't understand a thing, but it sounded bad."

Of course. Cathy didn't speak Deutsch . "Zeb doesn't want to see Tabitha ever again," Ada glanced at Tabitha, sorry to cause her more pain by recounting the conversation. "He tried to pay Enos ten thousand dollars, but Enos wouldn't take the money. He said it's a privilege to care for Tabitha and that Zeb is worse than an infidel. Zeb said Enos is a nobody. Enos said he deserves better."

Cathy frowned at Tabitha. "So do you. You deserve much better than Zeb."

Tabitha shook her head. "You told me. You said my chickens had come home to roost. I don't deserve Enos's kindness. He is a loyal son, and I've given him nothing but grief."

Cathy, Esther, and Ada surrounded her, and they came together in a four-way hug—no judgment, no I told you so, no gloating or rejoicing that Tabitha had gotten what she deserved. Tabitha was finally seeing the consequences of her bad temper and unkind behavior. But Ada couldn't rejoice at what she'd heard today. No mater

should be treated with such contempt. It didn't matter that Tabitha was partly to blame for her sons' dislike. They were commanded to honor their parents and to forgive seventy times seven. All along, Enos had been right, though Ada had argued with him about it. He was a better person than she could ever be.

Ada hooked her arm around Tabitha's elbow, and the four of them tiptoed back into the house. They crept to the front window and with arms around each other, watched Zeb climb into Wilford's car.

Tabitha shrugged Ada's arm off her shoulder. "Well, that's that. One less pest we have to spray for."

Ada studied Tabitha's face. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Tabitha's eyes flashed with headstrong determination, and she lifted her chin. "Let's hope there are no more interruptions. This quilt isn't going to finish itself." She put on both pair of glasses and picked up her needle. "Remember, a stitch in the ditch. And make them small. Unpicking puts me in a bad mood."

Ada waved goodbye to Cathy and Esther and headed across Enos's yard toward home. They'd been at Tabitha's house for nearly two hours, Enos hadn't bothered them once, and they'd finished almost a fourth of the quilt. It had been a very gute day. They'd all been shaken up by the conversation between Enos and Zeb, but none of them had said one more word about it. The subject was too painful and too fraught with emotion.

Ada held her breath as a deep longing washed over her. Tabitha had seen Zeb's true colors today, and even though she was gute at hiding her feelings, the revelation had brought Tabitha profound pain. Ada was proud of how Enos had stood up for himself, even if it meant financial ruin and an uncertain future. But Enos was not alone, even if he thought he was. The gmayna had rallied around him before. They would do it

again. They could help with his mortgage and his alfalfa. They could support him until he was firmly on his feet and financially whole. That was one of the best things about being a member of the Amish community. There were no more strangers or foreigners, only fellow citizens with the household of Gotte.

Ada clutched her bag tighter as she gingerly climbed over the fence that separated Enos's farm from the potato field, the shortcut she had taken many times over the last few months.

"Ada! Wait."

Ada's heart lurched, her foot missed the last fence post, and she found herself in the dirt on her backside. Ach ! Enos had horrible timing.

Bracing both hands on the top post, he leaped over the fence like it was nothing, then knelt in the dirt at Ada's side. "Are you okay? I'm wonderful sorry. Did I startle you?"

He reached out his hand to help her to her feet, but she could get up on her own, thank you very much . She stood and brushed the dirt off her dress, doing a thorough job of it just to show Enos how put out she was. "Do you often creep around your property waiting for unsuspecting women to walk by?"

His lips twitched as if he found her amusing. "Why do you like to climb my wobbly fence? It's an inconvenient and dangerous shortcut."

"Not that dangerous. I was three feet off the ground." She swiped her hand down her dress once more for gute measure. " Denki for your concern. I've got to get home to fix dinner."

"Wait, Ada. Don't go. I need to talk to you. Something happened earlier today, and I

need to tell you . . .”

Ada resisted the urge to growl. “Enos, I can’t be the kind of friend you want me to be.”

He tilted his head to the side. “What kind of friend is that?”

She blew a puff of air from between her lips. “Any kind of friend.” It hurt to say the words, but maybe he would leave her alone if he knew how she felt. “You need a friend, Enos, but it’s not going to be me.”

Frustration pulled at his mouth. “But you said you’d like it very much if we could be friends.”

Ada squared her shoulders and blurted out her confession. “I was lying, and I’ve come to regret it. I should have told you from the very beginning. I don’t want to be your friend. I don’t want you to try to talk to me after church. I don’t want to have conversations over the fence. I’m not going to invite you over for dinner or marshmallows or banana boats.” Her voice cracked. “I just want to be left alone. Menno and Clay and Levi are still happy to help with the alfalfa and the harvest, but I am going to go back to being your next-door neighbor who waves at you from long distances and makes sure my dog doesn’t bother your chickens.”

“I don’t have chickens.”

“All the better.”

He reached out to her, but she wasn’t having any of that nonsense. She stepped back, and he dropped his hand to his side. “Ada, I don’t want to be friends either.”

Why did his words cut a slice through her heart? “Okay, well, gute . We feel the same

way then.”

“ Nae , Ada, we don’t.” The intensity in his eyes made her heart skip a beat. “I’m trying to tell you. Something happened earlier today. Zeb came to see me while you and Mamm were quilting.”

Ada didn’t act surprised. She’d deceived Enos enough for a lifetime. “What does that have to do with being friends?”

“I realized that you were right. Zeb and John think I’m worthless, and I have lived out their opinion of me for far too long.” He closed his eyes. “I stood tall today. I did the right thing, the hard thing, and I realized that I’m not worthless, no matter what Zeb or John or my mamm say. You tried to tell me, and I didn’t believe you.”

“Why would you believe me? I’m just your next-door neighbor who keeps her dog away from your chickens. Certainly nobody to fuss over or pay heed to.”

He studied her face. “I’m detecting sarcasm.”

She turned away from him. “No one can convince you of your worth if you don’t believe it.”

He tapped his hand on the fence post. “Ada, will you stop being so stubborn?”

She sniffed into the air. “Don’t you dare accuse me. I have no blame in this.”

He held up his hands. “Okay. You’re right. It’s just that I’m trying to tell you something, and you’re acting like I’m the enemy.”

Was Enos the enemy? It felt very much like he was trying to get her to surrender to something. Jah , today he was the enemy. She folded her arms. “What is it you want

to tell me?”

“Can we try again?”

The look he gave her stole her breath, but she pretended not to understand him. “Try what?”

“Being more than friends.”

He was sidling into dangerous, risky, heartbreaking territory. She wanted to be Enos’s fraa more than anything, but what did Enos want, really? “I can’t even begin to answer that. I’ve worked very hard to let you go.”

His disappointment was thick in the space between them, but to his credit, he didn’t seem inclined to give up. “You said you love me, that I’m the only person who can make you happy. What has changed?”

“If you don’t love yourself, how can you even begin to love another person? You certainly can’t love me.”

“I can, and I do.”

Her heart swelled. Had he just said he loved her? Or was he simply tap dancing around his feelings again? Could she risk more heartache? “On the night you chased away that rattlesnake, what were you feeling? I’m sure you were concerned for me, and you cared that I didn’t die on your property. But concern isn’t love. Love has power and strength, and you are not willing to fight for me.”

“Not willing to fight? I faced down that rattler with a shovel.”

“A rattlesnake is nothing compared to your own self-doubt and your mater .”

A black cloud darkened his features. "I can't abandon my mater . Please don't make me choose."

Ada's heart felt wrung out, like an old dishrag. "This is what I'm talking about, Enos. I would never ask you to abandon your mater . Lilith and Zeb think there are only two choices, let your mamm live with them and separate or shut your mamm out of their lives and be happy. Why are you unwilling to look for a third way, a better way, to fight for me and still honor your mater ? Maybe it's too hard. Maybe you don't think enough of yourself to try. Maybe you don't care enough about me to try. Can you blame me for giving up on you? You've already given up on me."

"I haven't. I promise, I haven't."

She stiffened her spine. "Then show it. Fight for me."

"Fighting is against the Ordnung."

She sighed so loudly, two birds in Enos's yard took flight. "It's not that kind of fighting." She swallowed hard. "Do you love me, Enos?" She hated making herself so vulnerable, but everything hinged on his answer to that very risky question.

Pain flashed across his face. "Look at me, Ada. How can you even ask that?"

"Because you've never said it, and you're still avoiding it."

He fell silent and stared down at the dirt. "I . . . I have never said those words to anyone in my whole life."

She tilted her head to one side. "You've never said I love you?"

" Nae . You don't know how hard it is for me to say. Impossible, really." His eyes

flashed with raw and sincere desperation. “Actions are more important than words.”

“Jah, they are.” Ada didn’t have the heart to argue with him or press him to say something he couldn’t say. Perhaps that was a conversation for another day. Perhaps it was a conversation they would never have. Enos’s family had wounded him deeply, but she didn’t want to marry a broken little boy. She wanted the grown-up Enos, who was willing to stand up to his bruder and fight for the woman he, maybe, sort of, loved.

“So tell me what you want me to do.”

What she wanted him to do was jump back over that fence and leave her alone. But not really. She wanted him to fight for her, but he bristled at even the hint of violence. “Even if you can’t tell me, I want to be sure of your love. I feel like just one of many items on your list of concerns, but so is your horse and your alfalfa.”

She’d made him very unhappy, but she didn’t regret a word. “How can I prove I’m gute enough for you?”

“I already know you’re gute enough. You don’t have to prove it to me.”

“What then?” he said.

He didn’t know what he was asking for, but Ada was agitated enough to give it to him. “I want someone who won’t roll over or back down or give up because things are hard. I want someone who will do everything in his power to make it work between his mamm and his fraa and who won’t avoid the hard decisions to make it easier on himself. I want someone who won’t walk over other people but will walk through fire to win my love.”

He stared at her, slack-jawed and wide-eyed. “I don’t know what to say.”

His expression made Ada feel like a selfish, self-centered idiot, but it also gave her more clarity than she'd ever had before. Maybe that kind of love—stubborn, wholehearted, and uncompromising—was an impossible fantasy, but it was the only kind Ada wanted. She was willing to walk through fire for Enos, and she wouldn't settle for anything less from him. Even if he couldn't say the words.

“It sounds like too much of a bother, doesn't it?” she said. “A nicer, sweeter woman would never ask such a thing of you. That's why we should go back to being indifferent neighbors. I'll wave to you over the fence, bring eggs from our chickens, and nod to you if we pass each other at gmay .”

His frown was like a deep cut on his handsome face. “I don't want that.”

Suddenly feeling very weary, she turned around, dodged a potato plant in her path, and took a step toward home. “Words mean nothing to me, Enos, and apparently they mean nothing to you. I hope you have a lovely life.”

She had the courage to walk away. It was the hardest thing she'd ever done.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

Ada strapped her headlight over her bandanna, donned her work gloves, and trudged out to the potato field using her hoe and her shovel as walking sticks. It was early, too early to be out of bed, but she wanted to get a head start on the weeding before the sun got too high and the temperature went above eighty.

Ada and Dat had never planted potatoes on their farm before, and Ada was trying to decide if it was worth the trouble, especially since she planned on giving all the potato money to Enos after the harvest.

She wasn't altogether sure he'd accept it. He'd refused Zeb's ten thousand dollars last week. Why would he take what he'd told Ada was hers?

Enos couldn't tell her he loved her, but he was making a complete and adorable pest of himself, and Ada had no one to blame but herself. "Fighting for Ada" apparently meant helping Dat oil the buggy, fixing the chicken coop door, and milking the goats before Ada could get out there to do it in the morning. Enos had left a full pail of milk in the barn every morning for a week, and Ada was starting to feel like a slacker. He was also building something big and important looking against the west side of his house. Maybe an addition, but Ada couldn't begin to guess where he'd gotten the money for such a project.

She was still too irritated and uncertain to talk to him, though he tried every day to engage her in conversation. He had finally successfully cornered her at gmay and talked to her for a full seven minutes before he was drafted to help load the benches into the church wagon. He was awkward and unsure, but Ada was hopeful that he was fighting for her in his own clumsy way. Or maybe he did truly just want to be friends. She certainly wouldn't get her hopes up. Getting her heart broken once was

quite enough for a lifetime.

Ada got to the edge of the potato field and stopped short. Enos's one-man tent sat in the middle of the field where Ada's bigger tent used to be. What did he think he was doing? Was he trying to camp himself to death? Would that man never listen to reason and common sense? Right next to his tent was a three-foot pile of dead weeds. She scanned the potato field with her headlamp. The whole thing had been weeded! Yesterday, the weeds were taking over the field. This morning, they were gone. When had Enos found time to do that? If he'd stayed up all night, she would give him a scolding he'd never forget.

Ada marched right up to Enos's tent and slapped the top. That man was as stubborn as a mule, and if he wouldn't look out for his own well-being, Ada would have to. "Enos Hoover, get out here."

He stirred, and she held her breath as he crawled out of his tent fully clothed with suspenders, hat, and boots in place. Was that man ever unprepared? "Ada, it's not even five o'clock. Have you no compassion? I only crawled in bed at three this morning."

"Three? You were up until three?"

He nodded. "I had to finish the weeding. I knew you'd be out here early."

"What are you doing? I moved my tent weeks ago, and you need your sleep."

He yawned and stood up, squinting into her headlamp. "If you're so worried about me getting enough sleep, you shouldn't have woken me up."

"I wouldn't have had to wake you if you hadn't been sleeping in the middle of my potato field. You said you'd never set foot on my property again."

He didn't seem inclined to back down to her. "I said that, but this isn't your property, and I'm not going to let you get away with stealing it. I have to fight for what's mine."

Ada couldn't keep a smile from twitching at the corners of her mouth. "You think you can play this game better than I can? I invented it."

He betrayed himself with a soft chuckle. "Is it working?"

"Nae , now take this tent down, go home, and get some sleep. The sun won't be up for another hour."

"You're my sun, Ada. I don't need the other kind."

Ada felt herself blush. Gute thing it was dark and he couldn't properly see her face because of her headlamp. "Those are very pretty words for a man who's trespassing on my property."

"If this is what it takes to win you back, I'll camp for the rest of my life."

"You'll die of exhaustion."

He folded his arms. "It's the principle of the thing. A man has to fight for the woman he loves."

Ada's heart skipped, and she felt very foolish indeed. Enos couldn't come right out and say it, but she'd known all along that Enos loved her as much as she loved him. She'd simply been waiting for him to work up the courage to do something about it. Camping out on her property, losing hours of sleep, helping around her farm, were all doing something about it. Weeding her potatoes was doing something about it. Not giving up on her was definitely doing something about it.

She buried her shovel into the dirt. “Maybe I’ll go back to sleep, then. I was planning on weeding, but the job’s been done. You seem determined to work yourself to death.”

“More proof I’m fighting for you.”

Ada laughed. “Okay, okay. I’m getting the message.” Her heart wanted to sing.

Enos bent over and picked up two camp chairs lying by the side of his tent. “Will you join me for breakfast?”

“What are you planning to make?”

“I’ve got marshmallows, bananas, and chocolate chips.”

“Doesn’t sound very nutritious.”

Enos set up the camp chairs, then pulled some firewood from a small pile next to his tent. “Bananas have potassium in them.”

“We could all use more potassium. Do you have kaffee?”

He nodded. “French roast. Only the best for you, Ada.”

Ada snorted. “You don’t have to work so hard to butter me up. Plain kaffee from the Bent and Dent is gute enough for me.”

He set to making the fire, a pleasantly amused look on his face. He was definitely testing the limits of her patience. “Nothing is gute enough for you.”

She laughed out loud. “How long have you been practicing that line?”

He seemed on the verge of laughter himself. “Only the best for you, Ada.” He ducked into his tent and came out with four bananas, a bag of marshmallows, and a storage container of chocolate.

“You’re well prepared,” she said wryly.

“I had to be ready for anything, and I was hopeful you’d come this way to weed the potatoes.”

“And you weeded for me.”

“Only the best for you, Ada.”

“You can stop saying that. You’ve made your point.”

He grinned like a mischievous boy. “I don’t think I have.”

She studied Enos’s face. “You seem awfully cheerful this morning.” Why was he so chipper? Just a week ago she’d told him she didn’t even want to be friends, and he’d told her he didn’t know how to fight for her.

He piled the wood and struck a match. “I should be. It’s a very special day.”

Ada couldn’t keep her pulse from racing. “Why?” she managed to squeeze out.

“Could you turn that headlamp off? I want to see your face better, and I’m going to go blind.”

She flipped the light off and pulled the strap off her head. It was still pretty dark. Surely he wouldn’t be able to see how red her face was. “Why is it a special day, Enos?”

He held up his hand before throwing a couple of sticks into the fire. “Not yet. Everything has to be ready.” He motioned for her to sit, then pulled his camp chair to face hers. He handed Ada a banana, and they cut the thick skin with plastic knives. After filling their bananas with chocolate and marshmallows, they wrapped them in tinfoil and set them at the edge of the fire on the hot coals.

Enos reached out and took both of Ada’s hands in his. He looked confident enough, but his hands were trembling. She held her breath. He was nervous. She resisted the urge to pull him into her arms and comfort him. “Ada, I thought I had to sacrifice everything to be worthy of Gotte’s love, but I don’t think Gotte would ask me to give up my love for you just to prove my love for Him. He is love. Gotte created me, and He has plans for me. He wants me to have hope and a bright future, not to live my life in despair and misery. I’m finished sacrificing my own happiness for other people, especially when I don’t think Gotte would ever require that of me.”

Ada wanted to kiss him so bad, her fingers tingled at his touch. He was looking at her with such love, she knew what he was going to say before he said it. Her heart beat an uneven rhythm in anticipation.

“You said something the other day that struck me like a brick to the head.”

“Did it hurt?”

He pursed his lips. “You said there weren’t only two choices. You said I didn’t have the courage to find another way. And you were right.”

“Of course I was right.”

“Ada, please don’t talk.”

Laughter burst from her lips. “ Ach , but you’re bossy.”

“I’m trying to say something, and I need you to let me say it.”

Ada closed her mouth and shook her head, but she couldn’t keep from smiling at the earnest, lovesick look on Enos’s face.

“The night after your quilting bee with Mamm, I sat her down and told her everything. I told her that I want to marry you.”

It was all Ada could do to keep from shouting for joy.

“I assured my mamm I would never leave her, but that Gotte has plans for my life, and you are the biggest part of those plans.”

“What did she say?”

Enos shrugged. “She wasn’t happy. She’s afraid you’ll turn out to be just like Lilith and Ardy. I told her that wasn’t possible. You speak your mind and don’t put up with bad behavior, but you are also the most thoughtful, considerate person I know. I told her that it will be much more pleasant if she’s nice, but that even if she makes herself unbearable, there is still a place for her with us.”

“There will always be a place for her.” They hadn’t even married yet, and they were already making plans to accommodate Tabitha. It was a gute thing. Ada could handle Tabitha, and Tabitha was learning to curb her temper and her criticism. Ada had already seen some encouraging changes.

“She got offended at the word unbearable ,” Enos said, “but then she reluctantly admitted that she could be difficult. I was so surprised, I almost choked on my own tongue. She told me I am her favorite son. Not that I believe it for a second, but it must have been very hard for her to say the words. She’s come very far from our first day in Colorado.” He cleared his throat. “She said you’re not a gute cook, and she

doesn't think your quilt stitches are small enough."

Ada raised an eyebrow. "I know. She chastised my stitches, but hers are bigger. And for sure and certain if she tasted my au gratin potatoes, she wouldn't be so sure of herself. Or my bread pudding. Does she like bread pudding?"

"I love bread pudding."

"But what about your mamm?"

"If you made it, I don't think she'd admit to liking it."

For some reason, the thought of Tabitha pretending not to like Ada's cooking made her smile. "I look forward to the challenge of making something she can't find fault with, but I won't to let her disapproval hurt my feelings. For her, criticism is just a bad habit."

Enos picked up a stick and poked at the fire. "Ada, I don't mean to be rude, but will you please be quiet so I can get all the way through my story?"

"I was just saying . . ."

"Ach, vell, hold all your comments until the end." He took her hand and kissed each one of her knuckles. Ada flew to the moon. "Despite all her protests, Mamm didn't seem all that upset about the thought of having you for a daughter-in-law." He squeezed her hand. "Here's the part that knocked the wind out of me. She told me Dat carefully put away money in a separate bank account for her. She has almost sixty thousand dollars in the bank."

"What?" Ada said, before clapping her hand over her mouth. No interrupting.

“I’m building her a little apartment attached to our house so she can have her own private space and keep you and me out of her hair. She told me to pay down my debts with any money left over after the addition.”

“That is . . . that is shocking news.”

“I don’t know that my mamm will ever be considered kind or beloved, but she’s softened so much, I hardly recognize her.”

Ada smiled to herself. It took Cathy Larsen, a little sneaking around, and Gotte’s grace to accomplish such a miracle. “Maybe she’s finally seeing you the way Gotte sees you.”

“Maybe I’m finally seeing myself the way Gotte sees me.” The resolve on his face faltered momentarily, and he took a deep breath. “Ada, I have never told anyone I loved them before because I was afraid. I adored my bruderen , but I knew they’d laugh at me if I said anything so sentimental. I didn’t dare say the words to my mater . She would have thrown them on the floor and stomped on them. I was afraid Dat would ignore me or act like it wasn’t important to him. I didn’t have the courage to risk my heart because there was no one worth risking it for, not my parents, not my bruderen , not Gloria Lapp in the third grade.” His lips curled upward. “She liked to chase me around the playground. With one missing foot, I was the only boy she could catch.” Still holding onto her hand, he slid off his chair and knelt at Ada’s feet. Ada almost fainted. “But I know I’m safe with you. You told me you love me, even after I yelled at you for sleeping in the tent all those weeks. Even after I tried to steal six acres. Even after I chastised you for how you treated Beth. Even after I told you to go away and leave me alone.”

“ Ach , du lieva ,” Ada said breathlessly. “I’m an exceptionally forgiving person.”

He laughed, but his hand still trembled in hers. He wasn’t comfortable or confident.

“I have behaved very badly, yet you still love me. At least I hope you do.”

“You’re a dummkoff , Enos Hoover. Of course I do.”

In one swift motion, he stood up, pulled her to her feet, and snaked his arms around her waist. “I say this with my whole heart, Ada. I love you. I love you more than I have ever loved anyone or anything. Do you believe me?”

“You’re a dummkoff , Enos Hoover. Of course I do.”

His smile was as wide as the sky. “Then will you marry me?” He didn’t wait for an answer. Pulling her close, he brought his lips down on hers and kissed her so gently and urgently that Ada forgot her own name. She got on her tippy toes, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him back, even though she was still mad at him for taking so long to finally ask.

He pulled away slightly. “I was so eager to kiss you that I didn’t even wait for an answer.” Doubt lined his brow. “Please say yes.”

“I’m sorry to repeat myself, but you are a dummkoff , Enos Hoover. Of course I’ll marry you.”

He laughed. “I’m going to take care of you, Ada. You’ll never have to climb the irrigation system again. You’ll never again have to sleep with the rattlesnakes or face down an angry tractor driver.”

“That was sort of fun. It got my heart pumping.” She gave him a swift kiss. “Let’s take care of each other. You keep me safe. I’ll keep you on your toes.”

He grunted. “Yes, indeed. But no more of your camping out. It’s too hard for me to sleep when I’m on high alert.”

Ada giggled. “High alert? What does that mean?”

“Cathy says it means I’m stressed out. I’ve been stressed out ever since I met you.”

“Only because you’re so fascinated with me.”

He tightened his arms around her. “Very fascinated and very much in love. I’ll never want for another thing in my whole life.”

He kissed her again and again, and Ada kissed him back with her whole heart. The banana boats burned to a crisp.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 2:30 pm

Ada glanced out the front window. Big fluffy snowflakes drifted lazily to the ground and dusted the grass and sagebrush with a fine layer of ice. The first snowfall of the season. The backbreaking outdoor work of plowing, planting, and harvesting was finished for another year. Ada looked forward to many cold winter nights tucked in Enos's arms, sitting next to the woodstove with thick woolen socks on her feet and a mug of hot cocoa in her hand.

Cathy drove up in her van with a load of passengers. Esther, the kinner, Sadie, and Beth were there to talk about Grossmammi Beulah's quilt. Mary and Joanna had both given birth last week, so they couldn't come, but Ada would be seeing them later. She and Tabitha had made both families dinner, and after they thought about quilts and talked about quilts and planned to make more quilts, Cathy was going to drive all of them to Joanna's and then Mary's to deliver food to the new mothers.

Most Amish couples were engaged for several months, but Ada and Enos had been given permission to marry immediately after the harvest. The bishop agreed to it because he'd very untactfully told them that neither of them was getting any younger, and if they wanted babies, they would need to start immediately. Ada didn't mind that the bishop thought she was getting on in years. She got to marry Enos that much sooner.

Once they got engaged, Enos and Ada were published the very next week and married four weeks later. Cathy claimed it was all her doing, though Ada was the one who'd chosen the Bachelor's Puzzle quilt block and had been stubborn enough to refuse to change it. Esther also claimed responsibility for the marriage since a relationship between Ada and Enos had been her idea first.

Cathy and Esther made Ada a wedding quilt out of Bachelor's Puzzle blocks, and Ada thought it was beautiful, even though Tabitha said it was a rush job and the stitches were embarrassingly uneven.

Ada's wedding day was perfectly beautiful, even though everything went wrong. Zeb and John and their families didn't come, which was sad and a relief at the same time. The bishop arrived late, Mary went into false labor, and Tabitha bawled out Tyson Carruthers for wearing bright yellow trousers and a red bow tie to her son's wedding. Joanna made little cakes for every table, and they were delicious, but Beth had insisted on decorating each one of them. Her pink flowers had looked like bulbous spiders, and her leaves had melted and made little green trails down each cake. Ada loved them anyway. Beth had proven herself smart and determined and loyal. Ada would never take her for granted again.

Ada wasn't sure what Enos had been thinking, but a man in love didn't always think straight. After the wedding dinner, he had Clay and Menno drag his one-man tent into the field behind the Yoders' house, pile wood on top of it, and light it on fire. The only problem was that it was made of fire-resistant fabric and wouldn't burn. It did, however, melt and stink up the entire valley with the odor of burnt nylon. Ada smiled to herself. It was still a lovely gesture, symbolizing the end of mistrust, isolation, and camping. Ada promised Enos that she would never camp again, and Enos promised there would never be a reason.

Enos and several other men from the gmayna had finished the addition to the house three days before the wedding. Tabitha had her own bathroom, bedroom, and kitchen. It was the perfect arrangement for everyone. Tabitha didn't feel like a guest in someone else's home, and Ada and Enos got some much-needed privacy.

They'd been married less than a month, and Enos was proving to be an even better man than Ada had originally thought. He helped Dat on their farm, joined in on all the hay cutting, potato harvesting, and winter planting he could, and he'd even sent Zeb's oldest son some money to buy his family a new milk cow. He kept the stove

stoked on chilly days, snuggled with Ada when her feet were cold, and kissed her every morning and night without fail. Ada had never been happier in her life, and the joy could only increase with the passage of time.

Tabitha came to the window and stood next to Ada. They watched as Cathy, Esther, and everybody else climbed out of the van. “Why do they have to all come to the front door? Aren’t we all just going to deliver food to the new mothers? Die kinner will make a mess, for sure and certain.”

“They want to spend a few minutes talking about Beth’s quilt block. Two years ago, we schwesteren started a birthday quilt for our grossmammi Beulah for her hundredth birthday. Thank Derr Herr, she’s still alive, because we have yet to finish it. Everyone’s squares are done except for Beth’s, and she keeps changing her mind. Cathy is going to make her decide today so we can finish the quilt before Grossmammi gets too old to enjoy it.”

Tabitha’s eyebrows traveled up her forehead. “I’d say she was too old about two decades ago. When I get to be eighty, I’ll have the gute sense to die so I won’t be a burden on anyone.”

“Grossmammi Beulah isn’t a burden. She’s a blessing to all who know her.”

Tabitha grunted, and Ada sensed a little sorrow in it. “I doubt anyone will say that about me.”

Ada took Tabitha’s hand and squeezed it. “You are a blessing to me. You brought Enos to Colorado so I could fall in love with him.”

Tabitha’s cheeks darkened with a red blush. “Enos brought me to Colorado, kicking and screaming, I might add.”

“Aren’t you froh he did? If not for him, you wouldn’t have seen Zeb’s true colors.

You wouldn't have learned what a gute son Enos is. You wouldn't have met Cathy Larsen."

"Ha! Cathy barely tolerates me."

"Vell, she barely tolerates any of us, but we fill her life as much as she fills ours. Never underestimate her feelings. They run deep and real. She's loyal, straightforward, and fun to be with. If she didn't want to be your friend, she wouldn't. I'd say she likes you quite a bit."

The corner of Tabitha's mouth curled upward. "Well, I don't like her, but I've never met a better quilter. I think I can overlook all the rest."

Cathy, Esther, and the rest of them tromped into the house, each shrugging off their coats and scarves and piling them on one of the easy chairs next to the front door. "Okay," Cathy said, "we're not planning to be here very long. We've got just enough time to help Beth pick out a quilt block."

Beth plopped herself on the love seat and pulled a small notepad out of her apron pocket. "I was going to do Grandmother's Flower Garden, but it just started to feel overwhelming. It has too many sides and corners, and I'm not good at matching corners."

Winnie and Junior immediately found Tabitha. "Aendi Tabby, can we have a cookie?"

Tabitha propped her fist on her hip and glared at Esther. "Don't you teach your children their manners? It's rude to ask for something to eat at a stranger's house."

Winnie gave Tabitha that wide-eyed innocent look that could melt even the hardest heart. "But, Aendi Tabby, you're not a stranger. We love you."

Tabitha puckered her lips as if she'd just swallowed a whole lemon. "You can sweet-talk me all you want, but you need to learn your manners." She took Junior's hand. "What kind of cookie do you both want? I have chocolate chip and molasses crinkles."

"What is mole-has-is kinkles?" Junior said.

Tabitha led the children toward the kitchen. "I'll let you have a taste of both. Ada made them, so they're not as chewy as mine, but you're children so you're not picky."

Esther grinned at Ada and set Benny on his feet. He toddled to the kitchen behind Tabitha. Tabitha didn't seem to mind at all. Sadie sat next to Beth, and Cathy, Esther, and Ada sat on the couch. Esther pulled a quilting book from her canvas bag. "I found five very easy patterns. Any of them would be a piece of cake."

Cathy pulled a protein bar from her purse, along with a pair of scissors. She cut the top off the package and dropped the scissors in her purse. "Before we rush into anything, let us remember that any quilt block we choose has consequences. I don't want to doom Beth to suffering a bear attack or living in a log cabin for the rest of her life."

"Now, Cathy," Esther scolded. "Remember how anxious you were about Ada's quilt block? Look what a wunderbarr man she has now."

Cathy tilted her head as if to hear Esther better. "So you admit everything that happened to Ada was because of that quilt block she chose?"

Esther shook her head. "That is not what I meant. I'm just saying that God makes everything turn out all right in the end."

Cathy rolled that around in her head for a few seconds. "I can't argue with that. God

does have a way of turning our afflictions to our gain. But let's not tempt fate."

"We don't believe in fate."

Cathy was unconvinced. "I'd rather not find out you're wrong."

Esther opened her book and pointed to one of the photos. "How about this one? It's called Ohio Star."

"No doubt about it, Beth will move to Ohio," Cathy said.

Esther sighed, doing a gute job of keeping her patience. "There is also Maple Leaf. Isn't it beautiful?"

Cathy took a bite of her protein bar. "Even worse. She'll move to Canada."

"Churn Dash is easy."

"That's the worst one. Beth will marry one of those Swartzentruber Amish, and you'll never see her again."

Ada drew her brows together. "What does Churn Dash have to do with the Swartzentrubers?"

"The Swartzentrubers are the most conservative Amish sect," Cathy said. "I imagine they still churn their own butter, and they don't believe in indoor plumbing. I could never marry a man who renounces indoor plumbing. It's the most important thing, next to love."

Esther smiled sweetly, though Ada could feel the tension building. "All right then, what about the Economy Block."

“She’ll marry a politician.”

Ada smiled at Cathy’s irrational reasoning. If nothing else, she cared very deeply about Beth. Maybe Ada could put Esther out of her misery. “What about the easiest pattern of all? The Nine Patch.”

Cathy mulled that suggestion over for a second. “The Nine Patch is very plain, very simple, and very safe. I can’t find anything wrong with it.” She pulled out her cell phone and tapped the screen.

“Well, hooray for that,” Esther said.

Beth shrugged. “That sounds like a wonderful- gute idea. I’ve been so busy making cheese and running the household that I barely have time to breathe, let alone quilt.”

“You should be able to finish your squares quickly,” Ada said. “Then we can sew it together and quilt it and give it to Grossmammi for Christmas.”

Esther closed her book. “That’s a lovely idea. Fast, easy, and beautiful.” She glanced at Cathy and paused. Cathy was riveted to her phone. “It’s all settled then. Have Ada help you pick some fabric, and I can come and help you cut it out.”

Cathy sucked in a breath. “Wait! We’ll have to choose another one. The number nine is bad luck in Japan.”

Esther glared at Cathy. “The Amish don’t believe in luck.”

Cathy fished in her purse, pulled out a sucker, and handed it to Beth, as if to lend her some comfort at this difficult time. “That’s too bad, because if you choose that quilt block, Beth will have a whole wagonful of bad luck.” There was no talking Cathy out of anything once she got it in her head.

Sadie's eyes widened. "Cathy is right. Just this morning, Beth had a string of bad luck. Maybe we should reconsider."

Beth went pale, jabbed Sadie in the ribs, and popped the bright red sucker into her mouth. Did Beth believe in bad luck? She wasn't saying. Suddenly she yanked the sucker from her mouth. "Yuck, hot cinnamon."

Cathy took the sucker from Beth's hand and examined it. "I didn't buy any cinnamon ones. It's most definitely bad luck. I hate to say I told you so."

"It's your favorite thing to say," Esther whined.

Cathy zipped her purse shut. "I wash my hands of the whole thing. Beth has made her choice. Now all of you will have to live with it. The only thing I can say is good luck."