The early morning light streamed through the kitchen window, sending sunbeams bouncing across the plain white walls. Susan Hostetler closed her eyes as she listened to the sound of her daeti’s deep voice leading out in morning prayer. It was so gut to be home again, she decided, feeling the warmth of the stove on her back, noticing the soft touch of the hanging tablecloth on her arms, and taking in the delicious smell of Mamm’s breakfast filling the room. Already Asbury Park seemed thousands of miles away, another world lost in the distant past. Yet it had only been a few days since she’d returned home, bringing Teresa and baby Samuel with her.

Beside her Teresa sniffled as she pulled a white handkerchief from the pocket in her new Amish cape dress. Her hand hit the side of her head covering and knocked it askew as she dabbed her eyes. Teresa wasn’t quite used to Amish clothing, Susan thought. She smiled. Teresa had insisted on wearing the dress Mamm had made for her the moment she saw it.

Menno’s deep voice was wrapping up the prayer. “And now, may the God of all peace comfort our hearts with His holy grace. And be with us this day, oh Lord. Lead us in the path of Your righteousness. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Teresa stuffed the handkerchief back into her dress pocket. Susan gave her friend’s arm a quick squeeze under the table while she reached with the other to pass the plate of eggs.
Susan’s _mamm_, Anna, glanced at both girls. “I have things I need at the Dutch Barn this morning. Do you girls want to drive down for me? The weather isn’t too bad, and it would give Teresa a chance to see more of the community.”

“I don’t know why not,” Susan replied. “Teresa, do you want to go?”

“What about Samuel?” Teresa asked, glancing toward the upstairs doorway.

“I’ll watch him,” _mamm_ offered, smiling. “You’ve fed him already, haven’t you? And I already love the little fellow.”

A quick smile spread across Teresa’s face as she nodded. “Then he’ll be okay for a few hours,” _mamm_ said.

“I don’t know much about babies,” Teresa replied, her smile fading. “I’m so thankful you took me in. You don’t know how much it means to me.”

“You’re very welcome here,” _mamm_ said. “And you can stay as long as you wish.”

Susan’s _daett_, who had been listening to the conversation, spoke up. “_Da Hah_ gives His grace to all of us, does He not?” He helped himself to some eggs. “We are more than glad to help out.”

Susan thought Teresa was going to pull her handkerchief out. Teresa gathered herself together instead and, barely speaking loud enough for them to hear, said, “I have wanted this for so long. You have no idea how much I have wanted this. At first I was thinking only of my son, but now I want this life for me too. It’s an answer to my prayers.”

“_Da Hah_ is a very gracious God,” Menno said. “And you’re welcome here, Teresa. Just remember, we are all human, even here in the community. But I suppose you’ll be finding that out as time goes on.”

“That’s for sure,” _mamm_ said. “And none of us should ever be forgetting we are not perfect.”

“But I think you are all wonderful,” Teresa protested. “I haven’t seen anything but saintliness so far. You are such sweet people. I know I can never be a true Amish person—like from birth—but Samuel
can. He is almost the same as being born Amish since Susan was right there with me the whole time.”

“As Menno said, you really shouldn’t think too highly of us,” Mammcorrected gently. “Even if you feel very good about us right now. No doubt you will be seeing our faults before long.”

Teresa didn’t look convinced, but she let the subject drop.

Menno frowned, deepening the weather-drawn lines on his face. Apparently he was not going to allow the matter to end here. “Mamm and I are very glad Susan is back with us, Teresa,” he said. “And that you could come with her. You must remember, though, that Da Hah wishes no one to consider themselves perfect. Our life here may be different from what you are used to—and hopefully better. But only Da Hah is perfect, and He is a very jealous God.”

“Yes,” Teresa said, raising her eyes to meet his face. “I’m going to try to live the way I ought. It’s just that I’ve never been taught a lot of things about God like you people have been.”

Susan breathed a sigh of relief. Thankfully the discussion this morning at the breakfast table was going quite well—better than she had dared hope. Teresa was joining in freely, and Mammm and Daett were being very gentle and kind with this touchy subject.

“There will be plenty of time to learn,” Mammm said, getting up from the table. “Da Hah makes sure of that.”

“I hope there is,” Teresa agreed. “But I have a very long way back from where I’ve been. And I want to say again that I’m sorry about the baby…being I’m not married. Do you think God will forgive me?”

“Da Hah already has,” Mammm said, coming back with freshly baked bread that had been sliced.

“He has?” Teresa looked up at Mammm’s face.

“One only has to look into that baby’s face to see the hand of Da Hah already working,” Mammm said. “Da Hah makes the walk of obedience as easy as possible.”

“But Samuel—he didn’t sin. I did.”

“We have all sinned, Teresa,” Menno said. “As even my own Susan has. Just not in the same way. And Da Hah has forgiven her.”
“Daett!” Mamm gasped. “You don’t know what Susan has been doing while she was gone.”

“Perhaps not, but she was away,” Menno said. “That is serious enough. And the world calls to our weak flesh at every turn. Even Susan’s.”

Teresa looked up and spoke slowly. “I hope you’re not thinking bad thoughts of Susan because of me. I know I’ve made awful choices in my life, but Susan hasn’t done anything like I have. She’s a holy woman. She dated only Christian people, like Duane Moran. He was a nice man.”

Menno dropped his fork on the table. It bounced once before clanging on the floor. “Susan spent time with an Englisha man? She spoke to him of love?” he asked.

Oh no! Susan thought. Here it comes. Now what am I going to do? Oh, why did I ever confide to Teresa about Mr. Moran? She had known it was only a matter of time before her mamm and daett started asking questions about her time spent with the Englisha.

“Daett,” Mamm said, reaching over to stroke his arm, “we knew Susan had to be doing some things like that.”

“But she is my dochtah,” Menno said.

Susan got to her feet and walked over to her father. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders. “I’m home, Daett,” she said. “Can’t you just leave it at that? And I haven’t done anything wrong. Really.”

“But you spoke of love with an Englisha man?” Menno raised his eyes to Susan’s face.

“No, I didn’t. He was a very nice person, Daett,” Susan said. “I went out to eat with him in a restaurant. I did not agree to marry him. Okay?”

Menno thought for a long moment before he sighed. “I had hoped to never hear of such things happening to my youngest daughter.”

“You have lots of other daughters, Daett,” Susan said. “They’ve all turned out okay.”

Menno sighed again and then bent down to pick up his fork. “So what have we done wrong with you?” he asked. “What have we not
taught you that we taught the others? How could one of my girls just up and leave so suddenly like you did?”

“But she’s back!” Mamm said before Susan could answer. “So let’s be thankful for that. Perhaps Da Hah will give us grace to continue from here.”

That was the answer they’d be the most satisfied with, Susan figured, taking her seat again.

“I’m sorry,” Teresa told Susan quietly. She pushed her food around with her fork.

“You helped me get back home!” Susan whispered back, leaning over to give Teresa a hug. “Let’s not forget that.”

“Da Hah moves in mysterious ways,” Mamm said. “I’m glad to see how much you two girls love each other. It helps make my heart feel better about your time away from us, Susan. If Da Hah can bring about this love, then your time among the English was not completely lost.”

Menno nodded in agreement. “Da Hah also forgave sinners while He walked on this earth. Perhaps I should not have spoken so harshly.”

“I understand, Daett,” Susan said, mustering up a smile. “And if I didn’t know that you and Mamm loved me, I never would have come home.”

“I am glad you are home,” Menno said. “But surely you won’t be having those Englisha boyfriends coming to visit the farm, will you?”

Susan laughed. “I think Robby did mention something about coming. But he’s not my boyfriend. We’re just friends. His mother owned the bakery where I worked.”

“Susan!” Anna gasped. “How could you do such a thing? Inviting an Englisha boy here?”

“He’s only a friend, Mamm,” Susan repeated. “And I doubt he’ll come anyway.”

Menno nodded with a hint of a smile on his face. “That Thomas of yours came by looking for you over Christmas. Has Mamm told you about this?”
“No, she hasn’t.” Susan glanced over at her mamm, who was staring at her plate.

Menno smiled. “Perhaps this thing can be patched up between the two of you?”

Susan took a deep breath before answering. “I may not want to patch things up with Thomas, Daett, so please be understanding. What I want is a man who will love me. Someone who will not fall in love with my best friend the first time I turn my back.”

“We all have made mistakes,” Daett said. “We all have our faults.”

“Did you fall in love with Mamm’s best friend while you were seeing her?” Susan asked him.

“No,” Menno said. “That one I did not do.”

“That proves my point,” Susan said.

Menno fell silent, but Mamm didn’t look ready to drop the subject. Moments later she spoke up. “You always were the fiery one of the girls, Susan,” she said. “Don’t you think you’re overplaying this a little? Thomas does seem like a nice man, and he did go all the way to Asbury Park to visit you over Christmas, not knowing you’d left already. It shows you he is serious now.”

“I didn’t know about that,” Menno said, leaning forward over the table. “That does sound serious—and quite gut to me.”

“I think it counts for a lot,” Mamm said. “It clearly shows that whatever affection he had for Eunice, it was very short-lived.”

Susan glared at the wall at the thought of Thomas and Eunice. “It was long enough for me to see what kind of man he is,” she said. “And I will have nothing to do with him. Thomas was kissing Eunice!”

“Well…” Menno said, “remember, we need a younger man on the farm soon. And I think Thomas would be more than willing. Perhaps you need to find forgiveness in your heart for the boy.”

“This has nothing to do with forgiveness, Daett,” Susan said. “It has to do with trust, and I don’t trust Thomas.”

Menno sighed. “Then Da Hah will have to do His work in His own slow way, I suppose. But I wish He would hurry because I’m getting old and my body isn’t going to hold out much longer.”
“You’re much tougher than you think,” Susan said. “And I’m willing to help out as much as I can on the farm. You know that.”

“Okay, enough of this,” Mamm interrupted. “This is getting us nowhere. If everyone is done eating, let’s pray. The sun is climbing quickly into the sky, and I need those supplies from the Dutch Barn.”

“There will be more time to discuss this later,” Menno said. He bowed his head, praying silently this time.

Susan caught Teresa’s eye moments later and smiled. The girl looked perfectly terrorized. She must not be used to such frank discussions. But it had been only a few days since they had arrived on the Greyhound, and this was indeed another world to Teresa. A güt world, but why did the discussion of Thomas have to come up so quickly? Her parents meant no harm. They just hadn’t seen Thomas like she had, all starry-eyed and flat-footed while Eunice beamed on him with her sweet smiles. How Susan’s heart had been torn at the sight of the two outside the washhouse that Sunday night after the hymn singing. What a betrayer of friendship Thomas was. Well, let Thomas marry Eunice if he thought she was so wonderful.

Susan jerked herself out of her thoughts when her daett stood to his feet and pushed his chair back under the table.

“Can I help with the dishes?” Teresa asked.

“We’ll both help,” Susan said, getting up. “Then it’s off to the barn to get the horse.”

“I’ll work on my list now,” Mamm said, disappearing into the living room.

Susan went to the sink to turn on the hot water, while Teresa moved the dishes from the table and used a plastic scraper Susan gave her to remove the food particles.

“Are they clean enough to wash now?” Teresa asked moments later, setting two plates on the counter.

Susan nodded. “You’re doing really well.”

“I guess it helps that we never had a dishwasher in that dump of
an apartment,” Teresa said. “Perhaps God was preparing me for this life, though I never scraped dishes clean before I washed them. Mom was different, you know.”

“Yes, I remember,” Susan said with a smile. “Have you written your *mamm* to let her know you and Samuel arrived safely?”

“Yesterday,” Teresa replied. “I mailed the letter to Laura’s address. I’m sure she’ll be kind enough to take it down to Mom.”

The two girls worked together, moving between the sink and the kitchen table. Moments later Susan saw a frown flit across Teresa’s face. She stopped what she was doing and asked, “Is something wrong?”

Teresa didn’t answer right away. Susan was ready to ask again when Teresa said, “Do your parents hate me? After all, I haven’t lived like they believe a person should. I have a son and I’m not married.”

“Oh course they don’t, Teresa!” Susan said. “Don’t even think such thoughts.”

“I hope my being here doesn’t make trouble for them,” Teresa worried.

“They like you and little Samuel,” Susan said. “I know they’ll love you when they get to know you better. They’re wonderful people, and they don’t hate anyone, especially you.”

“But you talk about things…” Teresa’s voice drifted off.

“Things that seem private to you? That’s one of the many things to get used to,” Susan said. “We keep few secrets—from each other or from the community.”

“Really?”

“Yah,” Susan replied. “Are you sure you want that?”

Teresa took a deep breath before speaking. “With all my heart I want it. Even more than you can imagine. I so want to get away from my old life. I want to find the peace I feel around here. I want to raise little Samuel to be a godly man and see him marry a wonderful Amish woman someday.”

“Those are good things to want,” Susan said. “Just be aware that it’s going to be a long, hard road. That’s all I can say.”
“You keep saying that,” Teresa said. “But look where I’ve already come from. Was that easy?”
“I guess not,” Susan admitted.
“Then why should I expect this to be easy?” Teresa asked. “No, even if it’s hard, I’m going to live and die Amish from here on out.”