




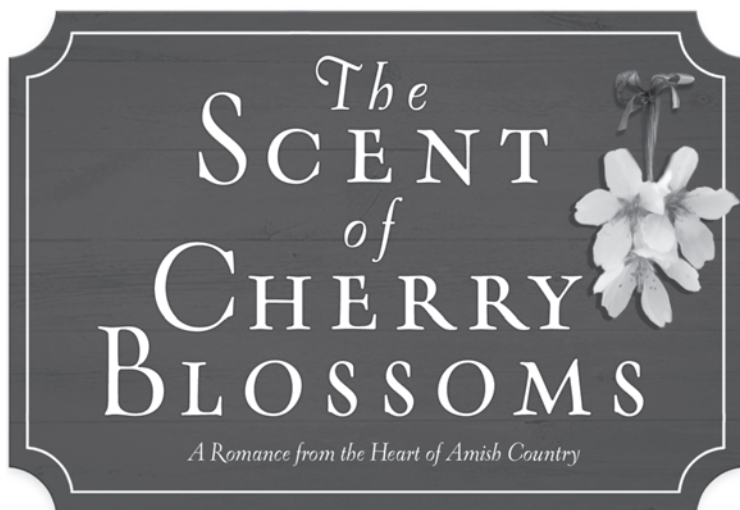
# CINDY WOODSMALL

*New York Times Best-Selling Author of  
When the Soul Mends*



*The*  
SCENT  
*of*  
CHERRY  
BLOSSOMS

A Romance from the Heart of Amish Country



CINDY  
WOODSMALL



WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

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*To Jeffry J. Bizon, MD, and his amazing wife, Kathy*



*You've been faithful from the start.*

*Thank you.*

# One

Annie added several lemons to the basket on the scale. “You have a little over two pounds.”

“*As gut.*” The gray-haired Amish woman smiled. “*Ya, as gut.*”

Annie wasn't as skilled with Pennsylvania Dutch as she'd like to be, but she definitely understood the phrase “yes, that's good.” Her family had once known the Pennsylvania Dutch language well, but it had faded in the Martin home like a patch of sun-bleached wallpaper.

She'd been raised in a Plain home. Her clothing, with the flowery prints on her dress and apron and the circular prayer *Kapp*, was different from that of the woman standing in front of her, but Plain nonetheless. Annie's cape dress and white head covering indicated she was one of the horse-and-buggy Mennonites. They were also called Old Order Mennonites, and unlike their Old Order Amish neighbors, Annie's group had electricity and phones inside their homes.

An overhead fluorescent light flickered and buzzed. Annie pulled a paper bag from under the counter, wrote the price on it with a permanent marker, and slid the lemons into the sack. Her brother's voice

echoed through the almost-empty market, and she tried not to show her embarrassment. Working at the same market as her two loud-mouthed brothers wasn't always easy.

For any of them, she was sure.

The woman picked up a Gala apple and smelled it.

"*Meh Ebbel?*" Annie asked. The customer already had a sack of Red Delicious in her cart, but maybe she wanted some Galas too.

She shook her head, set the apple in its bin on top of the dwindling mound, and took the sack from Annie. "*Gross Dank.*"

Annie started to respond in Pennsylvania Dutch, but when an *Englischer* woman came to the counter, she decided to speak in a language all of them knew. "You're welcome."

She turned to the *Englischer* woman. "May I help you?"

"Naval oranges?"

"Oh, absolutely." Annie grabbed her stepladder from its hiding spot. She'd been unable to keep up with the demand this afternoon, and her brother, who was supposed to restock her supply from the back room, hadn't been in sight for hours. She knew where he was, but she wasn't supposed to leave her stand. Besides, if she complained to him, he'd bring her less fresh produce next time and disappear for even longer periods. "I tried to get a fresh box down to fill the bin earlier today, but I was interrupted. Give me just a minute." She went up two rungs. "They are delicious, aren't they?"

The woman sniffed a kiwi. "I bought several pounds last week, and my family gobbled them up."

Foul language, followed by her brother's sarcastic laugh, rang out.

Reminding herself that customers didn't know she was related to the loudmouth, Annie climbed to the top rung of the stepladder and reached for the box of navel oranges. Why did Glen always put the heaviest boxes in the hardest places to reach? She pulled it toward her, straining to get it down from its perch without spilling anything. With the box almost in her arms, she saw an avalanche of oranges tumbling toward her face. One pelted her on the cheek. She flinched, turning her head, and was hit on the other cheek by two more oranges, but she didn't lose her grip on the box itself. The few other loose oranges fell to the floor.

Glad the Englisher woman wasn't close enough to get hit and relieved she was buying oranges instead of pineapples, Annie held on tight to the crate as she made her way down the ladder. "Here we are." After setting the box on the floor, she touched her stinging cheeks, wondering how red they were. The phrase *painted woman* came to mind, and she suppressed a chuckle. How about a fruit-smacked woman? Did the Plain church frown at that?

An announcement that the market was closing came over the loudspeaker. She bagged the oranges, marked the price, and said good-bye to the woman and then began cleaning up the stand and surrounding area.

It was Saturday evening, and the market wouldn't be open to customers again until next Thursday. Annie's next day to work would be Wednesday, when all the deliveries arrived and the main prep work was accomplished. She needed to repack whatever was left in the bins and put them in the refrigerator before scrubbing down the units.

The store grew quiet except for a few employees talking to each other from their booths. A piece of loose tin on the roof rattled as the March winds howled. Winter remained shackled to the land, and Annie had long grown weary of waiting for the earth to once again tilt toward the sun.

Katie, an Amish woman at the bakery stand, asked Leah at the vegetable stand if she had any slightly aging zucchini they could use next week for making bread. Leah said she had a few.

Annie had a box of healthy but bruised fruits to take over to them in a few minutes, including the oranges that had fallen from the box to the floor. They looked fine today, but internally they had to be bruised. “Katie, I have some naval oranges to give you. They smacked me in the face before landing on the floor with a thud.”

Katie continued sweeping out her stall. “Gut. They’ll be good flavoring in my orange-spice pound cakes.”

Whatever Annie didn’t get scrubbed today could wait until she returned on Wednesday. She loved coming to work, but Wednesdays were her favorite days. Not having customers gave her uninterrupted time to prepare for the other three busy days.

After cleaning up, she carried her box of apples, oranges, and kiwis to Katie. “Here you go.”

“*Denki*. Not good for eating outright, but perfect for baking.” Katie put the box in a commercial-sized refrigerator. Sometimes it was hard to believe that an Old Order Amish man owned this huge, nice market and that ten years ago, before Annie lived in New York, this market was a lone stand carrying only fruits, vegetables, and a few



baked goods. Now it housed four large sections—fruits, vegetables, baked goods, and meats. There were also two eateries, a florist, and a gift shop under the same roof. In the last three years, she'd worked in each one, but running the fruit stand was her favorite. By the time she went home at night, her hair, skin, and clothing smelled like a cornucopia of delicious fruits.

“I bet our driver is here.” Katie removed her white baker's apron and put on her Amish black one.

Annie and four other women headed for the back room to grab their coats and bonnets from their lockers before going out the door of the loading dock. One Englisher driver brought and picked up all the horse-and-buggy Plain workers, which amounted to nine people most days. Since the morning trip started before daylight, the riders tended to be quiet and to doze during the hour drive, but on the way home, the women usually chatted and laughed about the day's events. Annie looked forward to the jokes about those oranges smacking her in the face that would make the rounds in the van this evening.

Once in the back room, she glanced through the window into the break room and saw four market workers playing cards, two of which were her brothers Glen and Eddie. Each had a cigarette in hand as he plunked money onto the center of the table. Concern and embarrassment rushed through her.

Her Amish friends, Katie and Lydia, glanced at her before looking straight ahead, probably trying not to react to the scene. Glen and Eddie made the Old Order Mennonite people look bad. Most families were

very conservative, and the church's moral lines were upheld, both inside and outside the home, even if the parents had to shed their blood to do so—figuratively speaking. But Annie's *Daed* was not in the picture, and her *Mamm* was not strict, which held great appeal for Annie's brothers and tended to confuse her.

A few weeks ago a bottle of whiskey had fallen out of Glen's work locker and broken on the concrete floor, stinking up the place. Word of the incident had reached the second-story office where Jonas, the market owner, stayed. He'd called Glen to his office the next day, and the rumors were that he'd issued a warning, saying that underage drinking was absolutely not acceptable and alcohol was never allowed on the premises, regardless of a person's age. Later she'd heard Glen telling Eddie that he had apologized and Jonas had given him a second chance. Everyone at the market knew about the incident, and Annie figured the only reason Jonas gave Glen a second chance was because the market needed its few strong laborers.

She heard a card being slapped onto the table and Glen holler a curse word. Annie flinched, but she just kept walking across the loading dock and toward the door.

A mixture of disappointment and anger churned inside her as she went outside. Her wool jacket and winter bonnet were not sufficient to protect her from the howling winds that carried spatters of wet snow. She longed for the earth to warm, for budding flowers and trees to smell of sweet deliciousness, for rich, tilled soil to yield homegrown fruits and vegetables.

Moreover, she longed for Apple Ridge, where the bitter truths

about her brothers' not-so-secret lives had yet to reach the ears of her people. Even when the first signs of spring did appear here, near Seneca Falls, they wouldn't be as glorious as those in Apple Ridge, Pennsylvania, where she and her family used to live. Seneca Falls had some flowering trees, but being almost two hundred miles farther north, it had nothing that compared to the blossoming of the cherry trees in her grandfather's orchard.

The five female workers sat in awkward silence while waiting on the other riders to finish for the evening. Sometimes while waiting on them, she was tempted to go help. But when Jonas gave someone a station to operate, he didn't want other workers pitching in. Each person was to handle his or her assigned duties and nothing more. After ten minutes two of the missing workers arrived, but neither Glen nor Eddie was with them.

The driver waited another ten minutes before tooting her horn. Though silence prevailed, Annie sensed the rising frustration levels inside the vehicle. She bet every person, apart from the driver, knew the holdup was that her brothers were involved in a game of cards. Except for children's card games, like Dutch Blitz or Old Maid, Plain people frowned at cards, especially betting games. It surprised her that Jonas overlooked the nonsense. Or, sitting in his second-story office at the front of the building, maybe he never knew about it. As long as people did their jobs, he rarely got involved. Her brothers played with a couple of Englischer men who had their own set of wheels. If her brothers were such good friends with the Englischer guys, why couldn't they take Glen and Eddie home?

Tina looked at Annie in the rearview mirror. “What is holding up your brothers?”

“I’ll get them.” Annie reluctantly got out of the van, hoping they were in a mood to cooperate. Once inside, she could see them through the break-room window. When she opened the door, smoke billowed around her. “We’re ready to go. Tina is asking for you.”

The four broke into laughter. “I told you she’d come for you.” Ryan smirked at her.

She hated being her brothers’ target, and they pulled other people into the game.

“Yeah, yeah.” Glen snuffed out his cigarette. “Might as well leave. I can’t manage to win one round.”

Annie went back to the car, smelling of cigarette smoke and feeling like the donkey that’d had a tail pinned to it as the group applauded. She crawled into the van and stared out the window the whole way home. Her brothers reeked of stale smoke, and every so often she caught a scent of something else. Maybe alcohol? She didn’t have enough experience with the smell to know for sure. Not one bit of levity or conversation passed between any of them during the long ride home.

After being dropped off, she walked across the driveway toward her house and thought she heard their phone ringing. She hurried up the sidewalk and into the house, leaving the heavy wooden door open for her brothers.

Harvey and Lorraine stood at the counter, fixing themselves a snack of peanut butter and crackers. At sixteen, Harvey was always

hungry, and Lorraine, who was just two years younger, loved peanut butter more than almost any other food.

A bright lamp sat next to Mamm's sewing machine as she focused on making one of the boys a new shirt. She looked up at Annie and then at a clock. "Is it that late already?"

"It is," Annie said. "I thought I heard the phone ringing."

Lorraine licked her fingers. "Hello, Annie."

"Oh, sorry. Hi." Annie removed her coat and bonnet and hung them on hooks before going to the phone. She pressed the button to scroll through the names listed on caller ID. Her grandfather had called numerous times in the last four days, including just a few minutes ago. She'd been working at the market and hadn't spoken to him, but she assumed someone had answered his calls. Although right now she wasn't so sure.

Annie looked to Mamm, seeing only her back from this angle. "Did anybody pick up even one of these five calls from *Daadi* Moses?"

Mamm straightened her shoulders and neck as if they ached. "What, you don't think he'll call back?"

She glanced at Lorraine, who shrugged. "I was busy."

Disappointment nagged at her. Mamm's apathetic attitude seemed to be spreading like a disease, infecting all of them. Annie fidgeted with the belt to her dress. "What good does it do to belong to one of the Plain sects that allows a phone in the house if you're simply going to ignore it."

Glen and Eddie entered, smelling of fresh smoke.

Mamm turned to face her and pointed a finger at her. "If you

want to quit your day job so you can answer every call from your grandfather, do so.”

Annie knew she'd begun an argument without meaning to. If her devotion to God was as real as she hoped, why couldn't she manage to have one peaceful day with her mother? At nineteen years old, she should be able to hold her tongue and measure her words more carefully.

Mamm wagged her finger. “I'm both dad and mom to this family, and I don't appreciate your tone.”

Annie swallowed hard, knowing her mother expected an apology. But she couldn't manage to say she was sorry. They had a phone in the house; someone should answer it! Maybe not every time, but for no one to pick up the receiver when Daadi Moses had been trying to reach them for a week? Ridiculous.

“I'll tell you what.” Eddie went to the refrigerator and jerked open the door. “Next time he's sick and it's my turn to have to visit him and help out on that stinkin' chicken farm, you can go in my place.”

“Very funny.” For years, whenever Daadi Moses needed help and her brothers refused to go, she went in their stead, hoping her grandfather didn't pick up on the fact that they were avoiding him.

He was a good and kind man. A little strict, but what elderly Plain person wasn't? Yet, as much as she cared about him, he wasn't the only one she wanted time with in Apple Ridge.

Refusing to linger on those unwelcome emotions, she refocused on her grandfather. Occasionally he needed her to stay for an extended period to help him, but usually she went for a couple of weeks a few

times each year. Her family, job, and life were here in New York, but she wanted Daadi Moses to know that she loved him.

Mamm lifted the presser foot and jerked the shirt free. “There are seven children in this household. Try not to rock the boat, Annie.”

“Me?” Annie screeched. She tried counting to ten, knowing she was tired from four thirteen-hour days, and she was emotional after the embarrassment of her brothers’ behavior. “I just asked a question about answering the phone. Why don’t you ask Glen and Eddie how they spent their afternoon?”

Her mother looked to her sons. “What have you done this time?”

“Nothing,” Glen yelled, waving his hand at Annie. “You know what she’s like, Mom. All goody two shoes, like Daadi Moses.”

“Glen’s right.” Eddie pulled the jar of orange juice out of the fridge. “We didn’t do anything. We played a harmless round of cards with some friends while waiting on the rest of the workers to get done. No different than when you play Dutch Blitz with the little ones.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Annie said, raising her voice. Just once couldn’t her mother see past their half truths? “If that’s so, then how come you make more money than me per hour but, when it’s time to turn our money over to Mamm, you always give her less than me?”

“Because unlike you, we go on dates.” Glen shot the words at her. “Maybe if you weren’t too good for every guy around here, you’d understand that.”

Mamm rolled her eyes. She’d pushed Annie to date Leon, and Annie had gone out with him to please her mother. But she didn’t really enjoy his company and discouraged him from asking for more dates.

Harvey and Lorraine stopped chewing and stood there motionless and wide eyed. Annie wasn't sure where her youngest sibling was. Hopefully, Erla was out of earshot, because she hated any hint of friction, and Annie didn't want to be the cause of her little sister losing another night's sleep.

Mamm sighed. "Enough. All of you. What they do with their money is between me and them. Understand me, Annie Martin?"

Annie's body slumped, suddenly feeling heavy. "Yes ma'am." Knowing that Mamm needed help with the mounds of ironing, Annie moved to the pressing board and plugged the iron into the electrical socket. There was a time when she'd understood her Mamm, or at least she'd thought so. But now she understood nearly nothing. Placing bets on a poker game was ignored, but being kind to Daadi Moses was treated with contempt. It didn't make sense.

She wished she could sit at God's feet for an hour and ask lots of questions. How wonderful it'd be to come away with a clear understanding of what He thought and felt about all sorts of things.

Mamm brought the newly made shirt to the ironing board.

"Denki." Annie took it from her.

"You're welcome." Mamm started back toward the sewing machine. "Annie."

Annie placed the shirt on the board. Should she voice anything else or hold her tongue? She lifted her eyes, trying to get her emotions under control.

Mamm smiled, but it looked forced. "If you agree with your Daadi Moses so much more than you do with me on how I'm raising this family, maybe you should go spend a few months with him."



“What?” Annie couldn’t believe her ears.

Eddie started laughing. “I like that idea!”

Mamm turned toward him, pointing her finger. “Stay out of this, Edward, or I’ll send you.”

But everyone in the room knew that Annie was the one in this family who didn’t fit. She struggled with what the family was becoming. The more years that went by since Daed had left them, the farther they moved from cherishing each other or the Plain ways.

Eddie stormed out of the room, slamming his bedroom door behind him.

Mamm kept her back to the rest of the brood, facing only Annie. Her threat loomed over the house like a dark thundercloud.

Her other siblings watched the interaction as if frozen in place. The tension radiating within the room reminded her of the clash she’d had with her mother a year ago.

Her mother had brought in the mail, flipping through the stack of bills and stopping at a small note-sized envelope. She’d ripped it open, glanced at its contents, and then thrown a check onto the kitchen table. “Your father might as well send nothing if this is all he can scrape together. He never did bring home much, and now it’s just pathetic.”

Her mother’s words had ripped at Annie’s soul, and the hurt spilled out before she could control herself. “None of us have seen Daed in almost nine years, and the only regret you ever mention about him leaving us is that he never sends enough money. Is that *all* you miss about him?”

Her mother had stood firm, daring Annie to say one more word.

But she didn't need to. All the damage imaginable had been done in that brief exchange, and although Annie often regretted not holding her tongue when she had the chance, they'd quarreled easily and often since that day.

But right now she was just as fed up with her mother as her mother was with her. "Maybe I should."

Mamm stared at her for several moments, almost looking pleased with Annie's response. "Good. Then the decision is made."

Years of hurt pummeled Annie like pineapples falling off a top shelf, but she'd not give in to tears. No way would she give her mother the satisfaction of seeing her cry. She swallowed hard, wrestling with the fact that she'd been politely kicked out. Regret began to wind its way through her, but there would be no reasoning with Mamm at this point.

As she went to her room to pack, Annie wondered just how much she'd regret her words...and how long it would be before Mamm let her come back home.

## Two

Aden woke abruptly, as if an alarm clock had gone off. A dim glow of moonlight came in around the shades on the window.

He sat up and put his feet on the floor. The silhouette of his brother's wheelchair stood stark and empty. "R-r-roman."

His brother, in the twin bed halfway across the large room, didn't stir.

The memory of the day Roman had lost the use of his legs was never far away. Aden and Mamm were working a shift at the diner while Daed and Roman baled hay. Something spooked the three-horse and three-mule team, and they took off running, jolting Roman backward against the metal chute of the baler. Then he fell between the baler and the loading wagon. When Daed heard Roman screaming in pain, he panicked and jumped between two horses, trying to grab the reins and bring the team to a stop. Instead, he got tangled up in the rigging and was pulled under and trampled.

By the time the dust settled, two ambulances took Roman and Daed to different hospitals because of their areas of expertise. Roman

had numerous injuries, the worst being the partial paralysis of his legs. He was numb below the knees, which caused his legs to easily give way if he tried using hand braces. Other injuries caused stiff muscles or spasms that prevented him from being mobile at times, especially in the mornings. Still, the doctor told him he had low-level, incomplete injuries of individual nerve cells and was one of the lucky ones who had some feeling in his thighs and knees without being in constant pain. Daed could still walk, but he'd dealt with chronic soreness ever since and was able to stay on his feet for only a couple of hours at a time.

Aden gently flung his pillow at his brother. "W-wake up."

Early morning was the one time of day this household was quiet. When he and Roman returned home from work around suppertime, the four youngest Zooks would be out of school, sounding like a barnyard of playful and hungry creatures.

Roman shifted. "Ya. Okay."

Aden lit a kerosene lantern before going into the adjoining bathroom. He turned on the shower and adjusted the nozzle toward the far wall of the oversized stall. He took his showers at night, but Roman needed them in the mornings to relax his rigid muscles. Most days, after a hot shower he could dress, get into his wheelchair on his own, and return to the bathroom to shave and brush his teeth before they left for the diner.

After putting a match to the wick of two more lamps, Aden walked to the side of his brother's bed. "R-ready?"

Roman jerked air into his lungs. "I'll never be ready for anything except sleep at three in the morning, so quit asking."

Aden chuckled and pulled back the covers. He put one arm under Roman's knees and one around his back and then lifted him out of bed. He carried his brother into the bathroom and put him on the seat in the shower, where Roman peeled out of his flannel pajamas and underwear. Aden rotated the showerhead, making sure the stream of water hit his brother just right.

Roman moaned with discomfort as he moved his shoulders in response to the hot water. Finally he drew a relaxing breath. "Ah. The only thing that feels better than this is getting your shoulders rubbed by a girl you're on a date with."

"I w-wouldn't know." Aden went to the sink and splashed hot water on his face before applying shaving cream. He'd never gone on a date. Never wanted to...except with someone he could never be with. He watched his brother's reflection in the mirror. With the exception of the wheelchair, they were outwardly identical. But their personalities had always been quite different, which used to cause a lot of friction between them.

Roman flicked water at Aden's back. "You gotta trust me about the girl thing."

Aden chuckled and ran a razor down the side of his face. "If having a g-girl is c-comparable to sitting in a wet stall during winter, I'm not impressed."

"For an artist, you sure don't see life through romantic lenses." Roman drew the bar of soap to his face. "You like the smell of soap, right?"

Aden rinsed the razor and shaved his neck. "You mean over your usual st-stench? Ya, I do."

Aden didn't hear the rest as he rinsed and dried his face. Roman was a talker, even in his sleep. Besides, Roman may have kissed a few girls in his days of dating, but all his brother really wanted was to spend evenings talking to someone special.

Before the accident, Roman had attracted young women like honeybees to nectar. Aden had never had Roman's confidence or his gift of gab that convinced girls they wanted to be around him. In fact, Aden's stutter made it impossible for him to talk anyone into anything, including a date.

Sometimes it felt as if the five years since the accident had passed in the blink of an eye. At seventeen, they'd simply enjoyed life. Oh, they'd worked hard helping their parents as needed on the farm or in the diner, but then they'd spent their money once the weekend came. Roman spent his money taking out girls. Aden spent his on art supplies and on books about how to draw. Life had a free and easy feel to it back then. And Roman had felt like a man who could conquer any challenge put before him.

But that was a lifetime ago. Only a few years had passed, but Aden and Roman were decades older than they should be at twenty-two.

"Hey," Roman bellowed. "I'm telling you important stuff here. Are you listening to me?"

"Only when I have t-to," Aden teased. "You d-done?"

"Ya."

Aden turned off the water and passed Roman a towel. "You thought any more about g-going to—"

"Ya," Roman interrupted. "And the answer is no. Uncle Ernie will

have to get someone else. I can't fix generators anymore. You know that's true."

Aden shook his head. "You're j-just unsure."

"I don't lack confidence. I have absolutely no doubt that I can't do it."

"I know you c-can."

"I'd probably make things worse, cost Ernie more money, and make a fool of myself in the process."

Once his twin was reasonably dry, Aden carried him back to the bed. After putting clothes next to Roman, Aden pulled out his sketchbook and a pencil. He had only about ten minutes before he needed to feed the horse and hitch her to the rig, but these few minutes were like a fix to an addict.

While Roman dressed, Aden held the pencil loosely, hovering it over the paper. Without any idea what he'd draw, he put the soft lead against the thick page. His heart beat a little faster as his creativity began to flow. Pencil lead transformed the blank space into a horseless carriage with two faceless people inside it. Quickly making long and short strokes, he drew the finer details on the rig and landscape.

"Hey." Roman tossed Aden's pillow back onto his bed. "Do you really think I could help Uncle Ernie?"

Aden nodded and continued adding strokes to the asphalt road that meandered off the page.

"What if you're wrong?"

"I'm n-not."

“Until that generator’s fixed, they’ll have to hand milk each cow. I owe Ernie my help if I can give it.”

“Ya.”

“But this is going to be the busiest week at the diner that we’ve had in years. You can’t get through it without me.”

“N-n-not true.” Aden drew the trunk of a tree, but like the faces of the people, the branches and leaves that would reveal its type remained a blank in his mind. Part of the pleasure of artwork was waiting to see what would emerge.

Roman bumped his wheelchair against Aden’s bed. “Hello. Anybody home?”

Aden realized Roman had been talking to him while he drew, but he had no idea what his brother had said.

“It’s time to go.”

He continued drawing. “In a m-minute.”

Roman thudded the rubber wheels of his chair against the bed again. “We’ve got too much to do to waste time here.”

Aden ignored him, wishing it were a Sunday afternoon so he’d have hours to draw.

“*Kumm* on, Aden. If you’re going to have pencil and paper in hand, you ought to be making lists of what we need to buy and cook.”

Aden stopped and looked his brother in the eye. He had a right to steal a few moments for himself here and there.

An apology flickered through Roman’s eyes, and Aden knew he could take a minute to finish. That wouldn’t have happened before the accident. But Roman was independent then, and rather than wait



he would have gone on by himself. His brother liked taking the lead. He knew what needed to be done, and it came naturally for him to order others around to accomplish it. Roman had never been an easy-going person, and being a paraplegic only served to agitate his impatience, but he was adapting. He had to. “Sorry. But you woke me up so we could get to work. So let’s get there.”

With his creative mood dampened by Roman’s pushiness, Aden closed his sketchbook and tucked it under his arm. He blew out the kerosene lanterns, making the room dark again.

Roman motioned toward the bedroom door, encouraging Aden to go through it. “Gideon’s coming by the diner in a few hours to get an update on how ready we are for his and Mattie’s families to descend on our place tomorrow. In all the history of the Amish in Pennsylvania—maybe in all the states combined—a couple has never hired anyone to help provide meals for out-of-town guests. We can’t afford to blow this, Aden. With the number of weddings that take place in the community every year, it could be a great boost to our business. But it needs to go really well. Word of mouth is important.”

Aden knew all that. Roman had a habit of repeating information that everyone already knew, sometimes with the same speed and repetition as Aden made strokes on paper.

Roman followed Aden through the farmhouse, giving his brother the chance to move items out of the narrow path so the wheelchair didn’t get hung up by the occasional toy or misplaced clothes.

When they entered the wider expanse of the kitchen, Roman wheeled ahead. Their Mamm stood at the stove, pouring coffee into

one of two tall thermoses. As always, she was fully dressed with her hair freshly combed and pinned up and her prayer Kapp in place. No matter what life dished out during any season, she faithfully greeted the day and her children with organization and routine.

Aden and Roman would have coffee made at the diner in about thirty minutes, but she got up before sunrise Monday through Saturday to hand them a hot drink in cool weather and a cool one in hot weather.

“Morning, boys.” She put the thermoses on the table.

“Mamm, tell Aden he needs me at the diner this week.”

Mamm kissed Aden’s cheek, a morning routine he’d long ago grown accustomed to. She looked into his eyes for a moment, strengthening him with her respect and love.

Roman sighed. “If Ernie’s generator had gone out any other time than now, I’d go.”

“N-not true.”

Roman glared at him. “For a man of few words, you sure do say a lot.” He huffed. “I’m telling you, we have too much going on.”

Mamm bent and kissed Roman on the forehead. “Your uncle wouldn’t have asked if he had any other way to get it fixed. I know my brother, and he must really need you.”

“But the diner—”

“Your Daed and I can take shifts helping Aden for a few days. Although your three youngest siblings won’t be much help, Mary may surprise you, even at thirteen.”

“She’s needed here at the house to help with Arie, Jake, and Benjamin,” Roman protested.

Mamm put her hands on the armrests of the wheelchair, her face inches from Roman's. "You're so good with mechanical problems."

Roman shifted the wheels of his chair, causing Mamm to back away. "Was. Before the accident."

"The solution Ernie n-needs is in your brain, not your l-legs."

Roman angled his head, his brows knit tightly. Aden hoped he'd finally said something that could work its way past Roman's insecurities. "You're right. If he needed legs, you could do it."

Aden rolled his eyes, but he wouldn't swap insults with his brother or call him on it. Roman had never said it in so many words, but Aden had always believed that before the accident, Roman thought he was better than him. Aden used to find that annoying but not worth fighting over. Right now his brother needed to believe he could outdo Aden in some area, and Roman definitely liked the idea that Ernie had asked for his help instead of Aden's.

Aden wanted him to have that confidence as much as Roman did.

Roman rubbed his hand over his chin. "I would love to get my hands on an engine again, maybe prove that I still have what it takes."

"You do," Mamm assured him.

Roman glanced to his brother, fear oozing from him. In a lot of ways, Aden preferred Roman's former overinflated ego to the shards of brokenness left from being wheelchair bound.

Roman went to the pews near the back door and grabbed his coat and hat. "I'll call Ernie as soon as we get to the diner. It'll probably be ten o'clock or later before he can find a driver who'll come all the way from Lancaster to get me."

Mamm smiled. "I'll be there by ten, then."

To be honest, Aden had no idea how he'd handle the demands facing the restaurant this week without Roman. It would've been much easier to let him go any other week. But Ernie needed him now. And pushing Roman to go was the right thing to do.

On the other hand, if Aden messed this up, no one in Apple Ridge would ever ask Zook's Diner to host meals for their out-of-town guests again. It'd be the first and last event of its kind. Mattie and Gideon might end up sorry they'd trusted Zook's to feed their families. Aden hated even considering that possibility. But how could he live with himself if he let Roman miss this chance?