

THE
BRIDESMAID



BEVERLY
LEWIS



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Prologue

Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride.”
That’s just what my younger sister said about me—in front of our engaged cousins, no less—most of them planning to marry come Amish wedding season. A mere five months away.

Seventeen-year-old Cora Jane’s words echoed in my head . . . and rippled through my heart. *Jah*, she was as superstitious as many of us in Hickory Hollow, but to be so glib about announcing it?

There I was, sitting on the sand at Virginia Beach, surrounded by oodles of *Englischers*—families with little children, young couples, and singles like me. All had come for the sunset. Some were celebrating more than others,

relaxing on their portable beach chairs with cans of soft drinks.

Meanwhile, my younger Witmer cousins, Malinda, Ruthann, and Lena—first cousins to each other—and my fair-haired sister Cora Jane were up yonder on the boardwalk, laughing and eating cotton candy. Sighing, I recalled Cousin Malinda earlier today, looking mighty excited when she asked me to be in her wedding. We had been packing sandwiches with Cora Jane and the others for a picnic lunch when Malinda leaned over to ask me, her face pink from more than the June sun. If I was to agree, it would be the third time I'd be a *Newesitzer*—side sitter, or attendant in a wedding.

“It just ain’t schmaert, Joanna,” Cora Jane warned, her big blue eyes flashing. *“You’re already twenty-four, ya know!”*

And still a Maidel. I shrugged away the wretched thought. Drawing a long breath, I tried to relax on the beach, alone with my writing notebook . . . away from Cousin Malinda and other relatives who'd come to attend tomorrow's funeral for my great-uncle Amos Kurtz. We'd traveled in large vans to honor the eighty-eight-year-old deacon, who was revered in Hickory Hollow and the

Shipshewana, Indiana, church district where he later lived. As a result, many Amish had come to pay last respects and to offer comfort to his elderly widow. Years ago Amos and Martha had retired here in Virginia, joining a growing community of other aging Amish near the ocean they loved.

My thoughts returned to Cousin Malinda's upcoming wedding—and her kindly request. Although I'd once yearned for a beau and marriage, I'd given up on love. And I wished I'd never confided in Cora Jane about any of that. I rejected her pity—and anyone else's, for that matter. Goodness knows, I've dished out enough of that on myself!

Opening my notebook to the end of the last scene in my current story, I pushed my bare feet into the warm sand, still wearing my green dress and matching cape apron. My white organdy *Kapp* was safely in the hotel room—no sense in getting it unnecessarily soiled. Even so, as I sat fretting and looking ever so Plain amongst all the folk in skimpy bathing suits and shorts, I knew I must be a peculiar spectacle. The years of wearing Amish attire at market and elsewhere outside the confines of the community had led me to accept the fact there would always be curious stares.

But soaking up the ocean spray and salty scent was worth any amount of attention. Oh, the wonderful-*gut* feeling of the sea breeze against my hair, still up in a tight bun. How I longed to let it down . . . let the wind blow through it. Still, I didn't want to add to the misconceptions far too many Englishers already had about us, some even from novels they'd read.

My pen poised, I played my favorite what-if game as I began to write. The squeal of a sea gull caught my attention as the sun fell, faster now it seemed, behind me, over my shoulders, its gleaming rays fanning out to the clouds high above. I leaned back and stared at the evolving light show above me, letting my mind wander as I watched beachcombers and shell collectors. Certainly I hadn't meant to be rude, ignoring Malinda's request.

Yet, dare I accept?

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a tall Amish fellow walking barefoot in the foamy surf, snapping pictures every few seconds. A curious sight, to be sure! His black pant legs were rolled up, and he was minus his straw hat. His light brown hair fell below his ears, longer than that of the young men in the

Hickory Hollow church district back home. I could scarcely pry my gaze from him.

“What’s he doin’ here?” I whispered, observing his amble through the gentle breakers, his handsome face aglow with a rosy cast.

Then, surprisingly, he glanced over at me.

“Hullo there.” He smiled in the fading golden light.

I almost looked around to make sure his greeting was meant for me. “Hullo,” I managed to reply, quickly closing my notebook.

As the sky dimmed, he moved away from the water and walked right toward me. “Mind if I join ya?”

“*Nee*, not at all.”

He sat down beside me, pointing to a black ship on the horizon.

“Jah, awful perty.” I felt too shy to say more.

We sat, not speaking, amidst the smell of popcorn and sea air while beams of red, pink, and gold sprayed the sky from the west.

“No wonder people thought the earth was flat, back before Columbus,” he said quietly.

I nodded. “Sure looks that way from here.”

“Ever see anything like this?”

“My first visit to the ocean,” I admitted. “So, no.”

He turned slowly, unexpectedly. “I’m Eben Troyer, from Indiana.” His smile was disarming.

“Joanna Kurtz . . . from Hickory Hollow.”

“Ah, Pennsylvania, where some of my cousins grew up. But I’ve never been there—unique name for a town, jah?”

We talked further, and I soon learned that soft-spoken Eben had come here for his deacon’s funeral. I could hardly wait to say that it was the same service my family and I had come to attend.

“Well, how’s that for a coincidence?” he said, his features growing faint in the twilight.

He showed me his camera, saying he took mostly pictures of landscapes and animals, same as our bishop, John Beiler, allowed. “Rarely pictures of people,” he remarked . . . although the way Eben brought it up, he almost sounded like he wanted to take *my* picture.

His attention flabbergasted me, but it was ever so pleasing. No one had ever sought me out like this. For sure and for certain, my family and every last one of my girl cousins had written me off as destined to be an *alt Maidel*.

“How long are ya here for?” he asked, his smile warming my heart anew.

“Three days, counting today.”

Then Eben surprised me again, asking if I'd like to walk with him to the fishing pier down yonder. I agreed, and he politely offered his hand as I got up from my sandy perch. Oh, glory be, we must've walked for miles into the night. So far and so long we got ourselves plumb lost trying to find our way back.



Following the funeral the next day, Eben and I hurried again to the beach. There, we waded into the ocean up to our knees—in our clothes, of all silly things. And later, after the sun and wind dried us out some, we rented a bicycle built for two and rode up and down the boardwalk, the warm air on our faces. We ate chili dogs and ice cream under the fishing pier, and his eyes rested on me when he said, “I’ve never known a better day, Joanna.”

My heart pounded in my ears.

That evening and the next, we met at sunset, laughing together and talking about whatever popped into our heads until, wonder of wonders, Eben reached for my hand! My heart beat so wildly, I wondered if he sensed it. All I could think of was our interlaced fingers.

But all too soon, we had to part ways, our private time together at an end. He asked for

my address, and I happily gave it. In such a short time, we'd become so dear to each other. I tried not to cry.

Our meeting on the beach—as romantic and special as it was—birthed a renewed hope in me. After all, it was nearly a blight on any Amish girl to still be single at my age. *Ach*, but Eben Troyer had surely changed all of that. Surely he had. . . .

Then and there, I decided it was safe to go out on a limb. I agreed to be Cousin Malinda's bridesmaid, hoping with all of my heart to prove wrong my sister's pointed warning.

Chapter 1



If Joanna hadn't witnessed it, she wouldn't have believed Cousin Malinda would break down and cry on the morning of her wedding. Certainly all the preparations were stressful, and November's weather was also quite unpredictable—today was undeniably disappointing, with rain making down in sheets. *But is that reason to shed tears on your wedding day?* Joanna wondered.

Neither of the other two brides Joanna had stood up with had wept before going downstairs to make their marriage vows. But then, neither of those weddings had taken place on days with a cloudburst and deafening thunder.

Standing before the bishop with Malinda and her tall, brown-eyed Andrew, Joanna hoped her cousin wasn't moving ahead with

something she might later regret. Once the sacred promises were made, there was no looking back. Marriage was to be honored for life.

Surely Cousin Malinda's tears were related instead to something other than second thoughts or cold feet. Oh, Joanna hoped so. Something to do with a blend of many emotions, maybe?

Through the windows, she saw the last vestiges of leaves falling in the downpour, the sky a slate gray. It nearly looked like nightfall, even though it was closer to noon.

Returning her attention to the bride and groom, Joanna was relieved to see Malinda look up adoringly at Andrew just as Bishop Beiler pronounced them husband and wife. "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

After the tears, only love remains, Joanna thought, aware of the reverent spirit in the temporary house of worship. So many church members were present today, as well as extended family from other districts and even Englisher friends.

O Lord, bless Cousin Malinda and her husband, Andrew, with your loving care, Joanna prayed silently.



All during the wedding feast and the fellowshipping that afternoon, the rain continued, pouring over the eaves and streaming down the windowpanes. Then, lo and behold, it turned to sleet . . . and later to snow, with thick flakes filling the sky.

“Such a lot of weather for a single day,” Joanna overheard Malinda’s mother saying to Andrew’s, a heavysset woman in her late fifties.

“Makes things interesting, jah?” Andrew’s mother replied, making note of the edible wedding novelties for the bride and groom at the *Eck*, the special corner of the wedding table. Besides sticks of chewing gum and wrapped candies, there were little animals made from Rice Krispies and candy. And miniature buggies made from marshmallows, hitched with toothpicks to animal cracker horses.

Joanna nodded absentmindedly from the corner where she and several other single girls, including her golden-haired cousins, Ruthann and Lena, stood talking and nibbling on sweets.

Cora Jane was there, too, looking exceptionally pretty in her bright green dress and white apron. “To be honest, weather ain’t

the only thing amiss today,” she said, looking askance at Joanna.

For goodness’ sake, thought Joanna, letting the remark slide over her, even though it felt like an ocean wave threatening to topple her. True, this *was* the third time she’d served as a bridesmaid, but now that Eben Troyer was in her life, she wanted to set foolish superstition aside and just enjoy the day.

Joanna thought back to the beautiful beach where she’d met handsome Eben. How she yearned to hear his voice, the way he’d said her name as they walked together. It was easy to fall into that daydream; she missed him terribly. She would not soon forget the delightful day at the mailbox last summer when she’d laid eyes on Eben’s first letter, her name and address written in his strong hand. It was the beginning of their long-distance friendship, now blossoming into something so much more. She secretly treasured that special letter, having read and reread it before tucking it safely away in a wooden letter box in her hope chest. It was there that Joanna kept her most treasured possessions, including her writing notebooks.

Around midafternoon, copies of the German hymnal, the *Ausbund*, were passed around,

and a special wedding Singing began for the newlyweds' enjoyment, with the courting-age youth sitting in pairs at the feast table. *Such a happy time*, Joanna encouraged herself, out of place though she felt at such gatherings anymore.

She put on a smile when she spied good-looking Jake Lantz, also known as Freckles Jake, sitting across the front room. The nickname arose from the freckles dotting his nose and cheekbones. His tall, robust frame proved he was hardworking, the kind of young man any Amish girl would welcome as a beau. His sandy hair and hazel eyes were identical to those of his younger brother, Jesse, who sat nearby, singing with other fellows in their late teens. Though Jake was twenty-three, both brothers were still quite single—according to the rumors, Jake had scared off a couple of girls on the first date, wanting to hold hands too soon.

Remembering that Eben had taken her hand in his the last evening they'd been together, Joanna couldn't help but smile as she sang with the others. Eben's gesture had been so natural, an outgrowth of their shared affection.

Between songs, Joanna chuckled over the

candies made to look like little airplanes that decorated the table in front of her. *When did make-believe planes become the norm at Amish weddings?*

Suddenly, she was again aware of Jake's gaze and felt a wave of pity for him, feeling as sorry for him as she had for herself last year around this time, at her first wedding as a bridesmaid. No doubt Jake just wanted to marry and get on with life. *Maybe if he'd had a sister, he'd know better how to treat a girl. . . .*

Later, Joanna poured her heart into the gospel song "I Love to Tell the Story," one of her favorites. But she wasn't able to put Jake out of her mind for long. Several times over the course of the afternoon he caught her eye, and as Joanna learned later, he even went so far as to ask Malinda to pair him up with Joanna for the evening barn Singing.

"He's awful sweet on ya, cousin," Malinda herself revealed to Joanna in whispered tones prior to the evening meal.

But Joanna gave no indication she'd heard . . . nor did she say she was no longer available. Best to hold to tradition and keep Eben a secret—at least till the proper time.



After the wedding supper, Joanna and the other courting-age young folk headed to the barn for the regular Singing. The evening was still, without a hint of a breeze. If it were summer, she might be sitting out by the pond beyond their barn, bare feet in the water . . . her writing notebook on her lap. Out there, with the occasional breeze, she could keep her stories from prying eyes, especially Cora Jane's. It was one thing for Joanna to keep a daily journal, but quite another to write made-up stories, since fiction was frowned upon by the ministerial brethren.

All of that aside, Joanna had for some years delighted in spinning her imaginary yarns. There were just so many interesting ideas flitting through her head!

She glanced at her younger sister, who stood in her usual cluster of friends and cousins. Here lately, Joanna had suspected Cora Jane was getting close to a marriage proposal. Truth was, with her golden hair and big blue eyes, Cora Jane knew how to get a young man's attention, something she'd even shared back when they were confidantes. Since Joanna had met Eben, however, their sisterly chats had become a thing of the past. And maybe it was for the best, with such a secret to keep.

Joanna remembered clearly what her sister had whispered during one nighttime conversation: that it was important to let a fellow know you were interested, holding his gaze and hanging on to his every word, interjecting a comment here and there while letting him do most of the talking, especially on the first date. And all of that had come so naturally to Joanna with Eben . . . something that had never happened before.

The minute the songs were finished, Jake looked Joanna's way again, and so as not to encourage him a speck, she visited with Cousin Malinda's younger sisters. She wanted nothing more than to slip out of the barn for home, unseen. Feeling a little guilty about her deliberate aloofness, she returned his smile when she again found him looking her way. Her toes curled in her shoes.

Will he take it wrong?

Then, as if by some miracle, Cora Jane, and Malinda's younger sister, Mary Rose, walked over to the other side of the barn to talk with Jake. Feeling much relieved, Joanna wondered if Cora Jane had, perhaps, observed the silent exchange of smiles and sensed Joanna's uneasiness. Had her sister stepped in on purpose?

Looking about her, Joanna saw that she could at last exit discreetly. So she pushed open the barn door and left to walk home through the chilly night. She didn't mind the snowflakes that sprinkled her nose and lips; Joanna simply pulled her coat tighter around her, glad for her scarf and gloves.

In that moment, she had an unexpected thought, one that warmed her heart. What if she and Eben were to marry next wedding season? Which two girls would *she* choose for her bridesmaids? Joanna laughed to herself—she was putting the carriage before the horse again. She was known to have a vivid imagination, something even *Mamma* had pointed out since Joanna was but a little girl. So now Joanna questioned herself: Was it merely wishful thinking to hope her beau might propose, perhaps even via letter? Or was this just the stuff of the romantic fiction she dearly loved to read . . . and write?

Wonderful as it was to anticipate and receive Eben's letters, they were a frequent reminder that her beau lived way out in Shipshewana, where he and his extended family had farmed for generations. She was curious about his parents and siblings—his entire family, really—but hadn't had the gumption to

ask, not wanting to appear forward. She sometimes feared she might mess up and write something awkward, spoiling things between them. So she was careful to see that her own letters dealt mostly with daily life and happenings in Hickory Hollow.

Joanna had taken care to capture every detail of her own beloved little hollow there in Lancaster County. She'd also written Eben about the dear folk, like Samuel and Rebecca Lapp, and Paul and Lillianne Hostetler . . . and Ella Mae Zook, the old Wise Woman so many in the area turned to with their problems. Joanna hoped she hadn't gone overboard with her portrayals or the descriptions of the landscape. It was just that she loved everything about Hickory Hollow and was holding her breath that Eben might come *there* to court her, to settle and eventually marry. So far, though, he hadn't said anything of the kind.

Picking up her pace now, she thought of Cora Jane and her steady beau, Gideon Zook. She'd seen him drop her off late at night after a long buggy ride. The memory of Cora Jane's mirth rang out in Joanna's mind—that appealing, melodious laughter.

“Do I laugh enough?” Joanna whispered into the darkness, unsure how to share her

lighthearted side in letters to Eben. But there had never been a need to work to impress him. Why, joy of joys, recently Eben had started signing off, *with love*.

A mighty gut sign!

And tomorrow evening at seven o'clock, Eben had said he'd call her, having asked for the phone number of the community phone shanty situated in one of *Dat's* fields.

So much for Cora Jane's admonition, Joanna thought with a smile.

Then a sudden concern presented itself, and she couldn't help wondering what Eben wanted to discuss by phone. *And why now?*

Chapter 2



Joanna slipped into bed well after ten o'clock that night, but she awakened before dawn with such curiosity and expectation for the day that she got right up and lit the lantern. She hurried across the room, her bare feet chilled by the draft creeping through the floorboards. Then, taking her notebook from the three-ring binder stored in her hope chest, she curled back up in bed and wrote for a good hour, till it was time to shower.

Her thoughts today were on one thing: the phone call from Eben tonight. Oh, to hear his voice again!

After dressing, she brushed her hair more than a hundred times, caught up in the notion that she wanted to look her very best, even though Eben couldn't possibly see her. Joanna

was to use the outdoor phone meant primarily for emergencies and calling for a driver—necessary things that didn't include talking to a beau. Yet lots of folk did small things behind the bishop's back, saying by their actions, *What the strict bishop doesn't know won't matter.*

Even so, what *would* happen if Joanna were ever caught using the phone for personal use? Was it truly a transgression?

Parting her hair down the middle, she tightly twisted the sides before pulling her blond hair into a thick bun. Then she placed her white Kapp on her head and hurried back upstairs to make her bed and put away her writing notebook. She'd taken an unnecessary risk, leaving it out in plain sight on the bed, of all things. For sure and for certain, the phone call tonight had her all but *ferhoodled*.

She still had no idea why Eben wanted to call. Was it just because he missed her? His letters certainly indicated his lasting affection. She hoped hers sent the same loving message back to him.

After breakfast, she put a roast in the oven, then set about sweeping Mamma's big kitchen floor with the stiff-bristled broom. She got in the corners real good, as Mamma had taught her back when she was a little girl, scarcely

as tall as the broom itself, finishing out in the catch-all utility room, which was as cluttered as she'd ever seen it. *How does such a mess happen in a single day?*

Once the floors were spotless, Cora Jane brought in a pile of mending and sat down at the kitchen table without uttering a word to Joanna or to their pleasingly plump mother. Right away, she set to work patching, not giving anyone so much as a glance. Joanna figured it was best to keep out of her sister's way, especially considering how Cora Jane had acted at Cousin Malinda's wedding.

Around ten-thirty, Joanna wiped her brow and went to wash up before peeling potatoes for a generous pot of beef stew. Taking into account Cora Jane's attitude, she'd rather cook on her own. Mamma had undoubtedly noticed the tension between them, but Joanna hoped things might calm down somewhat, now that Malinda and Andy's wedding was past. *Now that I've served as a bridesmaid yet again.*

Joanna began cutting up the potatoes, musing. If she could do anything in the kitchen, she'd choose something other than cleaning. Cooking was altogether different, because she didn't equate making meals or baking bread

with housework. To her thinking, one was humdrum and uncreative, the other enjoyable. She smiled, thinking how she'd feel cooking for Eben each day.

Just at that moment, Cora Jane looked over at her. "You happy 'bout something, sister?"

Mamma turned to look, as well, blue eyes shining. "Are ya makin' enough stew so we'll have leftovers tomorrow?"

"Oh, there'll be a-plenty," replied Joanna, thankful for Mamma's intervention. "This is a double batch."

"*Gut*, 'cause I really *hate* peelin' potatoes—it's the worst thing ever," Cora Jane complained.

"Now, dear," Mamma said sweetly. "No need to say 'hate.'"

Cora Jane clammed up, eyes blinking fast. At her age, she knew better than to say things to set Mamma off, yet sometimes Cora Jane just seemed bent on being disagreeable.

But Joanna knew it would do no good to fret over her sister. She returned her attention to cutting up the roast beef, then browned the cubes in butter. When that was done, she added two large onions, canned carrots from last year's family garden, and the seasonings. She'd made the meal so many times, there

was no need for a recipe. All the while, she wondered what Eben's favorite meals were. Joanna could scarcely wait to learn all there was to know about him!



Her father's intense gray eyes were fixed on the steaming bowl of stew Joanna set before him, though he characteristically said nary a word. He leaned his tall frame against the chair at the head of the table, and the four of them offered the silent table blessing. They enjoyed the hearty meal, complete with cottage cheese, fresh-baked bread, and Mamma's wonderful apple butter. For dessert, Joanna served the rest of a pumpkin pie Mamma had baked yesterday afternoon following the wedding.

Cora Jane ate without making a peep. Dat didn't say much, either—generally he said little unless he had good reason. Mamma, for her part, tried to make small talk, mostly about the cold weather and the coming snow. Joanna cherished her own private thoughts as she spooned up the delicious stew, relieved in a way that Cora Jane wasn't as talkative as usual.

Looking around the largely empty table, Joanna tried to picture Eben sitting there.

Could *he* manage to get Dat talking during dinner? Very few folk could. Not even Michael Hostetler down Hickory Lane, their neighbors' genial son, who until recently had worked part-time for Dat.

"We have a few more weddings comin' up in the next two weeks," Mamma said.

Joanna nodded. "Have ya decided which cousin's wedding to attend next Thursday?"

"Ach, two weddings in the family on the selfsame day," Mamma said, shaking her head. "Happens too often, jah? Lena and Ruthann—such a hard choice to make."

Cora Jane didn't bother to look up, and Dat would leave the decision to Mamma. *Poor Mamma*, thought Joanna.

"Which wedding will Salina go to?" Joanna asked. Salina was the only married daughter in the family and already a mother to three young children. The rest of Joanna and Cora Jane's siblings were boys, all married with youngsters of their own.

Mamma's face lit up. "Now, why didn't I think of that? I'll ask her this afternoon."

Joanna wasn't surprised. After all, Salina stopped in quite often. So then it was settled: They would go to whichever wedding Salina chose.

Weddings abound, thought Joanna, taking another bite of pie while avoiding Cora Jane's impudent stare.



When the clouds lowered during supper that evening and a tremendous wind came up, gusting snow, Joanna knew she was in for a challenge getting out to the phone shanty several acres away. The white-out conditions were hazardous—some farmers were known to tie a rope to the house and their own hand just to go out to the barn and back in such conditions.

She hoped the snowstorm was short-lived and done by the time she needed to get to the phone. How she yearned for the lovely months of summer, when their closest neighbors could easily wander over for some watermelon or homemade ice cream and a back porch visit, or the other way around. Mamma, for instance, hadn't been over to see Ella Mae Zook or even Rachel Stoltzfus, the bishop's mother-in-law, in weeks. Joanna missed all the impromptu conversation at the end of the long day, as well as the sight of green leaves and blossoming flowers.

Joanna had never quite forgotten the

impression she'd had of Ella Mae when Mamma had taken her along for tea with the Wise Woman. It was years before Ella Mae's husband passed away, when Joanna was but four and Ella Mae was still living in the farmhouse a mile or so away. Joanna couldn't help but feel comfortable in the sun-drenched kitchen so similar to Mamma's own. She'd sat across from Mamma on a wooden chair with a mound of pillows tucked beneath her, a little yellow daisy teacup and saucer set before her filled with peppermint tea.

Mamma and Ella Mae sat sipping and chatting on the other side of the table while Joanna picked up her spoon and began to stir, looking at the murky hot water.

"Here, dearie," Ella Mae said, rising just then and going to her old icebox to get a jar of real whipped cream. "This'll make your first cup of tea extra yummy." With a twinkle in her eye, Ella Mae put a dollop of the sweet white cream atop Joanna's tea. Mamma's eyes widened when Ella Mae encouraged Joanna to stick her little pointer finger in the whipped cream and lick it off.

Even then, Joanna had wondered how a woman that old could have possibly known what a child was thinking. Then and there,

she sensed something special about this lady the People called wise, whose sincere and welcoming manner—and specially brewed tea—drew people like bees to roses. Particularly women who needed a caring friend and a listening ear.

Joanna smiled with the dear memory as she drew hot water after supper dishes were cleared from the table. She squirted an ample amount of dish soap into the water and swished it around. Cora Jane came over, jerked the tea towel off the rack, and stood stiff and uncommunicative, waiting to dry the dishes. Joanna sighed inwardly and listened to see if the wind outdoors might be dying down some. Less than an hour and a half left before she needed to make her trek out to the phone shack for the seven o'clock call.

When the kitchen was all redd up, Mamma suggested the three of them make chocolate chip cookies for the upcoming weekend. Cora Jane brightened immediately, voting to make snickerdoodles, her very favorite. Joanna agreed to help, knowing she'd have to watch the clock, as well as find a way to leave gracefully without raising eyebrows.

Going over to preheat the gas oven, Joanna noticed Dat get up from his chair near the

heat stove and wander out to the utility room. Mamma followed, asking where he was going in such weather.

“Want to check on the livestock . . . see how the newest calves are doin’.”

Her father opened the back door, and Joanna could see that the wind was not as fierce as before. And when it was time to place the cookie sheets into the oven, Mamma slipped away to the sitting room and Cora Jane went upstairs. Joanna breathed a sigh of relief.

It's now or never! She made haste to don her warmest coat, boots, woolen scarf, and gloves. Then, lickety-split, she put on her black candlesnuffer-style outer bonnet and left the house.