

Finding Love at Home

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One



It was a beautiful fall morning as Debbie Watson sat on the front porch swing of the Beiler home. She smiled as she listened to the creak of the swing chains on each side of her. She hadn't been born Amish or raised in the faith, and yet God had done a good work in her heart, just as He'd done in the hearts of the Beiler family. They had welcomed her into their home well over a year ago, and so much had happened since then. Good things as well as tragic things.

That she was well accepted in the community was one of the good things. Widower Melvin Kanagy's passing last spring, only weeks before his planned wedding with Ida Beiler, had been one of the great tragedies. That Ida had managed to rebound so quickly after her heart had been fully given to Melvin still surprised Debbie. Of course, she had her own heartache regarding Alvin Knepp. He still hadn't asked her home after a Sunday hymn singing. When Alvin returned from his brief time of living in the *Englisha* world, he'd practically promised he would ask to take her home.

Debbie pushed thoughts of Alvin aside and took in the sweep of fall colors beginning to roll over the hills around her. It was the second week of September, and Snyder County's Amish country

always put on its best face this time of year. The Beilers' corn crop had been cut and stacked in the fields, awaiting the annual silage filling. Debbie planned to stay home from work when that day arrived. She'd wanted to take in the full flavor of an Amish silo filling for some time now—and this was the year!

The men of the community would gather for the day, and Saloma and Ida would have tables in the yard spread with an awesome noon meal. The community was a peaceful place filled with people who possessed deep faith and worked close to the soil. Debbie had chosen to become part of them, and each day she was drawn further in. And now, incredibly, tomorrow would be the day of her baptism! It had been so long in coming, and now that it was here, Debbie was finding it hard to hold her joy in. How she made it through all the baptismal instruction classes, with the long lectures by Minister Kanagy on the *Ordnung* rules, was still a miracle. Minister Kanagy wasn't the bishop, but he acted like he was sometimes.

Minister Kanagy had been skeptical of her true intentions and had regarded her with steely eyes as she sat with the other applicants on Sunday mornings. Surely the others were also at risk of not keeping the *Ordnung*. Minister Kanagy didn't have to single her out—but he did.

Still, she would never wish calamity on Minister Kanagy, but disaster had struck anyway. Horrible tragedy. His wife, Barbara, had been diagnosed with cancer at nearly the same time his brother Melvin had passed, back in the spring. The doctors had recommended the most aggressive treatment for Barbara, but this had done little to halt the cancer's rapid advance. They had buried her last month, only yards from where Melvin's body lay.

Debbie sighed. How closely sorrow and joy walked together. And here among the community, the cutting edge of each emotion was felt to the maximum. These people drew support from God and from each other. That was how they survived and flourished in a modern world that often rushed past them. And tomorrow she

would become part of them. Bishop Beiler would ask her the questions, she would answer, and water would be poured over her head. Debbie's hands tingled at the thought.

She'd truly become Amish. Her baptism would just confirm what she already knew in her heart. Despite his eagle eye, Minister Kanagy had failed to catch her in any *Ordnung* transgressions. She'd been careful about that, often questioning Ida Beiler for hours on how things were done. Ida would mention things like comportment, how to fold her hands on her lap in the instruction classes, and to look up only when the others spoke or a question was asked of her. Ida had personally supervised the sewing of her dresses, and she'd seen to it that her head covering was large enough. If Minister Kanagy had found fault with any of that hard work, Debbie would have corrected the error at once. That was another character trait the people of the community admired—the willingness to change one's ways to conform. And she *had* changed her ways. She'd come a long way from her *Englisha* roots.

Debbie's thoughts drifted to the sweeping lawns of the college of Franklin and Marshall in Lancaster. There the trees would also blaze with their fall splendor. The students were rushing about this week on their way to classes. She'd once been one of them, only she hadn't been eager or excited. Their world had never been hers, even when she completed four years and graduated with honors to please her mother. Callie had thought she'd won the struggle with her only child once Debbie had her degree in hand. Hoping her daughter's fascination with the Amish had been forever purged or at least neutralized by her college education, Callie had been sorely disappointed. With the world open before Debbie, and now able to choose for herself, she'd followed her heart first by becoming a boarder with the Beiler family and then by embracing their Plain faith. Her mother had openly disapproved of Debbie's decision. But at least her mother wasn't in shock like Adam and Saloma Beiler were when their youngest daughter, Lois, deserted the Amish

faith and moved into the *Englisha* world. The Beilers were still reeling from the blow.

Debbie had grown up next door to the Beilers and was friends with the three Beiler girls: Verna, Ida, and Lois. But between Lois and her there had always been a vast difference. Debbie admired the Amish community, while Lois longed for *Englisha* life. Now Lois lived at Debbie's parents' place, where she'd moved earlier this year. Debbie thought it was as if she and Lois had swapped places and corrected some error of birth. But there hadn't been an error. She was Herbert and Callie Watson's birth daughter, just as Lois belonged to Adam and Saloma Beiler.

Debbie brought the squeak of the swing to a halt for a moment. Next week Lois would marry Doug Williams, of all people. Mother must have introduced the two soon after Lois moved in. Debbie was sure her mother had eagerly pushed Lois down the path of social success that her own daughter refused. What irony, Debbie thought. She'd dated Doug on and off but was never really impressed by him.

Debbie pushed with her foot to start the swing again. The subject of Lois's wedding was a sore one around the Beiler household. Lois's wedding invitation was in the bottom of one of Saloma's dresser drawers, and it would remain there. None of the Beiler family planned to attend the wedding. And Debbie couldn't go either, although she would have before she began the baptism instruction classes. Tomorrow she would be baptized, and she certainly wouldn't jeopardize her new standing in the community by doing such a thing.

The front door squeaked open. Ida's face appeared. "Hiding out, are we?"

"In plain sight." Debbie smiled. "Come join me."

Ida did so, gazing off into the distance as she sat down.

Debbie reached over to squeeze her friend's hand. "Are we troubled on this fine morning?"

Ida gave her a strained smile. "Your baptism is tomorrow. I'm so happy for you, Debbie. You'll have found your home amongst us at last."

"Thank you." Debbie didn't let go of Ida's hand. She wasn't fooled by Ida's cheerfulness. Her friend's heart was always toward others and seldom on her own troubles, but something was off.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Debbie tightened her fingers.

Ida shrugged. "I'm okay. Just thinking, that's all."

Debbie didn't back down. "You'll feel better if you talk about it."

Ida's response was a sharp intake of breath as she looked away.

"Did Barbara's funeral bring back memories?" Debbie tried again. "I know it did for me, so I can only imagine what you must still go through."

Ida's voice choked. "Melvin's body was lying over there, Debbie. So close. The man I almost married. I could still see the outline of the grave. And Melvin's boy Willard, the eldest, couldn't stop looking at it. I got to thinking of him finding his *daett* under the cultivator tines. No nine-year-old boy should have to see such a thing, and with no *mamm* to comfort him..." Ida wiped the tears from her cheek. "I almost went over last week to put my arms around him, Debbie. But Willard isn't my son, and he never will be. Oh, why did *Da Hah* do this to us? Why, Debbie?" Ida struggled to control her sobs.

Debbie slipped her arm around Ida's shoulders and pulled her close. "God knows what's best," Debbie whispered, surprised that the words were more than just words. Conviction rose in her heart.

"*Yah, Da Hah* does." Ida collected herself. "And here I am blubbering all over the place."

"That doesn't mean that you don't trust Him, Ida. It just means that it still hurts."

Ida's shoulders shook. "First Melvin's six children are left motherless and fatherless, and now Minister Kanagy's two have no *mamm*. It seems so wrong."

Debbie let go of Ida and gave her friend a sharp look. Should she say something? Hadn't she seen Minister Kanagy's gaze on Ida at the Sunday service—and Ida's weak smile in response? Or had her imagination been running wild?

Did Ida have ideas in her head? Like marriage to Minister Kanagy so she could take care of Melvin's orphaned children and Minister Kanagy's semi-orphaned children? Surely Ida wouldn't marry the man—even if Minister Kanagy asked. Would she? Shivers ran through Debbie at the thought of Ida as Minister Kanagy's *frau*. What a loveless match that would be. Debbie decided she shouldn't say anything about it. What if she said something, and Ida hadn't thought of it? Would she have planted seeds that could take root in Ida's kind and selfless nature? Then Ida's open heart might draw Minister Kanagy's attention even further. "That's terrible!" Debbie gasped out loud.

"I know." Ida nodded. "It's awful what has happened this year. And now Lois's wedding to that awful *Englisha* man is next week. Our family ought to go about the community in sackcloth and ashes."

Debbie let the subject of Minister Kanagy go. "People don't blame your family like you think they might." Thankfully Ida hadn't caught the true meaning of her gasp.

"I guess things look dark right now. Maybe you're right." Ida lapsed into silence.

Perhaps Lois's upcoming marriage was the more urgent concern anyway. Debbie knew Doug well. She had, after all, dated the man. He wasn't quite the awful *Englisha* man the Beilers thought he was, but she understood their point of view. To them Doug had lured Lois deeper into the outside world. On the other hand, Debbie remembered what the Beilers were overlooking at the moment. Lois had found her way into the *Englisha* world on her own, well before knowing Doug.

Ida shifted on the swing. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be speaking such

harsh words about Doug. My heart is broken and sorrowful, I suppose. But that's never a *gut* excuse for wrongdoing."

"I'm sure *Da Hah* understands." Debbie reached over to squeeze Ida's hand.

"I hope so." Ida attempted a smile. "I'll be needing His blessing soon. If I don't miss my guess, Minister Kanagy will be calling before long. He needs a new *frau*—and quickly, I would say."

Shock sent Debbie to her feet. "You shouldn't say that, Ida. It's not decent. The man's wife is barely in the ground."

Ida appeared puzzled. "There's nothing indecent about it. *Da Hah* made that choice, and Minister Kanagy is free to marry again since Barbara's gone. And we could bring all of Melvin's children into the family."

Debbie trembled. "He's a horrible man, Ida. Have you ever had to deal with his harsh eyes looking for any flaw in you? Well, I did. I lived through many an instruction class with the man. And what about what he did to Joe and Verna? He would've liked to put Joe in jail on his suspicions alone if Henry Yoder hadn't found another witness to testify for Joe."

Ida eyed Debbie. "He's a hard man, Debbie. I know that. But I also know I'm sitting here wasting away my life as an old maid when I could be mothering Melvin's six children." Ida paused to wipe her eyes. "Would you keep me from that, Debbie?"

Debbie's mind spun. Maybe there was hope yet. Ida hadn't said that Minister Kanagy had spoken to her. Perhaps there was no basis to this conclusion Ida had drawn. Perhaps Debbie had imagined it moments ago.

Ida seemed to read Debbie's thoughts. "He was watching me last Sunday at the services, Debbie. I know that look in a man's eye. So don't say I don't know what I'm speaking about."

Debbie wanted to protest in the loudest voice possible. This wasn't right! Minister Kanagy was way out of line. He shouldn't look at another woman so soon after his wife had been buried. But

her protests would be in vain, Debbie told herself as she took her seat on the swing again, her body now limp.

“It might be *Da Hah*’s will.” Ida reached over to touch Debbie’s arm. “*Da Hah* will give me love in my heart for the man—if not before, then after we’ve said wedding vows.”

Debbie groaned but said nothing. What was the use?

Two



Debbie hurried about to clean her room. There would be no visitors to the Beiler place tomorrow after the Sunday services that she knew of, but it seemed like one's room should be freshly cleaned in preparation for a baptism. Sort of cleansing the space before cleansing the soul.

Saloma had smiled when Debbie stated her intentions downstairs after lunch. She seemed to understand. "We're doing a thorough fall cleaning soon, so don't work too hard."

Well, it wasn't a matter of hard work, Debbie thought. It was the principle of the thing. And Ida probably had her bedroom spotless—baptism or no baptism. Emery, the Beilers' youngest boy, still lived at home. He never cleaned his room, so maybe Debbie would do him a favor after she finished with her bedroom.

Emery was in his early twenties and needed a wife, in Debbie's opinion. As the heir apparent to the Beiler farm, he should have no problem with his choice of any marriageable Amish girls in the community. Emery only had to say the word, and the girls would line up. Yet the young man seemed perfectly content to allow each day to roll by. He showed not the slightest concern about his single status. Still,

who was she to criticize people about their married status? She was approaching twenty-four and was still single. But it certainly wasn't because she hadn't shown interest in someone.

Emery was such a decent man. Maybe she should make a try herself for his hand. Debbie laughed at the thought. Emery had never shown any romantic interest in her, and neither should he. She lived at the house after all, so it was almost like they were brother and sister. And what a scandal that would be if they did date. She'd be seen as a gold digger for sure. Few in the community would think otherwise.

Maybe her baptism tomorrow would push Alvin off his perch. The man was the limit! He'd made such promises before and after he came home from his stint in the *Englisha* world—a stint that had resulted in his excommunication. But thoughts of Alvin still made Debbie smile. There was much she could be thankful for with him. He'd seen his mistake and come back from Philadelphia with a humble and manly confession of his sins in front of the baptism instruction class and then the membership. Alvin had even admitted to a few dates with an *Englisha* girl named Crystal Meyers. Debbie figured Alvin had been surprised when she'd had a front row seat for his confession. But she had, and this was no doubt due to Minister Kanagy wanting to embarrass Alvin. Though in the end the maneuver had worked to Alvin's favor. Much of the respect she'd lost for Alvin had been restored by his broken and honest words. Alvin had said he was done with the *Englisha* world, and that he'd left Crystal Meyers behind for good.

Alvin had spoken to Debbie after the services that Sunday—an accomplishment for him, indeed. He was usually shy and timid. Maybe his time in the *Englisha* world had done him some good after all. She'd allowed her hopes to soar as Alvin expressed an interest in pursuing their relationship—after he made his life right with the church, of course. And he had done that a few weeks later with

a knee confession in front of everyone. He was granted full restoration back into the fellowship of the community.

But then nothing had happened all summer. Nothing more than a few smiles exchanged at the Sunday services and the youth gatherings. What had gone wrong? Debbie asked herself that question a thousand times. She'd made her interest in him known even before she moved into Bishop Beiler's household. Debbie blushed as she thought of the times she'd driven all starry-eyed past Alvin's farm and watched him work with his team of horses in the fields. Thankfully Alvin must have never told anyone about it, even though he'd seen her and waved many times.

Debbie sighed. Surely Paul Wagler's continued interest in her didn't still deter Alvin. It had before he left for the *Englisha* world, but she figured Alvin would have gotten over that by now. There were reasons aplenty for Alvin to see that she cared for him more than she did for Paul—dashing and handsome though Paul was. She had settled in her mind that she would marry a down-to-earth, humble farmer. Not someone like Paul, who reminded her of the men she'd dated in her old life in her former world.

A rattle of buggy wheels jerked Debbie out of her thoughts. Surely Deacon Mast hadn't come to speak with her! This *was* Saturday, the day the deacon usually made his rounds to deal with church troubles. Had Minister Kanagy thrown one last wrench her way? She felt a little paranoid as she raced to the window and pulled the curtain back. *Whew!* Verna Beiler had climbed out of her buggy and was tying her horse to the hitching rack.

Debbie left her broom and dustpan by the dresser and hurried downstairs. Saloma looked up from her knitting on the couch with a smile as Debbie rushed by.

"It's Verna, isn't it?" Saloma's face glowed.

"Yes! I'm going out to walk her in." Debbie continued her dash out the front door.

Verna waved from the buggy and hollered, "*Gut* morning."

Debbie ran across the lawn and down the sidewalk to grab Verna in a tight hug. "It's so good to see you!"

Verna gave a little gasp. "And you, but oh, watch out for my stomach. It just keeps growing."

Debbie grinned as she stood back to regard Verna's swollen middle. They ended up in each other's arms again in giggles.

"I probably shouldn't have come out." Verna gave her midsection another glance. "But I couldn't resist with how glorious the day is. And soon I'll be laid up with labor pains, and then the whole winter lies ahead with a young *boppli* in the house. Better enjoy the outside while I can, I told myself."

"I agree! And your *mamm*'s glowing with happiness that you're here," Debbie said. "Yours won't be her first grandchild, but you're the first of her girls."

"I know." Verna sighed. "I love it. And Joe—he's such a darling husband. No child will ever have a more doting *daett*."

"Come!" Debbie offered Verna a hand.

Verna pushed it away. "I can still walk, though I waddle like a duck."

The two giggled again as they made their way slowly toward the house. The front door soon burst open, and Ida ran out to envelop Verna in a sisterly hug.

"I'll be having the *boppli* right here and now!" Verna groaned. "That is, if the two of you aren't more careful."

"She's not serious," Debbie said when concern flashed on Ida's face.

Ida recovered. "It's so *gut* that you've come. We needed your comforting presence in the house. Debbie and I were talking this morning about Barbara's funeral."

"Oh, you poor thing! Did that stir up so many sad memories?" Verna took Ida's hand, and the two continued toward the house with Debbie beside them.

Obviously it had, Debbie thought as she noticed Ida's tears. She should tell Verna about Minister's Kanagy's advances at the Sunday service, but she bit her lip instead. Verna would be sympathetic, but that wouldn't stop Ida. With Melvin's children in the balance, Minister Kanagy wasn't likely to fail in his pursuit of Ida as his new *frau*.

Saloma met them at the front door, a big smile on her face. She gave Verna a much gentler hug. Her arms lingered around her eldest daughter's shoulders. "You look well, Verna. And the child?"

"The midwife had a *gut* report last week." Verna's glow matched her mother's. "It won't be long now."

"*Da Hah* be praised!" Saloma said. "Come in. I'm sure we can stir up some hot chocolate for you, if nothing else. And we have all afternoon to talk. The girls were puttering around, but they don't really have pressing work."

A warm rush ran through Debbie when Saloma called her one of the girls. She would never cease to give thanks for how the Beilers had taken her in. Adam and Saloma had treated her like their own child from the start. That was what she'd wanted for so long but hadn't dared hope would ever happen.

Ida disappeared into the kitchen. Debbie was ready to follow when Saloma motioned for her to be seated. "Ida can handle the hot chocolate."

Debbie thought of protesting but gave in. This was so like Ida. She sacrificed for everyone. It became almost expected. Still, Debbie couldn't do more than be in the way while Ida heated the milk for the hot chocolate.

Verna leaned forward from her seat on the couch. "So Ida's still mourning?"

Saloma's face was sober. "*Yah*. It's been hard. *Daett* says Minister Kanagy has also taken it very hard."

Apparently not hard enough if the man is making eyes at Ida, Debbie thought. She almost choked out a protest but held her tongue.

Verna looked pensive. "Don't you think it's a little early for Minister Kanagy to be, you know, thinking about another *frau*?"

Debbie drew in a sharp breath.

Saloma regarded Verna steadily. "So you saw it too on Sunday?"

Verna shrugged. "It was plain enough to see since Minister Kanagy never looks at women that way. And I'm sure Ida has put two and two together by now. And there's Melvin's children—at least the two oldest who live at his place. Ida won't turn him down, *Mamm*, will she?"

Saloma didn't hesitate. "I've thought some about the matter, and I know this might not be the usual, but neither is the situation the usual. I think Ida should accept—if things come to that. Minister Kanagy would make anyone a *gut* husband."

Verna gave a little grunt. "Maybe so, but I don't like him all that much."

"It's in *Da Hah's* hands." Saloma nodded as if that settled the matter.

Debbie stifled her words. She had best stay out of this conversation.

Verna grabbed her stomach moments later, and Saloma's face flashed alarm. "Is something the matter? The child?"

Verna shifted on the couch. "No. I'm just thinking about Ida and Minister Kanagy. I don't like it one bit. Ida's always been too self-sacrificing. I don't want to see her hurt."

Saloma shook her finger. "I don't want you to say one word to your sister, mind you. Not everyone can have a storybook ending like you and Joe. Now mind me—not one word!"

Verna groaned but settled back on the couch.

In the silence that followed, Ida appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Chocolate coming right up!"

"She's such a dear," Verna said as Ida disappeared again.

Tires crunched in the driveway, and Debbie caught a glimpse of the car through the window. She knew who it was.

Saloma got up to look out the living-room window.

“Who is it, *Mamm*?” Verna asked when her mother didn’t move or provide information.

“It’s your sister!” Saloma stepped back and grasped the back of a rocker.

Verna struggled to get up. “Dear *Hah*, help us. That girl is nothing but trouble.”

Saloma headed for the front door as she muttered, “How can one apple in the bushel turn out so bad?”

Verna ignored the comment and hollered toward the kitchen. “Ida, our sister’s here.”

“I already know,” the answer came back. “I’ll heat another batch of milk if necessary.”

As usual, Ida’s first thought was of service instead of her sister’s transgressions. Debbie got to her feet. She would help Ida now, protest from Saloma or not.

Ida glanced up with concern when Debbie walked into the kitchen. “Did you see how she’s dressed?”

“No.” Debbie didn’t add that she didn’t have to. Lois likely wore one of Debbie’s old dresses she’d had the sense not to wear around the Beilers. Lois would have no such inhibitions. Lois was more of an *Englisha* girl at heart than Debbie had ever been—even though Lois was born Amish!

Ida pasted a smile on her face. “I’ve got everything ready, but you can help carry in the cups. At least we can give Lois a nice afternoon—show her what she’s missing.”

That won’t happen, Debbie thought. Lois doesn’t appreciate the quiet ways of Amish life. But Ida always saw the best in everyone—even Minister Kanagy apparently.

Debbie followed Ida into the living room holding steaming mugs of hot chocolate in both hands just as Lois bustled through the front door with Saloma at her side. Lois’s dress was well above her knees.

Lois grinned and gushed, "Well! If it isn't the whole family back together again. And hot chocolate. Am I glad I stopped by!"

Debbie smiled and handed over a mug as Lois took a seat. "I'm glad you stopped in."

Ida spoke up. "*Gut* to see you, Lois."

Lois took a quick sip of the hot chocolate. She wasted no time to get to the point of her visit. "So, will I see everyone at my wedding next Saturday?"

Lois knew good and well no one from her family would come, but she had to make one last attempt, Debbie supposed.

Saloma's voice was weary. "You know we can't come, Lois. It's an *Englisha* wedding. We cannot approve of this. You know that."

Lois's face fell. "I told Doug that would be your answer, but he just doesn't understand. I had to try one more time to convince you." Lois's voice caught, and she wiped one eye with a quick sweep of her hand. The hot chocolate remained clutched in the other.

"I'd come," Ida said with sympathy, "but it can't be, Lois. We can't show any approval of this choice of yours. Surely you know that."

Lois gulped. "I guess so. It's just sad and painful, that's all."

"You should have thought of that before you left." Saloma's voice had a bite to it.

Lois braced herself before she took another quick sip of hot chocolate. "But I love my new life. And Doug is such a catch. And I'm in my first year of college in Shamokin. We're setting up housekeeping after the wedding in a small rental in Selinsgrove. What more could I ask for?"

There was silence in the living room. Not because they didn't know the answer to Lois's question, but because Lois wouldn't listen even if they spoke the truth. Lois had chosen her life, which was a jump over the fence to the Amish. And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Saloma moved first. She reached over to touch Lois's arm. "But at least you've come home today. I'm glad for that. Maybe you can

visit again after the wedding—and bring this husband of yours with you.”

Lois pasted on a bright smile and settled in. The conversation soon flowed easily enough—now that the hard part was out of the way. The talk was all about Verna’s baby and the Amish wedding season ahead of them. Lois’s face fell momentarily when that subject came up, but she recovered quickly.

Finally, just before she left, Lois spent some time alone with Ida. The two whispered together near the front door when Saloma went into the kitchen. Debbie watched the sisters with no little sadness that things would never be as they had been. Lois’s happiness in the *Englisha* world made that only too apparent.