

Seeing Your Face Again

Jerry S. Eicher



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One



It was almost dark as Debbie Watson drove her car down the icy road toward Verna's house. This visit was overdue, and her friend would be thrilled to see her. Of that, Debbie was sure. At last Sunday's meeting, Verna had said, "You haven't been over to the house in a while. Why don't you stop by sometime?"

"With the weather the way it's been, I'm just glad if I can get to work and back home in one piece. But I'll try," Debbie had said.

Now that Friday had arrived and the weather had cleared, Debbie decided to keep her word, even though the roads were still slippery. It would be good to see Verna again other than on Sundays. Before Verna had married Joe Weaver this past wedding season, Debbie had seen Verna every day at home. Debbie had moved in with the Beilers as a boarder last year. Now Bishop Beiler's house echoed with women's voices—the two Beiler girls still at home, Ida and Lois, mingled in with those of their mother, Saloma, and now Debbie. But Verna was happy, so Debbie wouldn't wish her back home again. Verna and Joe were deeply in love. Debbie could see that every time she saw the couple together. They still had kind

looks for each other, undimmed by the passing months. It was a love she hoped to experience with Alvin Knepp someday.

Debbie gripped the steering wheel tighter as she thought of Alvin. He still didn't pay her much attention, other than an occasional timid smile. But she shouldn't complain. Especially after the nice talk she had with him at Verna's wedding. *Yah*, Alvin was insecure, but beyond that, he was everything Debbie wanted in a husband.

Debbie's thoughts drifted back to Verna and Joe. If she didn't miss her guess, Verna was already expecting her first child. Such things weren't spoken of in the community, but still there were whispers. And then there was Verna's dreamy look at the Sunday services.

The car slipped a bit to the right on the ice, and Debbie corrected easily, looking ahead for the turn into Verna's lane. Joe and Verna had a tough time of it only a year ago, but now they had much to be thankful for. During the previous season, their wedding had been called off because Joe had been under a terrible cloud of suspicion. His *Englisha* girlfriend from his *rumspringa* days had brought a false accusation against Joe. The girlfriend claimed Joe was involved with her in a burglary ring. Joe had been charged by the police, and a trial date had been set. Only the intervention of a mysterious, last-minute witness had prevented a miscarriage of justice. Debbie was one of the few who knew that the hand of Henry Yoder, a man the Amish ministry had excommunicated for breaking the *Ordnung*, had helped Joe in the matter. He'd joined a liberal church after leaving the Amish community. A man in that church knew the truth, and Henry had brought it to Debbie's attention. This man's testimony exposed the lies of the ex-girlfriend and her accomplice.

So the last wedding season, Verna and Joe had finally married. Verna had been so faithful during that dark time, never wavering in her devotion to Joe in his time of trial. Debbie wondered if she would have done the same. Would she have stood by her man and seen the goodness in him when many others didn't? She hadn't been raised Amish, so the trait didn't come natural to her. It was one of

the things that attracted her to these people. She was trying to practice with Alvin the wisdom she'd learned from Verna. Mostly it was the lesson of patience as Alvin continued to work through his fears. At least she hoped that was what was going on with him. He certainly had no misdeeds in his past like Joe Weaver had. The Knepp family was the model of perfection when it came to obedience to the *Ordnung*. Alvin's problem was his timidity around Paul Wagler, the man who was still determined to win Debbie's hand. Alvin couldn't seem to get past his family's low reputation among the community and Paul's well-respected family.

The image of Alvin as a poor farmer didn't fit her picture of him at all, but everyone had their opinion, she supposed. She used to drive past the Knepp farm before she moved in with the Beilers. She enjoyed catching glimpses of Alvin's broad shoulders as he worked in the fields. He handled the team of horses with such grace and power. Sometimes he even raised his arm to wave at her, even though he didn't know her. This was something not every Amish boy would do—pay attention to an *Englisha* girl while he stayed within the *Ordnung* rules. But Alvin had, which was one of the reasons she admired him.

Much later she'd learned from Emery, Bishop Beiler and Saloma's youngest son, that the Knepp family ran one of the worst-kept farms in all of Snyder County. Emery didn't think Alvin or his older married brothers were to blame. Their father, Edwin, ran things with an iron-but-incompetent hand. The results were disastrous. And keeping the *Ordnung* rules perfectly didn't make up for that in the eyes of the community.

Alvin's father's farm problems didn't bother Debbie, but they obviously did Alvin. There was one thing she had on her side. Alvin understood why she was here. When she'd told him, he'd seemed to grasp why she wished to join the Amish community—benefits that included the peaceful lifestyle and the depth of their faith. That was important to her—that Alvin understand her decision to join the

community wasn't based on some spur-of-the-moment emotion. They'd talked about it when they had served as table waiters at Verna's wedding. She'd motioned toward the women with their *kinner* by their sides and commented, "I've always wanted to be a part of this—ever since I can remember anyway, when I was growing up next door to the Beiler farm."

"I'm glad to hear that," Alvin had responded.

Debbie had continued. "Life kind of stalled for me after college. Mom was pushing for me to get out of the house—getting 'out of the nest,' she called it. And at my age, I agreed. So I chose to board at the Beilers."

"I'm sure Bishop Beiler had no problem with that," Alvin had commented.

Debbie had almost bitten her tongue to keep the words in her mouth. She wanted to tell him that if it hadn't been for Lois's ever-present desire to join the *Englisha* world and Bishop Beiler's hope that Debbie's presence might influence Lois for the better, she wouldn't have gotten in so easily.

"Bishop Beiler had his reasons," Debbie had said instead.

"What did your *mamm* think about your move?" Alvin had asked.

Debbie grimaced. "Moving in with Bishop Beiler's family wasn't exactly what Mom intended, but it was 'moving out of the nest,' so she didn't fuss too long."

About that moment, Paul Wagler had sauntered across the lawn, as if he'd accidentally passed by on his way to the barn. "Hi, Debbie!" he'd called—even with Alvin right there with her!

Debbie had felt her neck grow warm. Not because she cared for Paul in the least, but because this was an embarrassment. She'd given her assurance to Alvin earlier that Paul meant nothing special to her. Now here he was acting like they were old friends. And she couldn't be rude to him in public or say what she wanted to—that he leave her alone. Besides, Paul wouldn't listen anyway. At least he hadn't so far. Paul was a self-confident man who usually got what he wanted,

especially when it came to women. That she didn't return his affections drove him to try even harder.

"Ignore him," Debbie had whispered in Alvin's direction when Paul was out of earshot. But Alvin had noticed her red face, Debbie was certain. And he'd taken a long time to compose himself. She knew that Paul was Alvin's greatest fear, even worse than his insecurity over his father's farming reputation. But Alvin had nothing to worry about when it came to Paul. Paul Wagler was like the *Englisha* boys who used to pursue her—confident, pushy, but with shallow character. She certainly didn't want Paul as her boyfriend. Ida, the second of the Beiler girls, was the one who had lost her heart to the dashing man. But that was another hopeless match. Paul returned Ida's affections about as much as Debbie returned Paul's.

"Ida likes him," Debbie had said to Alvin that day.

A slight smile had stolen over his face. Alvin knew the impossibility of that matchup. Not that it kept Ida from hoping things would change, especially after Paul had agreed to serve as best man in Verna's wedding. That temporary match had placed Paul in Ida's company for the day.

Debbie sighed and held the steering wheel steady as she pulled into Joe and Verna's driveway. Alvin had left her under the clear impression that afternoon that he would soon ask her for a date one Sunday evening after the hymn singing. But nothing had happened. Maybe he didn't wish to date an *Englisha* girl who wasn't a church member yet? The *Ordnung*-inclined Knepp family might have such thoughts, Debbie told herself.

Would Alvin's insecurity put an end to her hopes for a romantic relationship? Would it even shake her determination to join the Amish community? Debbie had always thought it wouldn't, but with the spring baptismal instruction classes ahead of her, the question stared her in the face. If Alvin wasn't the only reason she wished to join the Amish, why didn't she go ahead and join the class? There were many reasons to do so. For one, if she began the instruction

classes this spring that would be about the time she'd graduated last year from college. Wouldn't that be a coincidence—and a fitting one at that?

Thankfully, Joe had cleared the lane of snow all the way from the road to the barn. Debbie pulled beside the barn door and parked. The soft glow of lantern light was visible through the dusty glass. Joe would be about his chores, no doubt. He'd want an early start before the winter's deep darkness set in.

Later in the evening, after supper, Joe and Verna would sit around the stove to read and spend time together. They lived their lives like the generations of the Amish faithful before them...and would do after them. These were not people tossed about by an ever-changing world. They were anchored in all that was good of the past. They embraced only what they found in the current culture that benefited their families, which was precious little. That was one of the reasons Debbie was here. She wanted this life—not the one she'd grown up in.

Debbie pushed open the car door and stepped out into the snow. True to her expectation, the front door burst open and Verna rushed out onto the porch with a shawl wrapped over her shoulders.

"Stay there!" Debbie called as she motioned with her hand. "I'm coming right in."

Verna looked like she meant to dash across the snowy lawn to greet her, but apparently she changed her mind.

Debbie hurried up the little pathway Joe had shoveled from the barn to the house.

"Oh, Debbie!" Verna wrapped her in a tight hug. "You've come to visit me."

"I said I'd try," Debbie laughed. "I wasn't sure the weather would cooperate."

"*Yah*, it's an extra-bad winter," Verna said. "Joe struggles to keep our lane open. But it's *gut* of you to stop by." Verna took Debbie's hand and led her inside. "I'll have hot chocolate ready for us in a

minute. I even have cinnamon rolls I made today. Will you have one?"

"No rolls." Debbie held up her hand. "I don't want to spoil the supper I'm sure Lois will have ready at home."

Verna glowed. "You could stay, you know. I *can* cook."

"I'd love that." Debbie said. "But Lois and the rest of the family are expecting me." She followed Verna into the kitchen and sat down with a sigh. "You do have it cozy in here."

Verna beamed. "It's comfortable. And we get to enjoy our first winter together, just Joe and me. I can't tell you how thankful I am for all you did, Debbie. You know Joe and I wouldn't be together if it hadn't been for your help."

Debbie dismissed the praise with a wave. "There were others who helped besides me."

Verna shook her head. "You always play down your part, Debbie. That last witness was sent from *Da Hah*, but you were there to help get it through. And your college education didn't hurt either."

Debbie shrugged. What Verna said was true, but she didn't wish to dwell on the subject. She would help where she could, but it was small payment for all that the Beilers had done for her. They'd taken her in as a boarder even if she was *Englisha*. That wasn't exactly the accepted norm for the Amish community.

Verna poured steaming water into cups. "How are things at home? Is Lois enjoying having the bedroom to herself?"

"I think so," Debbie allowed. "I miss sharing a room with her, but it seemed senseless to go on that way, what with your room sitting empty across the hall."

Verna set the cup in front of Debbie. "Here's the bowl of cocoa. I'll let you add what you wish. Some days I like extra in mine."

Debbie dipped a heaping spoonful of the chocolate into her cup. She stirred it and took the first sip. "Winter makes things both darker and more peaceful, doesn't it?"

With a pensive look, Verna sat down beside Debbie. "*Yah*. The

land rests in the winter and so does the soul. That's how *Da Hah* intended it. The world out there seems to rush through all the seasons, missing so many blessings."

"Yes, they do," Debbie agreed. "Like the Christmas season we've just been through. From what I was used to, it was such a change living in the community. Though I did go home to Mom and Dad's on Christmas morning, it turned out Mom had to work that afternoon. 'As a favor to a friend,' she said."

"*Yah*, though life lived our way has its costs," Verna mused. "But in the end it pays back...much more than most people can imagine. Like our quiet evenings together with the farm work finished early. It's truly a peaceful time, Debbie, with the quiet, snow-covered fields lying outside the living room window. It heals the wounds of last year—some of which I didn't even know I had."

"You did well through all of that," Debbie said. "I don't think I would have kept faith in Joe like you did."

"That's just because you didn't know Joe very well," Verna said. "The man has a heart of gold. Steady and solid like a rock. I couldn't have wished for a better man—not in a hundred years of living. Still, the situation did hurt deeply. But *Da Hah* is healing us."

Debbie sat in silence, drinking her hot chocolate. Her earlier thoughts crept back. There was nothing she could do about Alvin's hesitation. In her *Englisha* world she had an option. There, she could ask a man out on a date, though she'd never done that. Here in the Amish world it wasn't even a dreamed-of possibility. She would have to practice patience and endurance like Verna had last year. Debbie would choose to believe that in the end Alvin would come around.

Verna tapped her arm, and Debbie glanced up to see her friend regarding her with raised eyebrows. "What were you thinking, Debbie? Your mind is somewhere else."

"Alvin..." Debbie said. Verna was one of the few people she'd unburdened her heart to on the subject of her interest.

Verna's brow wrinkled. "He still hasn't asked you home, then?"

"No, and I'm beginning to think he won't."

"You must keep up your faith." Verna smiled. "Look at what Joe and I went through!"

"I know. You shame me," Debbie said. "You were so patient, and here I go again complaining."

Verna shook her head. "Don't look at it that way. No situations are exactly that same. I was just trying to encourage you."

"Thanks," Debbie whispered.

Verna face lit up. "Should I have Joe say something to Alvin? Perhaps that would help."

"No!" Even Debbie heard the alarm in her voice. "You mustn't do that. It needs to come from Alvin...but thanks for the offer." She quickly changed the subject, and the two chatted on for another thirty minutes before Debbie got to her feet. "Well, it's time for me to go. Supper is probably about ready."

"You must come over more often!" Verna said, following her to the door. "I miss our talks."

Debbie gave Verna a quick hug before she made her way down the narrow path to her car. After getting in and starting it up, Debbie turned the car around. Verna gave her a wave as she crept past. *She is a very dear friend*, Debbie thought. One she hoped she'd never lose.

Two



Fifteen minutes after she left Verna and Joe's place, Debbie slowed for Bishop Beiler's driveway. The Beiler home lay a few miles off Route 522. Here Emery, the youngest son still at home, had cleared a double lane of snow. Debbie slowed the car even more when she caught sight of Emery on the tractor, now backing the makeshift plow into the overhang behind the barn. He'd cleared a nice little spot for her car, the snow pushed into a heap against the fence. She would have to make a special effort to thank him. Debbie inched her vehicle into the spot between the drifts.

Emery appeared around the corner of the barn as she got out. He had his winter stocking cap pulled down tightly over his ears. "Like my nice lane?"

"*Yah*, thank you!" Debbie said with a warm smile. "Your lane is much nicer than Joe's."

Emery raised his eyebrows. "You stopped in at Verna's place?"

"Just to say a quick howdy. I don't get over there much with the way the winter weather is."

"How are things going for the young love birds?" Emery asked and then grinned.

“Wishing you were in their shoes?” Debbie teased.

Emery laughed. “I’m a little young yet. And where would I find a girl?”

“Now, Emery!” she scolded. “You’re 20, and you know there are dozens of Amish young women lined up waiting for a word from you.”

He laughed again. “I’m afraid you overestimate my Romeo powers. Isn’t that what the *Englisha* call it?”

“Something like that,” she said, humoring him.

“Plus I have to get all my sisters married off before I take the farm over. I wouldn’t want to push anyone out into the cold.”

“That’s kind of you,” Debbie said as she gathered her things together.

Emery wasn’t through with his teasing. “I don’t think you’ll be lasting around here much longer. Not with the way Paul Wagler’s carrying on.”

Debbie stood upright so fast her head spun. “I’m not interested in Paul, Emery!”

Emery cleared his throat. “I think you’re showing the very spunk Paul finds so attractive. What’s wrong with him, anyway?”

Your sister’s in love with him for one thing, Debbie thought, but she didn’t say it aloud. Ida didn’t want her secret spilled to the world. And Emery probably knew anyway and was just as convinced the case was hopeless as she did.

“See?” he teased. “You’re speechless. There’s not one *gut* reason Paul Wagler shouldn’t be arriving here every Sunday evening for sweet visits with you.”

“Please.” Debbie turned up her nose in exaggerated disdain. “That man is barking up the wrong tree. Plus, it sounds as if you’re only trying to get me married off so you can take over the farm. That’s quite a biased opinion in my book.”

Emery didn’t answer as he headed toward the barn with a pleased

look on his face. He'd said what he wished to say, and he would now wait for his words to bear fruit.

Debbie knew Emery's push wouldn't help, but no one seemed persuaded of that except her. And if Emery teased her so openly about Paul's constant attention, no doubt there were plenty of others from the community who also had noticed. But what could she do? If she asked Ida for advice, she'd sigh with her meek spirit and advise resignation to *Da Hab's* will. But surely the Lord didn't want her married to Paul!

Debbie made her careful way up the shoveled walkway and entered the house without knocking on the door. This had been, after all, her home for many months now. It had fast become the only life she knew, even with her *Englisha* car still parked out beside the barn. Bishop Beiler had tolerated the vehicle so far, especially since she'd proven so helpful with Verna and Joe's troubles last year. Besides, she wasn't Amish...yet.

The bishop bore a great burden for his family's welfare. Not just as bishop, but as husband and father. He wanted his wife happy and for all of his children to remain in the faith. This was an issue that had weighed heavy on his shoulders the last few years. Since her teenage years, the bishop's youngest daughter, Lois, had spoken of the time when she would leave the faith for the *Englisha* world. Things had become serious enough that the bishop had welcomed Debbie into his home in hopes of influencing Lois about the dangers of the world. He'd never stated that in so many words, but it wasn't hard to figure out. And so far it had worked.

Debbie's open admiration for all things Amish and her willingness to forsake so many things that Lois admired—her college education, her *Englisha* home, her *Englisha* boyfriend—had made an impression on Lois. Debbie thought it was almost like Lois and she had been switched at birth. In so many ways, Lois was the exact image of the daughter Debbie's mother had wished for, and Debbie

was the daughter Bishop Beiler longed to see in Lois. It seemed like sometimes things got all turned around and no one could explain why.

Debbie pushed her thoughts away to peek into the kitchen. Lois and her mom, Saloma, were rushing about, surrounded by the aftermath of their afternoon's cooking. Several steaming bowls of food were on the stove, and dirty dishes were stacked everywhere.

"Well, look who's home!" Saloma said as she glanced up to give Debbie a kind look.

"I'll run right up and change so I can help," Debbie said. She dashed for the stair door.

Lois gave her a grateful look. There was no one in the Beiler family who could cook like Lois, but cleanup wasn't high on her priority list.

Debbie entered Verna's old room and paused long enough to stash her purse in the dresser. Moments later she was back downstairs drying dishes for Lois.

"How did your day go?" Saloma asked.

"Okay. Nothing unusual," Debbie told her. "I stopped in at Verna's on the way home though. That's why I'm a little late."

Saloma's face brightened. "That was nice of you. I'm sure Verna appreciated it. How is she doing?"

"She looks all snugly in that new home of hers," Debbie said as she turned a dish over in her hands. "I think Joe and Verna are very happy together."

Saloma nodded but a sigh escaped her lips. "I guess that's the first one married, which we can be thankful for."

Lois gave her mother a quick glance but didn't say anything.

It went without saying that Saloma longed for a decent matchup for her other two daughters. If it didn't happen, Ida would survive as an old maid in the community. But Lois was another matter. With her desire for the *Englisha* world, there was little chance Lois would stay in the community if she were passed over by the unmarried Amish men.

"You don't have to be sighing like that *Mamm*," Lois spoke up. "Joe's cousin Roy has been eyeing me for a while already. I'm not without my chances."

Saloma looked like she was about to drop the dish of mashed potatoes she was carrying. "Oh, Lois! Please keep your mind and heart open. Don't be doing anything foolish like turning down the man...if you get a chance. You know your words haven't been the best in past years. Many in the community have heard your sighings for the *Englisha* world. Few of our men wish for such a *frau* to stand by their side."

"*Mamm*, stop it!" Lois said. "What if I don't like the man?"

"Love can perhaps grow in your heart...if you get to know him better." Saloma sounded a little desperate.

Lois gave a little laugh. "And what is *Daett* going to say?"

Saloma was silent for a moment. Bishop Beiler was well known for his strict standards when it came to any man who wished to date one of his daughters. In the past, this reputation of the bishop's had as much to do with Lois's lack of romantic offers as her *Englisha* sentiments. "I will speak with *Daett* on the matter," Saloma said. She pressed her lips firmly together.

Debbie looked away. The truth was that the bishop wasn't as strict as he used to be. At least when it came to Lois and her prospects. At this point Lois could probably bring home the wildest man in the community and get him past Bishop Beiler's inspection. Such was the urgency with which both the bishop and Saloma wanted their youngest daughter safely married into the faith.

For her part, Lois gave a little snort. "Save your efforts, *Mamm*. Until Roy asks me home, I wouldn't want word to leak out how desperate we all are." Lois's sarcasm was thick, but Saloma didn't seem to pick up the signal.

"That not a nice thing to say, Lois," Saloma scolded. "At your age everyone is already wondering..." Saloma stopped. She apparently thought better of what she was about to say.

Lois was now lost in her own world and didn't notice. Her voice

was dreamy. “Now if I had Debbie’s chances, how happy I’d be! I’d be floating along on the arms of handsome *Englisha* boys like Debbie used to do in her college days. She probably had more offers than she could handle.”

Debbie laughed. “You exaggerate, Lois. And I turned down those I had. It’s not all that great out there.”

“See, Lois?” Saloma clutched her daughter’s arm. “Listen to the voice of experience.”

Lois gave Debbie a quick glance. “Would you at least set me up with an *Englisha* boy—for just one date? I’d like to see for myself if I’d like it or not.”

Saloma’s face paled. “You must put such awful thoughts far from you, Lois! They aren’t right in the sight of *Da Hah*.”

“Oh well, just saying,” Lois mumbled. “At least that way I’d know for sure.”

Debbie spoke up quickly. “Amish men are every bit as handsome and charming as *Englisha* men, Lois. Plus the Amish know how to work hard. And they provide for their families and don’t run off at the drop of the hat. Think about that. There are a lot of divorces out in the *Englisha* world.”

“But our men aren’t dashing, and exciting, and edgy, and thrilling,” Lois said, her face glowing. “And they don’t drive fast cars.”

Saloma moaned.

Debbie glanced at her, but Saloma appeared unable to speak at the moment. Debbie spoke up. “Lois, you can have Paul Wagler if you want. He’s dashing.”

Lois giggled. “And break Ida’s heart? The poor girl. *Nee*. Plus I don’t like him.”

“Then you might not like what’s out there in the *Englisha* world either. In some ways Paul is like an *Englisha* man.”

Lois gave a little snort again. “I like the type, just not Paul. Though I’d let him bring me home just for the experience. And what do you know about Amish men anyway? What with your fixation

on Alvin Knepp. His family is the farming joke of the community. That would be quite a come down from the life you're used to, you know."

"Maybe I look at the heart," Debbie protested. "That's what Verna did, and she turned out pretty happy."

Lois laughed. "I think you're mixed up, Debbie."

Saloma sat down on a kitchen chair, apparently at the end of her strength as she listened to such plain talk. She managed to whisper. "I have never heard such twisted thinking in my life, Lois."

Lois shrugged. "I'm just talking, *Mamm*."

Saloma wiped her brow. Moments later she took a deep breath and got up. She rushed about to set the table.

The outside washroom door slammed, and Ida stuck her head through the kitchen doorway. "Hi," she chirped.

"Hi to you," Debbie greeted Ida. Even though her face wasn't the prettiest in the community, Ida had such a sweet spirit. Why some boy couldn't see that, Debbie didn't know. Instead they'd passed up Ida all these years.

"Supper's about ready," Saloma said as she put the last of the food on the table. "I suppose the men aren't far behind."

"You still have a few minutes," Ida offered before she closed the door. Sounds of water could be heard splashing in the washroom as she washed up.

Debbie stacked the last of the mixing bowls on the lower counters. Ida soon dashed past moments before the sound of the men washing up could be heard. When Ida reappeared from upstairs in a clean dress, Saloma motioned for her to join them at the table. The women were waiting when Adam and Emery walked in. The food steamed on the table.