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Scripture quotations taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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UNTIL I LOVE AGAIN

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Chapter One



Susanna Miller pulled back on the buggy reins, and her horse Charlie came to a halt as the traffic light turned red. Susanna casually looked to her left and suddenly let out a gasp, not believing her eyes. When the light changed to green moments later, Susanna's gaze was still on the illuminated sign in the parking lot of DeKalb Seed and Feed. It took the honking of the car horn behind her to break Susanna's trance. She let the reins fly as Charlie lunged forward.

As she drove by, she glanced over her shoulder at the sign one final time. *Yah*, it said what she thought it said: Happy Birthday, Susanna Miller. Susanna groaned. If *Daett* or anyone else from the community saw this, there would be questions she didn't want to answer.

Susanna hung on to Charlie's reins as he trotted out of town and made the sharp turn off of Highway 17 onto Maple Ridge Road. Perhaps the fact that she was on the final days of her *rumspringa* would make any explanation more acceptable. She had been given free rein by *Daett*, but that was about over now. And this sign might be the straw that would break the proverbial camel's back. *Daett* had

allowed her freedom in the hope that her *rumspringa* time would accomplish its intended purpose. *Yah*, she was supposed to taste what lay out there in the *Englisha* world, and in so doing, come to realize why those things were not allowed among her people.

But *Daett* hadn't intended things to go as they had. Things like her friendship with Joey Macalister. She had kept that hidden from everyone, because, really, Joey was only a friend—nothing more. She need not alarm her family. Her *rumspringa* was almost over and she was ready to settle down—or was she? That was the question. She had told herself she was done with the *Englisha* world... but when she was with Joey, she wasn't so sure. When she was out with him, the world outside the Amish fence beckoned, tossing her emotions back and forth each weekend.

The birthday sign she had passed—if she was honest—warmed her heart as much as it alarmed her. Joey had placed the words there himself, or more likely, he had asked his cousin Marisa, who worked at the seed and feed, to set up the birthday greeting. Joey meant no harm, but an Amish girl's name should never be seen on an *Englisha* sign whether she was on her *rumspringa* or not. Such a thing would obviously mean she was a close friend and perhaps more than a friend with some *Englisha* person. *Daett* would wish to know who that was, and all the details.

Her friend, Emma Troyer, claimed that one's *rumspringa* in her aunt's community in Ohio allowed for friendships with *Englisha* people, but Susanna couldn't imagine that here. Amish life in New York's North Country was a controlled affair. *Daett* had already given her more freedom than anyone in the community thought was appropriate.

Susanna sighed and pulled back on the reins as Charlie approached the Millers' driveway. She turned in with a quick look

around the barnyard. *Daett's* buggy wasn't there. It was just as well. She didn't want to see him at the moment. Not with the memory of the illuminated sign still haunting her. *Daett* would understand neither the sign nor her friendship with Joey. No, *Daett* would want to end her *rumspringa* time if and when he learned of this. He would no doubt put pressure on her to attend the community's upcoming spring baptismal classes.

"It's about time you thought about settling down," *Daett* had said only last week with a grin, but underneath his beard the lines had deepened on his face. She knew *Daett* well enough to know that he was worried, and so was *Mamm*. *Mamm* didn't tease like *Daett*, but of late *Mamm's* steps had grown slower as each weekend approached and Susanna spent time away from the homeplace.

Susanna climbed out of the buggy to unhitch Charlie from the shafts. She led him toward the barn while her thoughts whirled. Neither *Mamm* nor *Daett* knew where she was spending her time on Saturday nights, and that was how she intended things to stay. She had let *Mamm* think she was at the usual parties the other young people attended in Heuvelton.

The result was that neither *Mamm* nor *Daett* knew of the quiet hours she had spent at Joey's house over the past few months—nor of her newfound love for music. She had even learned to play the piano at Joey's, much to her own surprise. She had picked it up more easily than even Joey's mom, Beatrice, had imagined she would. And by now, Susanna had grown to love the feel of her fingers moving across the keys. *Yah*, she had taken to music like a duck to water. She was better now than even Joey, who had been taking lessons from his *mamm* for years.

Daett would never understand how such a fancy thing had gained a hold on her. The community sang songs at the Sunday

services, but it wasn't the same as music from a piano. She could never explain the difference to *Mamm* or *Daett*, which was why she hadn't tried.

Susanna pushed open the barn door, and her younger brother Henry hollered from the back of the barn, "Home from a hard day's work, I see. Oh, and happy birthday."

"Thanks." Susanna forced a cheerful note into her voice.

"Did you pass *Daett* on your way home?" Henry asked as he tossed a bale of straw into the stall beside Charlie's. A cloud of dust drifted upward.

Susanna drew a long breath before she answered. "*Daett* went to town?"

"Yep!" Henry's voice no longer had its tease. "James is still in the field, but the axle broke on the wagon I was driving. I think it's been cracked for a while. Anyway, *Daett* hoped to reach the hardware store before they closed."

"I didn't see him." Susanna turned Charlie into his stall. "I guess *Daett* must have passed through before I started home."

"Must have," Henry allowed. "Or were you daydreaming?"

"I was minding my own business," she said, and hurried past him to exit the barn.

Henry's chuckle followed her. Susanna closed the barn door and continued her rush across the lawn. If *Daett* was going to the hardware store, he would surely pass the sign at the seed and feed. No doubt he would have words to say upon his return, but the matter was out of her hands now. She couldn't do anything but pray and hope.

Susanna entered the house by the washroom door and tried to smile as she opened the door to the kitchen.

"*Goot* evening," she sang out, mustering up as much cheerfulness as she could.

“*Goot* evening,” *Mamm* replied. She was bent over the stove, and at once, Susanna started to set the table for supper. She counted the pieces under her breath, hoping to settle her nerves. A knife and fork each for *Daett* and *Mamm*, and then there were her brothers. She laid out the place settings for Henry, James, Noah, and little Tobias. *Yah*, all brothers. She was the only girl in the family, but she didn’t mind. A sister would be great, but her brothers didn’t bother her much. And she was allowed the freedom to drive her own buggy on Saturday nights, a tradition she had begun before Henry turned sixteen. She liked all of her brothers, from Henry down to three-year-old Tobias, who was now peering at Susanna around the kitchen doorway.

Susanna gave him a smile. “You want to sit down? Wait for supper?”

Tobias shook his head as *Mamm* said, “Better wait. He’ll just be poking his finger into the food before it’s dished out.”

“Will you?” Susanna asked with another smile.

Tobias solemnly shook his head again, his tousled hair covering his ears. Tobias needed a haircut, but *Mamm* had been too busy this week. Perhaps Susanna should try her hand at haircuts. Her fingers could skim over the piano keys, so why couldn’t they handle the scissors? *Mamm*, though, had always kept the task for herself, and none of Susanna’s brothers would let her experiment on them.

“Don’t tempt him,” *Mamm* said. “You know he’s hungry.”

“*Yah*,” Susanna agreed. “He’s always hungry.”

Mamm ignored the remark and said, “Ernest Helmuth came by today. I saw him speaking with *Daett* out in the barnyard. He sure was looking toward the house often enough.”

Susanna pressed her lips together, but *Mamm* continued as if she hadn’t made the point. “I’m sure he was hoping for a glimpse of you.”

“Doesn’t the man know I work each day at the DeKalb Building

Supply?” Susanna snapped. “I would think that would be the first thing to learn if you’re interested in a woman.”

“Come now,” *Mamm* chided. “Ernest has plenty of things on his mind. He cares for his two small girls all by himself, with no *frau* and all of his farmwork. You ought to pay more attention to the man at the church services. That and...” *Mamm* focused on the pan in front of her, with the point temporarily forgotten.

But Susanna knew what *Mamm* meant. Both *Daett* and *Mamm* had taken a liking to the widower Ernest Helmuth, and unless she missed her guess, they planned to push her into a marriage with the man.

“Ernest is such a good *daett* to his little girls since their *mamm* passed,” *Mamm* continued. “Any man with such a tender touch would make a woman happy.”

Susanna kept her voice low. “What if I’m not interested?” There was no way Tobias could understand this conversation, but he studied their faces with interest.

“Of course you wouldn’t be.” *Mamm*’s statement was tinged with frustration. “You’ve not given the man a fair chance. You’re getting older, Susanna, and it’s high time to think of settling down.”

“And if I do that, how will you handle the house by yourself?” Susanna asked in a desperate attempt at distraction.

Mamm wasted no time in batting down the excuse. “Look how we’re living now, Susanna. You work at the building supply part-time and some weekends, and we’re making out okay. There’s no reason for you to turn down an eligible man’s interest. A suitable marriage partner for you is more important than how I’ll run a household of boys by myself. A woman’s place is in the home, Susanna, and not out there in the *Englisha* world.” *Mamm* waved her hand in the general direction of the town of DeKalb. “I should

never have agreed to let you work in that place, but what's done is done, and we can only go forward from here."

Susanna pressed her lips together again. This discussion was familiar territory. She wasn't attached to her job because it was part of the *Englisha* world, but it was useless to tell *Mamm* so. That was the only reason *Mamm* could imagine for Susanna's hesitation in joining the spring instruction classes. So far she had not told *Mamm* the real reason, but perhaps she would have no choice once *Daett* came home from the trip into town—if he noticed the sign.

If Joey had only known the trouble it was going to cause, he wouldn't have asked Marisa to put it up. But Joey didn't understand her world like she did his. And Joey had no intention to learn about her Amish world. That much he had made clear more than once. Not that it mattered. Susanna had no plans for their relationship to move beyond friendship. She planned to settle down in the community eventually, and Joey was headed for law school.

Mamm put a smile on her face. "Are you daydreaming about being Ernest's *frau*? That's sometimes the first step, you know. Even before you know if the relationship will work out. *Yah*, Ernest is a fine man, Susanna. *Daett* thinks highly of him, and so do I."

"No, I'm not thinking about him," Susanna retorted.

The smile stayed on *Mamm*'s face. "Then think about those two cute little girls of his. Don't you just love them? You'd have a right decent start at a family from the get-go, Susanna. And you would be spared the pains of bearing them."

Susanna felt the heat rise to her face. She glanced at Tobias. He still regarded her with that intense look of his, as if he understood every word, which wasn't possible. This conversation wasn't decent for adult ears, and hopefully it was unintelligible to three-year-olds.

"I almost invited Ernest and his girls for supper tonight," *Mamm*

continued, “but I thought that might be a little too much and too soon. You should give him a few smiles at the services and encourage his heart, though. He’s lonely, Susanna. And it’s a great honor for our family that Ernest is thinking of you as his future *frau*. You should get down on your knees and thank the Lord instead of hesitating. You might lose him.”

Susanna gave *Mamm* a sharp glance and opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again. She had heard enough about Ernest for one evening. The boys would soon be in for supper. And there was *Daett’s* buggy just now, coming down the lane.

A chill crept up Susanna’s back as she hurried to move the hot food over to the table. *Mamm* gave her frequent sideway glances but said nothing more about Ernest Helmuth.

Chapter Two



An hour later, Susanna reached over to tug Tobias's hand as he attempted to smear an extra layer of butter onto his bread. "Don't do that," she chided. "Enough is enough."

"But I like butter," Tobias protested.

"Susanna's right," *Daett* chimed in. "We must be moderate in all we do." *Daett* gave his young son a smile. "Life offers many choices and we must choose what is right, which means restraining ourselves on things that might not be wrong in themselves."

Tobias appeared puzzled at this deep lecture over such a small offense, but he settled back on his bench without further protest. Susanna glanced again at her *daett's* face. He had given no indication of having seen the sign at the seed and feed. Was it possible he had overlooked it?

"Pass the potatoes again," *Mamm* said to Susanna. When she didn't respond, still gazing at her *daett*, *Mamm* repeated the request.

"She's thinking about Ernest Helmuth," James teased. "I saw him here today, speaking with *Daett* for much longer than necessary. The poor man must have greatly desired a glimpse of Susanna on the porch."

“Oh, stop it,” Susanna ordered. “Must the whole community know about this?”

James chuckled.

“I think we should speak of something more decent,” Henry said.

“Thank you.” Susanna gave him a grateful smile. “Glad someone has *goot* sense among the males of this household. I—”

Daett cleared his throat, and Susanna stopped in midsentence. “The love between a man and a woman is not a matter of shame,” *Daett* lectured. “That goes for you, James, as well as Susanna. We can tease each other, but let’s not forget that the Lord made Adam and Eve and placed them on this earth to multiply and replenish the land. This is a sacred task, and we must take our duty with soberness and prayerfulness before the Lord.”

“Amen,” *Mamm* added.

There was heat rising up Susanna’s neck again. Odd, how this subject never came up at the Macalister home. Such plain talk had little place among the sounds of beautiful piano music and regular family chitchat.

“See, she’s all red-faced,” James teased. “We have a wedding coming up this fall if I don’t miss my guess.”

“Mind your own business,” Susanna retorted, as all four boys chuckled at her embarrassment.

Daett’s grin faded and he appeared ready to continue his lecture, but instead he said, “Let’s have dessert, please.”

Mamm bounced up before Susanna could move, and brought over cherry pies and a pitcher of milk. *Mamm* stopped with a flourish. “Something a little special for Susanna’s birthday today. It’s not much, but we all know how Susanna likes cherry pie.”

“So do I,” Tobias said as he eyed the lightly browned pies. “But we could use some ice cream on top.”

James cut himself a large piece and glanced at his brother. “You

do have fancy tastes tonight, but this is *goot* enough for me. Nothing matches *Mamm*'s cherry pies, even without ice cream."

"Thank you, James," *Mamm* said, smiling. "But remember not to praise your mother's pies once you're married."

Daett appeared amused. "You can say that again."

"Now, I wasn't talking about you." *Mamm* reached over to pat his arm. "Boys, your *daett* has been more than kind when it comes to comparisons with his mother."

"That's because you're so *goot* at cooking," *Daett* said. "Cherry pies especially."

Mamm beamed with happiness. "See, that's how it's done, boys. Look and learn from your *daett*."

"I'm looking," Henry said. "I just haven't seen the young girl that's right for me."

Laughter spread around the table, and Susanna joined in. "She'll come in due time," Susanna comforted Henry. "You're still pretty young, you know."

"*Yah*, but old enough to look around," Henry shot back. "And I do have cause to worry. Look at how Sarah Beth swoons every time James comes around. I can't even get a smile from a girl with James right there to grab all the attention. And he's younger than me!"

Daett spoke up. "That's enough, boys. We accept what the Lord gives, Henry. Keep your hopes up, son, and the right girl will be along. That's the way it works when we walk in the will of the Lord."

"You're such a dear, Ralph," *Mamm* cooed. "You have such sound advice to give all of our children."

Susanna smiled as James and Henry hid behind their spoonfuls of cherry pie. She appreciated *Mamm* and *Daett*'s affection for each other, even if it embarrassed her brothers. She wanted to be like them when she married.

An image of Ernest Helmuth's bearded face appeared in Susanna's

mind, and she lowered her head. Ernest wasn't exactly what she envisioned as husband material.

Thankfully *Daett* soon called for the closing prayer of thanks, and Susanna followed the boys into the living room where *Daett* had his Bible open. She found a seat on the couch, and he began to read.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." *Daett's* deep voice filled the living room.

Why had *Daett* chosen this familiar Scripture tonight? Susanna wondered. Did he seek comfort for himself, or was this to encourage her to face the truth no matter where the road led?

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." *Daett* concluded the psalm and closed the Bible. He looked around the room and took them all in one by one until even James squirmed on his chair. Finally *Daett* spoke. "*Mamm* and I would like to have time alone with our daughter this evening, so Tobias and Noah, would you boys please go upstairs to your rooms? James and Henry can start the work in the kitchen."

After the boys all left silently, casting a mournful glance at Susanna, *Daett* started right in by asking, "Do you have something you'd like to tell us, Susanna?"

Mamm had obviously not been let in on what was going on, as she looked at *Daett* and asked, "What do you mean, Ralph? What's this all about?"

"I think we should let Susanna tell us," *Daett* said. "It would be best that way."

Susanna took a deep breath. "Do you mean the happy birthday sign?"

"Yah, of course." *Daett* leaned forward.

"A happy birthday sign?" *Mamm* interrupted.

Daett held his hand up and *Mamm* fell silent.

“It’s...” Susanna began. “It’s some friends that I know. They didn’t tell me they would do this, or I would have objected...”

“In the middle of town where anyone can see it.” *Daett’s* voice was more statement than question. “Those must be some friends.”

“She’s...” *Mamm* tried again.

Daett turned to her. “Susanna’s name is on a well-lit sign at the seed and feed store in DeKalb. The sign says, in big letters: Happy Birthday, Susanna Miller. The whole community will know by morning, and we will have much explaining to do. I’d at least like some answers before Deacon Herman calls.”

“Susanna!” *Mamm* exclaimed. “How did this happen?”

Susanna swallowed but found no words.

Daett’s voice cut through her fogged brain. “You can begin anytime.”

“I...” Susanna began. “I didn’t know this would happen, I really didn’t, but Joey must have told his cousin Marisa about my birthday, and her parents own the seed and feed store.”

“You know this Joey well enough that he would put up your name without asking you?” *Daett* had leaned forward again.

Susanna looked at the floor. “I suppose so,” she allowed.

“We had best stop beating around the bush, Susanna.” *Daett’s* voice was stern. “Did you meet this Joey at the parties in Heuvelton?”

Susanna nodded, but this wouldn’t satisfy, so she added, “I met him there, but then I also went to his house.”

“Each weekend after the parties?” *Mamm* asked in horror.

“I don’t go to the parties anymore.” Susanna lifted her head to meet their gazes. “There. Now you know. Joey’s my friend—and that’s all.”

Moments later *Daett* reached over to touch the cover on the Bible, but he said nothing. *Mamm* was likewise silent.

“And they taught me to play the piano,” Susanna blurted out.

Daett's face paled. She had expected this result, but the sight still shocked her. *Daett* and *Mamm* had no idea what beautiful piano music sounded like, and she wasn't about to explain. She had already said too much.

"Do you love this man?" *Daett* finally asked.

Mamm gasped at the question, obviously fearing the answer.

"He's my friend," Susanna answered. "That's all."

"Is this why you've been hesitating about the baptismal classes this spring?" *Daett* asked.

"*Yah*, I guess," Susanna acknowledged.

"You surely know the depth of my shock and sorrow," *Daett* said. "This is not what *rumspringa* is for. I told you this when the Troyer sisters jumped the fence a year ago. You are not to form attachments with *Englisha* people. This will trouble you when it's time to come back. I trusted you, Susanna, enough to give you the freedom I thought you needed. Perhaps I was wrong."

"I didn't intend things to turn out this way," Susanna said. "It just happened. I wish you could understand."

Daett's hands trembled. "We had best speak no more about this matter tonight. I'll talk with Deacon Herman if he inquires about this, and ask for patience as we pray for the Lord to help us through this difficult time. But you must seek the Lord's will on your feelings for this boy, Susanna. None of our people marry outside the faith. Surely you know this."

"I do," Susanna told him. "And I'm sorry. But, as I said, Joey's just a friend."

"Friend or not, he's *Englisha* and he's a young man. That can only mean trouble eventually."

Susanna hung her head as *Mamm* remained silent.

Daett began again. "We will consider this matter settled for now. From now on, you will drive into town with Henry on Saturday

nights.” *Daett* tried to smile. “I should have insisted on this for some time, but we thought to make an exception in your case.”

Now what did that mean? Likely *Daett* had been his usual considerate and decent self—and was disappointed to find out that Susanna’s *rumspringa* had gone off course. The time had come for rules and restrictions, and she had no one to blame but herself. She ought to promise she would return Ernest Helmuth’s attentions at the next Sunday services, but her stomach turned at the thought. Instead, Joey’s face floated in her mind, and the tears stung. What a mess she had gotten herself into. Susanna rose to her feet and beat a hasty retreat up the stairs.

Chapter Three



As Susanna fidgeted with the pins on her dress, the late Saturday evening sunlight streamed through the bedroom window and spilled on the hardwood floor at her feet. She studied the beam and moved her bare foot into the light. Should she obey *Daett's* orders tonight? She drew her foot back and sighed. James had already left, and Henry was waiting in his buggy. She really didn't have much choice, but perhaps later in the evening she could slip away or find some other way to meet Joey. Maybe Henry could be talked into cooperating. They could drive past Joey's house on their way to Heuvelton, and then she could run inside for a moment and explain to him why she couldn't see him. And if no one was home, she could at least leave a note on the door.

But of course Henry wouldn't stop so she could see Joey. Henry was solid as a rock and would not let her out of his sight all evening. That was why *Daett* had assigned her to Henry's care, but she just *had* to see Joey tonight. She had to explain her absence.

"Susanna!" *Mamm's* voice called up the stairs. "Henry's waiting."

Susanna plunged in the last pin and stifled a shriek when the end pricked her finger. How clumsy she had become. Only ten-year-old

girls stuck their fingers when they dressed themselves. This only added to the shame she had felt all week as *Mamm* hovered over her.

“Did Joey stop by your work today?” *Mamm* asked each evening after Susanna came home from the DeKalb Building Supply.

In a way, she was glad Joey hadn’t stopped by. *Mamm*’s anxiety would only have increased. But the downside was that she missed Joey. At least *Mamm* and *Daett* didn’t know that. She had half-expected *Daett* to demand that she quit her job this week, but he hadn’t.

“Susanna!” *Mamm* called again. “You can’t keep Henry waiting.”

“Coming,” Susanna called out, grabbing her shoes. She dashed out the bedroom door barefoot taking the stairs two at a time.

“Do be careful!” *Mamm* chided at the bottom of the stairwell.

“*Yah, Mamm.*” Susanna stopped so *Mamm* could inspect her dress.

“Go.” *Mamm* motioned toward the front door. “You look decent enough. And be sure to stay with Henry. *Daett* has told him to watch over you.”

Susanna suppressed a protest and ran for the door. The screen door slammed behind her. The sound was rebellious, like how she felt inside. All week she had acted humble and submissive in front of *Mamm*. What a bundle of contradictions she had become, so unlike her former self. What was wrong with her? Why couldn’t she be stable like her brothers? She had taken chances in her *rumspringa* time that none of them had.

As she approached, Henry leaned out of the buggy and grumbled, “I’m not like a boyfriend that you can keep waiting.”

“Sorry,” Susanna muttered. She climbed in and shoved her shoes under the buggy seat.

Henry shook the reins and called out, “Getup, Ranger.” When the horse had settled into a steady trot, he gave Susanna a sharp

sideways glance. “You can put those shoes on now. I’m not arriving at the gathering with a sister in her bare feet.”

“In a moment,” Susanna said. “I have a question first. What’s different about me, Henry? Sometimes I feel so rebellious, and none of you boys are like that.”

Henry smiled. “Don’t worry. It’s just a rough spot, I suppose. You’ll settle down now that Ernest is making eyes at you. I saw you give him at least one smile at the service last Sunday. That’s *goot*. I hope you gave him lots more that I didn’t see.”

“You just imagined that,” Susanna protested. “If I remember right, I didn’t look at him all day.”

“Oh? There’s not another widower you’re making eyes at, is there?” Henry said with a grin.

Susanna made a face at him.

Henry laughed. “Ernest is a *goot* catch, you know. And those little girls of his, they are cuter than buttons.”

“You’ve noticed his girls?” Susanna asked.

Henry snorted. “*Yah*, of course! They sit on Ernest’s lap each Sunday. Naturally I’m interested in the man my sister will marry and the daughters that will become my nieces.”

“You’re such a dear, brother,” Susanna teased, reaching over to slap Henry’s arm.

“Hey,” he protested.

“Sorry.” Susanna gave him a sweet smile. “Like I said, I’m still feeling a little rebellious.”

Henry sighed. “You’ll come to love Ernest soon enough.” He jerked his head with all confidence and pulled Ranger to stop for the turn onto Highway 17.

“I’m not so sure about that,” Susanna muttered under her breath. She reached under the buggy seat for her shoes and put them on while Henry drove toward Heuvelton.

“That’s better,” Henry said once she was finished. “Now we’re ready to face the big wide world this evening.”

“What if Joey looks for me tonight?” Susanna asked. “I mean, he could. He knows where the Amish youth hang out.”

Henry’s face clouded over. “You’ll tell him you’re spoken for, and that’s that.”

“But I’m not spoken for. And I like Joey...as a friend,” Susanna said.

Henry gave Susanna a stern look. “That’s not the way to talk, and you know that.”

“Sorry, I can’t help it,” Susanna said. “It’s my rebel nature. I have all these desires inside me for forbidden things. How come you don’t? How come you were able to leave your *rumspringa* time behind so quickly?”

Henry’s voice was steady. “It was easy. There’s nothing out there in the *Englisha* world for us, Susanna.” He waved his empty hand toward the approaching city lights. “That’s what *rumspringa* is for. We’re to settle the matter in our hearts.”

“Then why is it not settled in mine?” Susanna glared toward the town. “You know I’ve tried.”

“*Yah*, I do,” Henry assured her. “And *Mamm* and *Daett* also understand. This is only a storm that will soon pass.”

Susanna kept silent.

Henry finally cleared his throat. “Maybe we should both think about joining the baptismal class in two weeks. I’d be willing to attend if you will.”

Susanna sat up straight. “You would? For my sake?”

“Of course.” Henry’s grin was lopsided. “I was ready anyway. I’ve seen plenty of what’s out there.”

“You’re such a dear, Henry, and so kind.” Susanna sighed. “Why can’t I be like you?”

“You’re close enough,” Henry said. “You’re just a little different, but that’s okay. Ernest will get a decent *frau* when he weds you this fall, and you’ll be happy with the man for all the days the Lord gives you together. You’ll raise those little girls up to melt some man’s heart someday.”

Susanna gave him a sharp glance. “Did *Daett* tell you to say all this? You’re not usually this talkative.”

Henry elbowed her playfully. “That’s because you’ve never driven with me before on a Saturday night. Look what you’ve been missing out on.”

“How do you know I’m the one who’s been missing out on Saturday nights?” Susanna teased.

Henry gave her a wry look. “I don’t think I like the direction of this conversation. Promise me that you’ll join the baptismal class with me.”

“I’ll think about it,” she said. “And don’t worry. I’ll behave tonight... wherever we’re going. And where *are* we going?”

“Just the usual,” he chuckled. “But I guess you’ve forgotten what the usual is?”

“Like *boring*,” Susanna said. “Let’s see, you’ll drive around town for a while and then stop and eat hamburgers with other Amish young people.”

Henry grunted. “And what’s wrong with that? Don’t you like hamburgers?”

Susanna rolled her eyes. Henry had obviously experienced little of what she had in the *Englisha* world, but that was because he was one of the decent Amish young people.

“You’ll enjoy yourself tonight,” Henry encouraged her. “Think of the evening as the last look before the door closes on the glitter of the *Englisha* world.”

Susanna winced, but said nothing as Henry tightened Ranger’s

reins once they approached the edge of Heuvelton. Several other buggies appeared from the side roads and fell in line behind them. Susanna waved over her shoulder, and the girls inside returned the greeting with smiles on their faces.

How happy they all were. Why couldn't she be happy with them? Deep down she knew the answer. She wanted to see Joey, not the other Amish young folks...but tonight she couldn't do anything about that. She would have to make the best of things. Susanna waved toward several more of the buggies and forced herself to smile. Surely Joey would understand. He was familiar enough with Amish ways to figure it out.

"We're stopping for hamburgers at the Heuvelton Deli," Henry announced. "Then we'll drive down to the river and eat them along the water's edge."

"That's okay with me," Susanna agreed. But the word *boring* was on the tip of her lips.

"Here we are," he announced minutes later. "Heuvelton's finest fast food at your service."

Ranger pulled to a stop, and Susanna gasped. Surely this couldn't be... Was that Joey's car she saw? *Yah!* And there he stood with his arms crossed, wearing the biggest smile she had seen in a long time.

Somehow he had found out their plans and had come to look for her. She couldn't stop her heart from pounding like Ranger's hooves on the open road.