

Living in Harmony

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*“If the Lord would tarry another hundred years,
what kind of world will we leave to our children?”*

Old Order Amish father of ten,
Waldo County, Maine



*“The Amish are a tremendous asset to our community.
They are restoring the agricultural vitality
to the land I grew up on.”*

Jim Kenney,
lifelong area resident and son of a farmer

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ONE

Rock of Ages, cleft for me

Mount Joy, Pennsylvania

The rain's finally stopped. We're late. I'd better get you home before your father comes looking for us carrying his squirrel rifle—thunderstorm or no."

"Hmm," replied Amy. John's attempt at humor fell short of its mark.

"With my next paycheck, I should have enough money for a load of insulation to be delivered next week," he said with great animation. "I'll check the total weight. If it's not too heavy for my flatbed wagon, I'll pick it up at the lumberyard with your *daed's* Belgians. That will save us the delivery charge."

"Mh-hmm," replied Amy, trying to shake off the odd sensation snaking up her spine. It was probably the two lemon bars she ate after the sloppy joes. Sweet and spicy didn't always set well in her stomach.

"And I'll pick up one of those fancy whirlpool tubs with at least a dozen water jets and also a tanning bed so your *mamm* won't get so pale during the winter months."

“That’s nice. Whatever you think would be best for the *dawdi haus* addition.” Amy laced her fingers together and pressed both palms down on her roiling belly.

John Detweiler pulled on the reins and steered the open buggy to the side of the road. “What has you distracted, Amy? You haven’t heard a word I’ve said since we left the cookout and singing at the Lapp farm.” His expression revealed concern rather than irritation.

Amy straightened against the bench seat, grinning as his previous words took root in her mind. “*Mir leid*,” she apologized. “I don’t feel quite right. I should watch the combination of foods I eat at get-togethers instead of nibbling on a dozen different treats.” She offered an apologetic smile. “I do believe *mamm* and *daed* would frown on the Jacuzzi and tanning bed ideas, so just stick to insulation.”

They laughed companionably as John checked for traffic and then guided their buggy back onto the roadway. “At least I got your attention.” He patted her knee. Even though her legs were covered by a pine-green dress and black apron, it was still an inappropriate gesture.

But Amy didn’t scold him for his affection, because everyone in the district knew they would announce their engagement this autumn and marry in November—the traditional wedding season in Lancaster County. She opened her mouth to ask him to explain his house addition plans when the acrid smell of wood smoke assailed her senses.

“Fire!” she gasped. Alarm turned her voice into a childish squeak. Her mild sensation of unease quickly escalated into full-blown dread.

“Easy, now. We just left a bonfire and s’mores roast. Who’s to say some *Englischer* isn’t doing the same thing over the next hill?” Nevertheless, he clucked his tongue to the horse to step up the pace.

As they rounded the bend in the road, Amy saw a streaky

orange glow reflected against low-hanging clouds. “Oh, dear Lord,” she gasped, half standing in the buggy. “Bonfires don’t light up the entire sky, and that’s the direction of our farm!”

John gently pulled her down to the seat. “There are plenty of houses in that direction, Amy. Let’s not get worked up until we know for sure.” He spoke words of assurance, yet his tone wasn’t very convincing.

She squeezed her eyes shut and began to pray. Over and over silently in her head, she pleaded for the blaze to be a brush fire, or perhaps an abandoned ramshackle barn torched by the volunteer fire department for training purposes. Every few years the fire marshal scheduled an exercise and invited all surrounding fire departments to participate. Amish and *Englischers* arrived with lawn chairs to watch the volunteers battle the flames.

“Git up there,” John shouted, slapping the reins with urgency. The Standardbred complied, breaking into a fast trot.

The horse’s effort only hastened the inevitable conclusion for Amy King. As they reached the top of the next hill in Lancaster’s famous rolling countryside, she stared across hay and wheat fields at a daughter’s worst nightmare.

Her fervent prayers weren’t to be answered.

Her parents’ farm—her home for all twenty-two years of her life—was fully engulfed in flames. Sparks from the inferno shot thirty feet into the air as the entire yard glowed with eerie yellow light. Paralysis seized every muscle in her body. She tried to scream, to holler for more people to come help, but no sounds issued forth. Hot, stinging tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks as the breeze carried smoke and soot in their direction. The horse neighed loudly and fought against the harness, expressing a strong opinion about getting closer to the fire. John slipped an arm around her shoulders as he turned the buggy into the next driveway.

She barely felt his touch as she again tried to speak. “Why is

no one ringing the farm bell?” she managed to say between choking coughs.

John jumped out to secure the horse to the hitching post of the house next door—the home of Amy’s aunt, uncle, and grandparents. Then he reached up for her hand. “I’m sure they rang the bell plenty. Everybody who could come is already here.” He also coughed from the bitter smoke that drifted across the yard like a heavy fog.

Avoiding his outstretched hand, Amy jumped from the buggy and sprinted through the meadow separating the two farms. She scrambled over the split rail fences with childlike agility.

John followed close on her heels, trying without success to catch hold of her. “Slow down, Amy! You’ll twist an ankle or break a leg.”

She ignored his warning and focused solely on the total destruction of the hundred-year-old wood-and-stone structure. When the wind shifted, her vision cleared briefly. The back and side yards were swarming with people. Two neighbors aimed green garden hoses ineffectually on the fire. The fire department’s larger hoses rained a steady stream on the back of the house, the side still intact. Firemen in full gear pumped water from the King pond using diesel generators. Some Amish men still clutched full buckets of water, passed to them by lines of women and children from the pond, but the intense heat prevented them from getting close enough to dump their buckets on the blaze. With soot-darkened faces they moved back, acknowledging the inevitable.

Amy stood rooted to the driveway, watching as the roof collapsed in a shower of sparks. Her home was lost. For a minute she stood transfixed, unable to look away. One by one, firemen repositioned the hoses on the barn to keep the blaze from spreading to other outbuildings. She heard the mournful bellowing of cows in the pasture, terrified by sights and sounds and smells they didn’t understand. John again tried to offer comfort with an arm around her back, but his touch merely galvanized her to action. She ran pell-mell through the crowd, amid smoke and sparks and

confusion. Hoses and equipment lay everywhere, ready to send the unobservant sprawling.

“Where are my *mamm* and *daed*?” she screamed. Yet her strangled wail was barely audible. “Rachel, Beth, Nora—where are my *schwestern*?”

Several Amish women of their district hurried toward her, but Amy shrugged off their restraining embraces. Headlong toward the inferno she ran, and she might have slipped between firefighters and into the house if John hadn’t caught up to her.

He grabbed her around the waist and dragged her none too gently back from the heat. “Get hold of yourself!” he demanded, pinning her against the trunk of a maple. Even the bark felt warm through the cotton of her dress. “Two of your sisters were with us at the singing. Don’t you remember? Nora and Rachel said they would wait out the thunderstorm and walk home if no one offered them a lift. They chose not to ride with us to give us a chance to talk.” John’s face wavered in front of her, speaking words that took time for her to comprehend. “They are fine, Amy.”

She sucked great gulps of air into parched lungs. “And Beth?” Her voice sounded raw and hoarse from the smoke. “Where is she?”

“You told me your youngest sister was spending the night at Aunt Irene’s. She was disappointed because she’s still too young to attend social events.” John released her shoulders but didn’t step back. He remained vigilant for another sprint toward the fire.

“They’re safe?” Amy repeated the idea before asking a new question. “And my parents? Where are they?”

“I have no idea,” he moaned, his expression a mask of shock and horror.

Slowly, Amy stepped away from the rough tree trunk without her earlier panic. On tiptoes she scanned the throng for several moments before spotting Aunt Irene and Uncle Joseph. *Mamm*’s sister and brother-in-law had lived next door for as long as she could remember. Uncle Joseph seemed to be supporting someone

to keep her from falling to the ash-covered ground. In her stupor, Amy didn't recognize the elderly woman in the dark-brown dress, soot-speckled *kapp* and sturdy lace-up shoes. But the tall white-haired man at the woman's side was very familiar indeed. "*Grossdawdi*," she murmured. Her grandfather. With growing horror, Amy recognized the bent, sobbing woman as her grandmother. She could think of only one reason for *grossmammi* to carry on so. On unsteady legs, she staggered toward her family as John remained at her side, supporting her arm. Onlookers and would-be helpers parted before them like the Red Sea.

"*Grossmammi*, Aunt Irene," she said as she approached.

Both her aunt and grandmother looked up with red-rimmed, watery eyes, confirming Amy's suspicion.

"Amy, I'm glad you're home," said her aunt as *grossmammi* wrapped her arms around her. They both patted and hugged and attempted to console what was inconsolable. Amy allowed herself to be enfolded in their embrace, feeling exhausted and numb, as though she'd run all the way from downtown Lancaster.

"Where's Beth?" she mewled, sounding more like a kitten than a grown woman.

"Your cousins are keeping Beth away from the fire. She's safe at our house." Aunt Irene sounded distant and muffled, as though she were speaking underwater.

"And my *mamm* and *daed*?" she asked with her face buried in the soft cotton of her grandmother's dress.

"No one can locate them in the crowd."

Aunt Irene's words were little more than a whisper, but Amy heard the pronouncement clear as a clanging farm bell. She squeezed her eyes tightly shut.

"Amy! John!" A shout pierced Amy's semiconsciousness.

Amy peered up at two of her sisters running toward her. Stiffening her spine with resolve, she pulled away from her grandmother. As the eldest daughter of Samuel and Edna King, she

must be strong. "I'm here, Rachel, Nora." She opened her arms to them.

Sweating and panting, with dirt-streaked faces, they hurried forward. *How long had they been running?* The glow from a house fire could be seen for miles in a night sky. The two girls fell into Amy's arms, crying and hiccuping like young children.

"We're so glad to see you," said Rachel. "Is Beth okay?"

"She's fine." Amy delivered a flat, emotionless statement, knowing what question would come next.

"And *mamm* and *daed*? Where are they?" asked Nora, extracting herself from the embrace.

Amy locked gazes with Nora, younger than her by only two years. "No one has seen them since the fire started."

Nora crossed her arms over her ash-speckled apron. "That doesn't mean they are still in the house!" she protested, outraged at such an idea. "They could have gone for a buggy ride or a walk in the moonlight, or maybe they both went to check on the livestock."

The third oldest sister, Rachel, also crossed her arms, looking hopeful rather than cross. "Maybe we should check the barn."

Amy forced her mouth into a smile. "That's true. It's entirely possible," she said, even though she'd never witnessed her parents doing any of those things in the middle of the night. "Why don't we bow our heads and pray they will soon be home?"

Nora and Rachel wrapped their arms around Amy's waist, and they all took a few steps toward the fire. The girls watched the flames consume the final side of the house with savage fury. Then they bowed their heads in silent prayer. Relatives and friends huddled close to pray, but they didn't intrude on the sisters' private anguish.

Amy kept her head down and eyes closed to the stinging smoke as the sound of their home crashing into a pile of embers rang in her ears. But she couldn't keep her mind focused on her pleas to God. She wondered instead about how she would manage as the

new head of the King household. *What will I do when others turn to me for direction, support, and comfort?*



The following days passed in a blur. Blessedly, no one looked to Amy for anything. She and her sisters had spent the waning hours until dawn next door in her aunt's kitchen. They did not return to the smoldering remains of their home. Uncle Joseph and her cousins cared for the livestock and began moving them to their own herds. The county fire marshal arrived before noon to confirm that he had found the bodies of Edna and Samuel King in the debris. Investigators would conduct a full inquiry, but it appeared the fire started in the attic, most likely from a lightning strike during the thunderstorm. The marshal asked Amy about working smoke detectors. She explained her father wouldn't allow them, preferring to place their safety and fate in God's hands. With the marshal's terrible news, destroying their hopes of possible alternatives, the younger girls broke into sobs. Amy wouldn't let herself give in to sorrow.

Her solemn grandmother organized a closed-casket viewing in Aunt Irene's front room and the funeral two days later. It seemed that half of Lancaster County stopped by to bring casseroles or desserts or to offer words of condolence. After the burial, the Kings served at least two hundred people at the luncheon, yet so much food remained they had to pack it up to send home with neighbors. Amy moved through the interminable days nodding her head to sympathetic mourners and murmuring the words, "They'll sleep peacefully, waiting on the Lord's return," over and over. But she didn't cry or shake an angry fist at the sky. The thoughts jumbling through her brain like puzzle pieces were of her future.

Should we plan to rebuild the house and try to keep the farm going?

We should just sell the place while the prices are high and move elsewhere, her *daed* had said several times.

It's getting too crowded in Lancaster—too much traffic. It's dangerous to even cross the street for the mail, her *mamm* had muttered too often to count.

With so many Englishers settling in the area, it's getting hard to keep the Plain ways.

Amy remembered her parents' complaints and those from other district members with bitter nostalgia. Now Edna and Samuel King no longer had to worry about the number of buggy accidents or increased land taxes or aggressive tourists trying to take their pictures in town. They wouldn't fret about anything ever again.

Now, two weeks later, Amy was no closer to figuring out what to do. Impulsively, she stalked away from those clustered on her aunt's porch following a preaching service. She headed across the meadow toward a stand of tall pines. Talk, talk, talk—that's all her Amish family ever did, just like *Englishers*. Maybe it's all human beings ever did. But she needed to think, alone, in only God's presence.

Ever since the night of the fire, the bishop, ministers, and elders had been dropping by to speak with her *grossdawdi*, Uncle Joseph, and John. Even though she loved her fiancé with all her heart, they weren't married yet, so why did the elders speak to him more so than her? They hadn't yet announced their engagement, although everyone knew they were courting. They had both taken classes and joined the Amish church. John had moved to a room in their barn loft so he could spend his free time helping with the remodeling to the King home. The long-range plan had been for *mamm* and *daed* to eventually move into the new *dawdi haus* addition, leaving the main house to Amy and John. That unfinished addition had gone up in smoke along with everything else.

Amy swallowed down her selfishness. Because her mind just now was a confused stew of emotions, she should feel grateful that

others were concerned with her well-being. Settling herself on a sunbaked boulder, she turned her face skyward to plead once more for guidance.

But the answering voice came from a tall, muscular man rather than from a merciful Lord.

“I thought I saw you slip off,” said John, striding toward her. “Too many folks around your uncle’s house, no? It’s hard for a person to find a quiet moment.” He sat down in the tall grass by her feet, tipping his hat back to catch the warm sun on his face.

“That’s the truth. And four girls to one bedroom is three too many,” she joked—her first attempt at humor in weeks.

He reached for her hand, cradling it gently inside his. “I imagine so. When one gal runs out of things to say, someone else pipes up.” He focused his sea-blue eyes—truly his best feature—on her. “You’ve been given much to think about the last few days. I know your uncle and the bishop spoke to you about selling your parents’ farm.”

“*Jah*, they have.” She wished this discussion could be postponed indefinitely.

“Plenty of people are interested in the land, English and Amish, besides your uncle and his sons.” John paused, waiting for a reply. When she sat mutely watching a bumblebee’s move between clover heads, he continued. “And I hope you’ve seriously considered my idea. I have nothing left here in Pennsylvania except for you, Amy. The addition I was building onto your parents’ house is gone. I can’t continue to live in a barn loft on property about to be sold. Both of my brothers reside in Maine. I can’t afford to buy your *daed*’s acres here in Lancaster, not since the proceeds must be split among your sisters, but my older *bruder* says I could buy decent farmland up north with what I’ve already saved...and your share of the inheritance.” John’s assurance slipped a notch when she failed to respond. “That is, if you’re still willing to marry me in the fall.” He seemed to be holding his breath, waiting.

She turned to face him and ran her index finger down his smooth-shaven cheek. “Of course I’ll still wed you, John. My parents’ passing didn’t change my feelings for you.”

He smiled, blushing like a schoolboy. “Whew, that’s *gut* to hear.” He leaned up to brush a quick kiss across her lips.

He tasted of peppermint candy and sheer devotion. John was the only thing Amy felt certain of. She’d fallen in love the night they met and had never doubted his commitment to her for a single moment.

“Thomas said his district grows larger each year. The *Englisches* have welcomed Plain folks to the community, but there’s little chance the area will become a tourist hot spot like here—at least, not in our lifetime. What say you, Amy? Land in Maine costs a fraction of what it does in Lancaster. I want to farm, but I can’t afford to do so here. I don’t like working construction, but I’ll continue if you don’t want to leave your family.” His ruddy complexion glowed with health and hopeful expectation.

Amy pulled back her hand and rose to her feet. Clearing her throat, she composed her thoughts—the ones that had been churning in her head for days. She’d discussed John’s ideas with her sisters and grandparents. She’d prayed nightly for direction, and finally it had been delivered. Now she needed to stop behaving like a child and speak up. “I have talked things out with my family, and I’ve decided to accompany you to Maine. We can marry before we leave, or, if you prefer, your brother can marry us upon arrival. But there is one catch.” She paused in her narration to meet his gaze.

He opened his palms wide. “Name it. I only wish to see my future *fraa* happy.”

“Nora wants to move north with us. None of the young men in this district interest her in terms of courting. She yearns for a fresh start where everyone isn’t as familiar as old shoes.”

John’s brilliant smile slipped a notch. “Thomas and Sally have a

large home, according to his letter. I'm sure they will take in Nora until we marry and buy our own place."

"*Danki*. Having one sister near will lessen the pain of leaving home. Rachel and Beth refuse to leave our grandparents. They are planning on moving into the attic of the *dawdi haus* and adjusting as well as can be expected."

"We're not moving to the moon, Amy. You'll still see them occasionally."

"I've looked up Maine on a map. Visits will be few and far between." Amy inhaled a deep, calming breath. "As the eldest King sister, I've made another decision too. I refuse to sell my parents' farm to an English developer. I don't want dozens of houses springing up next to my grandparents. The traffic on this road is bad enough already."

John's smile vanished altogether. "But no farmer can afford to pay what this land is worth."

"You mean worth by English standards. This land has been in my family for generations, constantly divided up into ever smaller plots for sons who marry. My uncle wishes to buy our acres and combine them with his. My cousins want to farm. They will secure bank loans to add to Uncle Joseph's down payment. The amount won't come close to what a land developer would pay, but it will be enough for the four King girls to make new beginnings." She lifted her chin. "As you already pointed out, land in other places is far cheaper than here."

He opened his mouth to argue, to protest the foolish idea of turning down a million dollars, but stopped. Maybe it was her ramrod posture, or the set of her jaw, or the hard glint in her cornflower eyes, but he closed his mouth before it started catching mosquitoes. "Your sisters agree with you?" he asked after a pause.

She nodded. "*Jah*, they do. Perhaps for the first time the four of us see eye to eye."

John pushed off the rock to rise to his feet. "Then it's settled. I'll

tell the bishop and Uncle Joseph of your decision. Shall we head back to the house? I could use a cup of strong coffee.” He held out his elbow toward her in a gentlemanly fashion.

Amy stood and hooked her arm through his, and then they strolled across the meadow back to the house. A long-absent sense of relief settled deep inside her. Finally she felt she could breathe again.



John Detweiler stared across starlit fields under a full moon, trying not to cough. The foul smell of smoke still hung in the air of his austere quarters. The night of the fire, he'd left his windows open to catch the evening breeze before taking Amy to the social gathering. Instead of cool air, the windows had allowed in thick, cloying smoke. District women and the four sisters had washed his walls and floor and laundered his bedding, yet the stench still remained throughout the barn, including his loft bedroom. Amy's aunt and uncle invited him to bunk with their sons next door, but he'd declined. He could tolerate the loft for a while longer. Because the woman of his dreams had agreed to become his wife, he was a happy man. They would soon leave the fast-paced, crowded world of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, for the tranquil countryside of Waldo County, Maine.

Maybe the winters would be long and harsh.

Maybe the soil might be less fertile than that of the Garden Spot of America.

Maybe he would have to build a house from the ground up for his new bride without the plentiful able hands in his current district. Amish homes without electrical wiring wouldn't be readily available in a four-year-old community. Four years in existence—as opposed to nearly three hundred years in Lancaster.

But those years had wrought much change to the lives of the

descendants of the original Swiss refugees. And in his opinion, those changes hadn't been for the better. Scouting parties of Amish had been quietly looking at land in other parts of the country for years. For the price of a farm in this part of Pennsylvania, a father could buy several homes for his sons in other states. What drove the Amish from Lancaster wasn't tourism but its consequences. Once *Englischers* visited, many wanted to stay and build houses, driving up prices and clogging the narrow roads with increased traffic. They demanded things like city water, professional police forces, and modern schools, raising taxes for everyone.

Many Amish families earned great sums selling quilts, crafts, furniture, and baked goods to the constant stream of tourists... and had become corrupted by the almighty dollar in return. He'd heard of Amish with gas-powered air-conditioning, modern propane-powered light fixtures, and women no longer content with traditional clothing fabrics, not when permanent press made ironing an unpleasant memory. Many had forgotten that subsistence existence, demanded in the *Ordnung*, had served the Amish for generations.

Almost every young woman he knew worked for a while in the English world, facing the temptations of a fancy lifestyle. He didn't want that for his sweet Amy. So far she'd remained home, helping her *mamm* with housework and occasionally babysitting for the English woman down the road. But once he overheard Nora and Amy talking about looking for jobs in a tourist shop to help their parents pay bills. John cringed, thinking about Amy with women who wore short skirts, low-cut blouses, and heavy makeup. Already he'd noticed subtle changes in her demeanor he didn't like. He hadn't appreciated the way she'd turned his words against him regarding land prices up north. She became evasive with his questions and forthright with her opinions, even on matters she knew little about. It's not that he thought women shouldn't have a say, but why should she burden herself with difficult choices when she had a man who loved and cherished her?

John walked to his cot and withdrew a tattered, dog-eared road atlas from beneath the mattress. An *Englischer* had either lost it or thrown it out a car window when it no longer served a purpose. He had found the atlas in the ditch and taken it home to study when sleep wouldn't come. By kerosene lamplight he located Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and Wisconsin—states that many Old Order Amish had settled in when Pennsylvania and Ohio had grown overcrowded. His fingers quickly found his favorite map—Maine—home to his older brother, Thomas, and Thomas's wife, Sally, and his younger brother, Elam.

John slipped on the reading glasses he'd purchased at the dollar store. He stared at the small dot that would become the new home of the John Detweiler family. Even the town's name portended a good life for those wishing nothing more than to farm and serve God—Harmony. Now that the prettiest woman in the world would be at his side, perhaps harmony would replace the doubt and disappointment filling his heart of late.