

THE COURTSHIPS OF LANCASTER COUNTY 3



Minding Molly



LESLIE GOULD



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Leslie Gould, *Minding Molly*

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For Taylor

Youngest son of mine,
a man of creativity,
strength, and humor

“Love one another.”

John 13:34



“The course of true love never did run smooth.”

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.134



C H A P T E R
1

My *Dat* had been a small man. And thin. No one would have guessed he'd have a heart attack. But he did.

I buried my face in his forest-green shirt, pressing the soft fabric against my eyes. It had been my favorite of all his shirts. My morning task was to go through his clothes and decide what to give away, but I couldn't bear to part with his shirts—not a single one.

I'd use all of them to make a quilt for my sister Beatrice.

Not now—but during the winter months, when the work on our flower farm slowed.

I placed the shirt on top of the others and closed the box.

My parents' room looked the same as it had before *Dat* died—a double bed, one bureau, a straight-back chair—but now it felt so empty. My gaze moved to the small table against the window. *Dat*'s Bible was on it, just like always, but there was a small sky-blue notebook there too, one I hadn't seen before. I stepped closer, reaching for it, but a knock on the door startled me.

"Molly? Do you need some help?" It was my half sister, Edna.

"No," I answered, stepping away from the table. "I'll be down in a minute."

She and Ivan, the oldest in my *Dat*'s first family, had come

to help us today. I was plenty able to handle what needed to be done, but it was a comfort to have them with us.

I should have boxed things up right after Dat's passing, but we'd been in such a state of shock I couldn't bear to tackle it then. None of us could—especially not my sweet *Mamm*. But now enough time had passed since that fateful day.

It was the first week of June. The sun shone again. The days had turned warm, for good.

Dat would want us to move on. He'd want us to keep living.

Besides, tomorrow was the first day of the *Youngie* farmers' market I'd started a few years back. At the time it was all young people, but last summer I'd opened it to older vendors too. It had brought in extra income for our family, and we needed it now more than ever. It was time for me to buckle down and put business first again.

I glanced around the room one more time. I didn't know how *Mamm* stood sleeping in it alone. Beatrice had moved into my room the night Dat died, and the truth was, if she hadn't come into mine, I would have moved into hers. We were grown, me more so at twenty-two than she was at nineteen, but we'd both adored our Dat. Even though he was seventy-two, we'd expected him to live at least another decade. Hopefully two.

My eyes fell on the notebook again. It was none of my business.

I picked up the box of shirts from the bed and headed to the door.

As I started down the hallway, the light from the window fell across the worn wood floors. Our home was old and shabby, but it was ours. I was very thankful for it.

I stopped at the end of the landing and pressed my forehead against the cool glass of the window. Our fields were far from shabby. They brimmed with shrubs and trees, annuals and perennials, ground covers and decorative grasses. Nearly

every shade of green leaves imaginable, with hints of gold from the late-morning sun, shimmered in the breeze. Splashes of color—including purple irises, pink peonies, and yellow roses—complemented the green.

We lived a few miles from the village of Paradise, but our land was truly paradise to me. There was nowhere on earth I'd rather be.

I hurried down the stairs and into the living room, where Mamm and Ivan sat side by side at the desk with a pile of bills. Ivan hid Mamm from my view as I hurried through. Dat had been thin and short, but Ivan was big and tall. My half siblings took after their mother, not the father we shared.

Even though Ivan had never married, he wore a beard and had for as long as I could remember. He'd been in his midtwenties by the time I was born and seemed much more like an uncle than a brother to me.

He had his own accounting business. The fact that Mamm had asked him to take a look at our finances meant things were worse than I'd feared. She'd always been involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm, but Dat had always seen to the books.

Dat hadn't shared our financial situation with me either, but I didn't remember him spending hours at his desk, looking worried, until a few years ago, after the economy had soured.

Seven years ago we'd had a thriving business, providing trees, shrubs, and plants to landscapers throughout the area, including those affiliated with commercial builders. As the business grew, so did our overhead, and Dat took out a mortgage to pay for the new greenhouse, office, and irrigation system. It had been a wise business decision—at the time. But then the financial downturn meant less development, which meant less landscaping, which meant fewer sales, which meant we had to scrape to meet each payment.

It had been my idea to add crops of *Blumms* and *Raudashtokk*. But the flowers and herbs didn't bring in the income that the nursery stock did.

I needed to figure out more ways, besides the farmers' market, to ease Mamm's worries.

I'd reached the hallway when she called out my name.

"*Jah.*"

"Come here," she said.

"Just a minute." I continued to the sewing room and put the box—not wanting Mamm to see it—on the floor and returned to the living room.

She sat with her reading glasses on top of a closed manila file, her small hands folded in her lap. A few stray hairs had escaped her gray bun and trailed down her neck alongside the ties of her *Kapp*. "I forgot to tell Mervin to water the dogwood trees," she said.

"I'll tell him," I answered.

Ivan pushed his chair away from the desk. "Anna," he said, addressing my mother by her first name, the way he always had, "I don't see how you can keep the Mosier boy on. Not with the way your finances are."

I didn't see how we could afford not to, but I didn't say it out loud.

It seemed Mamm didn't hear, or didn't register, what Ivan had said. She continued talking to me, "And tell Mervin to repot the geraniums. It's getting late in the season for those, but it would be good to sell as many as we can."

I nodded my head. "*Jah.*" We'd talked about it the day before. I planned to try to sell some tomorrow at the market. It had been a cool spring—I imagined not everyone had all their potted plants out yet. "Anything else?" I asked.

She shook her head and smiled, slightly. More wrinkles lined her face than had a few months before.

Ivan cleared his throat, as if he was readying himself to say something, but Mamm put her hand on his, and my half brother remained silent.

“I’ll go give Mervin the instructions,” I said.

“*Denki.*” Mamm picked up her glasses and opened the file.

She’d clearly communicated that I should leave, but I stayed for a long moment, staring at her as she bowed her head over the papers.

She’d worked as a teacher in Ohio before marrying Dat. Although she didn’t know much about business, she was organized and efficient, two skills that she’d passed down to me. And she had liked working alongside Dat. They’d complemented each other well in both their personal relationship and their work together. Plus after teaching for so many years, she was used to doing more than just housework and said she found the family business a satisfying endeavor.

Thankfully Beatrice enjoyed running the house, at least more than doing outside chores, and once she was out of school she’d taken on more and more of those responsibilities.

Although I could handle managing the house just fine, I too enjoyed working outside. Where I most differed from both my parents was in personality. They were quiet and didn’t socialize much, except with people in our district, but I was outgoing and had friends from across Pennsylvania, and in neighboring states too.

Beatrice, however, took after my parents when it came to social needs—except she didn’t seem to have any at all.

Edna already had a chicken roasting in the oven, potatoes boiling on the stove, and sticky buns cooling on the counter, but she wasn’t in the kitchen. I headed out the back door to find her. My half sister was eighteen years older than I and left home to marry soon after I was born, but she’d always doted

on Beatrice and me. She hadn't been blessed with children, and then four years ago her husband, Frank, had been gravely injured in a buggy accident and died months later.

She'd taken Dat's death hard too—more so, I guessed, than if Frank had been alive.

Our house sat on a hill. An arbor Dat had built, covered with clematis leaves, stood at the top of the path. I couldn't remember the baby pink clematis flowers blooming last month, although I'm sure they had. Nor could I remember the flowers of the dogwood trees or the lilac bushes. I'd lost all of that to my grief.

I exhaled. I wasn't going to lose any more.

The weatherman had predicted a high of eighty-five. The hottest day of the year so far.

I took another step toward the path that led to the pasture below.

The highway bordered the pasture where we held the farmers' market, and our driveway curved up the hill and along our property line. To the west our flower fields would soon bloom with lilies, lisianthus, and dahlias. To the south, behind the house, our huge white barn towered above everything else, including our greenhouse next to it. To the east was our garden, surrounded by a fence.

Edna stood at the garden gate, her back to me, while Beatrice stooped over in the first row, her bare feet half covered by the dark soil.

I couldn't tell what my older sister said, but Beatrice answered, "Denki," as she straightened up. Beatrice was beautiful—far more than I—with an untamed look and dark, intense eyes. She seemed oblivious to her good looks though. She tucked a strand of her chestnut hair under her Kapp. "I could use a break," she added. When she caught sight of me, she waved. "Come into the house," she called out. "Edna has a snack ready."

“I’ll be in shortly,” I answered.

I hurried on toward the greenhouse, along the stone pathway Dat had put in a couple of years before. Our land had served him the same way a canvas did an artist. I had often expected one of the bishops to accuse Dat of being too fancy. He’d added whimsical touches all over our farm. Besides the arbor covered with clematis, he’d built trellises and archways and placed slate pathways and rock gardens all over the property.

I stepped into the greenhouse, expecting to find Mervin. He wasn’t there, but the geraniums were—all repotted. Perhaps he’d read Mamm’s mind.

Mervin’s parents had the farm next to ours, although their house was on the far side of their property, as far away from ours as possible. But still we’d grown up together—gone to the same school, the same singings, the same parties. He was like a brother to me.

My best friend, Hannah Lapp, and Mervin had been courting. But around the time my Dat passed, they stopped spending time together. Usually I would know what was going on, but for the first time since I was six and she was five, I hadn’t kept up with Hannah. I hoped she understood.

Standing beside the greenhouse, I searched the field of nursery stock. Hydrangea, forsythia, and azalea spread out in front of me. I walked along, peering down each row. Next came cherry, myrtle, and plum trees.

A flash of yellow made me smile.

“Here, Love!” I called out to our lab.

She darted out from between the trees and rushed toward me. She’d been Dat’s dog, and he had named her Love, he said, because God had blessed him with a life of love.

I thought it a ridiculous name at first, especially when Dat called, “Here, Love!” but it grew on us in time. And it turned out

to be the perfect name for her. All dogs loved unconditionally—but Love would have won the first-place prize if one existed.

She'd refused to leave Dat's side when he'd fallen, and now she'd wait beside the back door at night, as if still believing he would come home.

With Dat gone, she tended to follow Mervin around when he was working. Otherwise she held Mamm and me in equal esteem, but Beatrice had never bonded with the dog much.

As Love reached me, I spotted Mervin by the dogwood trees, a black hose in his hand, his straw hat riding back on his head, his aviator sunglasses perched on his long nose. Wondering how he'd known what Mamm wanted him to do, I made my way down the row of trees, my flip-flop-clad feet sinking into the soft soil, Love at my side.

"Have you learned to read minds?" I called out to Mervin.

He pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose to where the tops were level with his sandy-colored bangs, met my gaze, and pursed his lips.

"How did you know what you were supposed to do?" I asked.

Mervin shook his head. "Your Mamm told me—yesterday at quitting time."

Mamm had been forgetful lately, but I'd chalked it up to Dat's death. All her energy had gone into coping—how could we expect her to keep track of mundane details?

But her giving Mervin instructions and then entirely forgetting she'd done so was something new. And she was only sixty-three. It had to be stress related—not age.

"Did she tell you to repot the geraniums too?" I stepped closer to Mervin, reaching down to pet Love as I did.

"Jah. In fact she told me more than once."

I shoved my hands into the pocket of my apron. "How many times?"

“Four. Maybe five.”

“Oh dear,” I whispered. Then in a normal voice, I said, “Denki for all your hard work. I don’t know what we would have done without you these last months.”

I turned to go but had only made it a step when Mervin said, “I wanted to ask you something.”

“Jah.” I stumbled on a rock, stubbing my toe, as I turned back around.

Love pressed her body against my leg as Mervin steadied me.

“Denki,” I said, pulling away, aware of his hand on my arm.

“I was wondering,” he said, his voice deep and strained, “if you’d go to the singing with me.”

I tilted my head. So things had come to an end between him and Hannah. Most likely months ago. I hadn’t been to a singing since Dat died. “Could I let you know tomorrow?”

“Sure,” he said, but his voice sounded down.

“I’ll see you after dinner.”

He nodded in response. Even though workers often ate the noon meal with their Amish employers, we’d worked out the routine of him going to his house for dinner. His Mamm always fixed a big meal, and that way if Mamm, Beatrice, and I just wanted to eat leftovers we didn’t feel pressured to do a lot of cooking. All three of us had lost our appetites—except for when Edna visited.

Love stepped back to Mervin’s side.

“Is she bothering you?” I asked.

“Of course not.”

I patted the dog’s head and made my way back to the end of the row. When I reached it, I kicked my flip-flops off, shook the dirt off of them, and dragged my bare feet along the grass. As I came around the side of the greenhouse, movement across the highway caught my attention.

A man driving a team of mules was cutting alfalfa. Certain it was Phillip Eicher and not wanting him to see me, I hurried toward the house. We'd dated—briefly—but he'd broken it off, much to my chagrin. I told people it didn't work out; he told people I wasn't the right girl for him—which was obviously true. Still, it had hurt my feelings and, to be honest, also my pride, even though I knew that was wrong.

Hannah had laughed when she found out Phillip had broken up with me. That hurt too. "Oh, Molly," she'd said, "it's only funny because this is the first time in your life you didn't get what you wanted."

I guess Dat dying was the second.

Now Phillip was courting a seventeen-year-old girl from across the county. I'd heard she was a beauty.

When I reached the house, the screen door slipped from my hands and banged. No one was in the kitchen.

"Molly? Is that you?" It was Mamm again.

"Jah," I answered.

"Could you come here?"

I sped through the kitchen, stopping at the living room doorway. She sat at the desk alone.

"Where is everyone?" I asked.

"Beatrice convinced Ivan and Edna to go see the new kittens in the barn."

That sounded like Beatrice. And like my older siblings to give in to her *kindish* ways.

"What do you need?" I asked Mamm, pointing to her cup. "More coffee?"

"No." She pulled her glasses from her face. "I've been thinking about ways to try to get our profits up." She put her glasses down on the desk again.

I smiled, pleased she was thinking about our profits too.

“And that got me thinking. I’ve noticed Mervin looking at you, following you around. I think he’s sweet on you.”

I couldn’t imagine what Mervin’s feelings toward me had to do with our profits.

“I didn’t tell Ivan this,” she said, placing her hand on the side of her head. “There’s no point yet, but a wholesaler left a message, asking if there was any way we could increase our production. He said if we could, he’d be willing to buy from us.”

I hadn’t noticed it before, but as I stared at her—in disbelief—I noted that her hair had grown whiter in the last couple of months.

“It would make me so happy to have you marry and settle down,” she said. “What could be better than to join our two families? We’ve been good friends all these years.”

My mouth fell open, but I couldn’t manage to form a sound.

“Our farms are side by side,” she continued. “You and Mervin would be able to provide for yourselves and for me in my old age. And for your sister.”

“Mamm . . .” I finally managed to say. She and Dat had never meddled in my life before.

“Think about it,” Mamm said, putting her glasses back on her face. “And in the meantime, I forgot to tell Mervin to water the dogwood trees. Could you tell him?”

“Mamm, you—”

“And to repot the geraniums.”

“No, you already did.” My voice wavered. “It’s all done.”

She looked up at me. “Are you sure?”

I nodded, a sick feeling settling in the pit of my stomach.

She lowered her voice. “Molly . . .” She took a deep breath. “I’m worried.”

Jah, I thought. *Me too*.

“It’s your father.” She stopped again and stared at the closed folder.

“Ach, Mamm. I know it’s hard . . .”

“He’s been gone so long,” she said, turning her head to me, tears filling her eyes.

I nodded. It had only been a couple of months, but it seemed much longer.

“When is he coming back?” she asked.

“Mamm?”

“I thought it would only be for a short time.” Her eyes held a longing in them I hadn’t seen before. Was it grief that had her confused? Or was something horribly wrong?

“He’s gone,” I said. “Remember he . . .” I didn’t want to think of Dat lying on the front lawn, let alone speak of it. “He passed, Mamm. We had the funeral. In April. Now it’s June.”

She shook her head.

Maybe it was just grief. But what if Mamm was having a stroke? I had no way of knowing. What I did know was I couldn’t lose another parent.

“Stay right here,” I said to her.

Before Dat died, I’d always left my cell phone in the greenhouse office, but since he’d passed, I kept it in my apron pocket—just in case. I pulled it out as I sped through the back door, heading toward the barn. I keyed in our doctor’s number as I ran and yelled, “Beatrice! Ivan! Edna! Come quick!” I shouted again as a voice on the other end of my cell said hello.

Beatrice appeared at the barn door first, leaving it wide open. I motioned toward the house. “It’s Mamm,” I called out. “Something’s wrong.”

She took off running, her hands holding her dress above her knees, the ties of her Kapp trailing over her shoulder. Ivan and Edna followed.

Somehow, all the way in the field, Love sensed something was wrong and came bounding to my side. I put my hand on top of her head to calm her as I explained the situation to the nurse.

“Can you bring your mother in?” she asked.

“I’m thinking I should call an ambulance,” I said. That’s what we should have done with Dat.

Edna kept going toward the house, but Ivan stopped beside me, saying, “That would cost quite a sum of money.”

The nurse asked, “Is her speech slurred?”

Ignoring Ivan, I answered, “No.”

“Face droopy?”

I would have noticed that. “No,” I answered.

“Arm weak?”

“I don’t think so.” I started for the back door, with Love still beside me and Ivan right behind.

“Are her words making sense?” the nurse asked.

“Jah,” I said, “except she was asking about my father as if he is alive, but he passed two months ago. It seemed she didn’t remember that.”

“How about her vision?”

“I think it’s fine. . . .”

“Any headaches?”

“Some, just lately, but she said they’re from stress. . . .”

“How old is she?”

“Sixty-three.”

“Any other signs of dementia?”

“Dementia?”

“You know—forgetfulness, confusion.”

“She has been forgetful. . . .” I told Love to stay and stepped into the kitchen with Ivan right behind me. “Should I call for an ambulance?” I asked the nurse.

“Can you bring her in?”

“I’ll call our driver and see.” If she wasn’t available I’d call 9-1-1.

“Oh, you’re Amish,” the nurse said. “I remember now, about your father . . .”

“Jah,” I answered.

Her voice overflowed with compassion. “I’ll tell the doctor to expect you.”

“Thank you.” After I said good-bye, I ended the call.

Edna stood to the side of Mamm. Beatrice had planted herself behind them, a confused look on her face. She mouthed, “She says she’s fine.”

“Mamm, do either of your arms feel weak?” I asked.

She shook her head.

“Can you see all right? Does your head ache?”

“Molly, I’m fine.”

Ivan was right, calling an ambulance would cost a fortune, and it would worry Mamm. I stepped back into the kitchen and called our driver, Doris. She said she’d be at our place in half an hour.

Edna served up dinner in a hurry, and I waited until the driver arrived to tell Mamm I was taking her to the doctor.

“Oh, that’s not necessary,” she said. “I’ll just go take a nap.”

Before I could say anything, Ivan jumped in and said, “Anna, we’re concerned about you is all. Humor us.”

She glanced from Ivan to me and then touched the side of her head. At last she said, “Oh, all right.”

Edna said she would stay with Beatrice. I shouldn’t have been surprised when Ivan followed me and Mamm out to the car, but I was.



Mamm sat on the examination table while I stood beside her and Ivan sat in the chair. We’d been at the clinic for a couple of

hours. The doctor had done an exam, the lab tech had drawn blood, and the preliminary tests had already been completed. The doctor had ruled out both a vitamin deficiency and a stroke, but he was concerned about Mamm's headaches, which were worse than she'd been letting on. She managed to be honest with the doctor, although she claimed they were grief related. The doctor conceded that grief—and stress—could cause physical symptoms, but he didn't think that was the case with her.

The doctor sat on the spinning stool. "I want you to get a CT scan. At the hospital." He took out a pad of paper from his coat pocket and wrote down a number. He started to hand it to Ivan, but I intercepted it.

Ivan didn't seem to mind. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"Any abnormalities," the doctor answered.

When I asked about dementia, the doctor answered that it could be a concern too.

Ivan asked if there was any reason not to have the CT scan.

"If Mrs. Zook wants to know what she's up against, she should have it. Hopefully it's nothing, and that would be good to know too."

"What will be will be," Mamm said.

"Granted," the doctor said kindly. "There are some people who, once their children are all raised and perhaps after a spouse has passed, decide not to go ahead with tests and such." It seemed he was choosing his words carefully. "But, Mrs. Zook, you have two daughters in your care." He'd been our doctor for years, since Beatrice and I were babies. "And you're still relatively young."

Relatively? She could live for another thirty years, easily.

"Jah, Mamm," I said. "You're very young." All my life, I had thought my parents old—until today.

The doctor said to call him if we had any questions but to make the appointment for the CT scan as soon as possible. I said I'd make it immediately, unfolding the piece of paper with the number on it and taking my cell from my pocket as he told us good-bye and left the room.

As I keyed in the numbers, Ivan said, "Goodness, Molly. Couldn't you wait until we got outside?"

I shook my head as I patted Mamm's arm.

My call went through, and I took the first available appointment—on a Tuesday, a week and a half away.

When I told Mamm when the appointment was, she said, "See, I'm fine. If they really thought there was a problem, they would have gotten me in sooner." She scooted off the table. "In fact, call back and cancel."

I slipped my phone into my apron pocket. I wasn't raised to disobey. So I pretended I hadn't heard.

As we left the doctor's office, Mamm sighed and said, "Now I have another bill to figure out how to pay." She padded down the carpet of the hallway in her soft-soled shoes, me on one side of her and Ivan on the other. "And then another for that test you didn't cancel."

"You've paid into the church fund all these years," I responded. "There will be plenty to cover your costs." Members from every district put aside money each month in a health-care fund that we pooled to pay medical expenses. We'd used some when Dat died, but not that much.

"When it's my time, it's my time," Mamm said. I decided to ignore that too.

"The Lord knows the number of my days," she added as we reached the door.

"Mamm . . ." I pushed it open, stepping out into the afternoon heat. "Your life isn't all that's at stake here. Beatrice and I need you. We're not ready to be orphans."

The driver had parked her car on the edge of the lot, in the shade, and Mamm stepped off the curb, leading the way, as I grabbed her elbow.

Ivan stepped quickly to Mamm's side. "Anna, I was serious about buying the—"

She put her hand up, swinging her purse around. He stopped.

I stopped cold, even as the heat swirled up from the pavement. "What?" I blurted out as I glared at my half brother.

"It's not right for three women to be living alone."

I shook my head. "What are you talking about?" I asked. "We're doing fine."

Mamm continued on toward the car.

Ivan's face reddened. "After paying off the mortgage, there'd still be enough money from the sale for you to buy a house in town, maybe on a double lot."

"But you don't even like to farm," I said.

Ivan's face grew redder.

The farm was my home. For as long as I could remember, I'd hoped the man I'd someday marry would want to farm it with me. I took off marching, biting my tongue from saying more, gaining on Mamm. But then she stopped abruptly, and I bumped into her.

"Sorry," I said.

Ivan stopped behind me.

Mamm turned toward us. "I just want both of you to know," she said, her voice firm and clear, "I know your Dat passed. Maybe I had a moment of wishful thinking, but I don't have dementia. I'm sure of it."

"Of course you don't." I took her hand and squeezed it. "It's far more likely there's a physical explanation for all of this. That's why you should have the scan done."

She started walking again, and when we reached the car,

Mamm and I climbed in the back seat, leaving the front for Ivan. Doris asked how things were.

“I’m fine,” Mamm said. “I’d know if there was something wrong.”

“She needs more tests,” I clarified.

“Oh, well, I’m sure everything *is* fine,” Doris said. “But, Mrs. Zook, for the sake of your girls, you’re doing the right thing.”

Mamm crossed her arms, an uncharacteristic gesture for her, and I gave Doris an apologetic nod. She smiled at me and mouthed, “*No worries.*”

Ivan stared straight ahead.

I’d been my Dat’s girl. The one who worked alongside him outside. The one he told his plans to. The one to whom he’d rattle off the Latin names—that I could never remember—of plants and flowers.

But he and Mamm had been best friends, holding hands in the privacy of our home. Stealing kisses in the hallway. Sharing their love of nature. I could only hope I’d have a marriage as dear as theirs someday.

As much as I missed and mourned Dat, I couldn’t imagine how much Mamm missed him—I couldn’t fathom how her inner world had shifted. Perhaps today’s incident *had* been caused by stress.

Doris pointed out the wild flowers alongside the road and then a colt romping in a field. Then she commented on the beautiful weather, saying she and her husband planned to barbecue for dinner. Usually, I would have kept the conversation going, but I couldn’t seem to hold up my end, and the car fell silent.

When we reached our farm, Mamm started to pay the driver, but Ivan said he would, which was generous for him. He paid quickly and then climbed from the car and headed toward the house. After telling Doris good-bye, Mamm took off for the house too, followed by Love, who had been patiently waiting.

“She needs to have a CT scan done week after next—that Tuesday morning,” I said to Doris. “But she doesn’t want to do it.”

“Give her a day or two,” she said. “I’ll put it on my calendar.”

“Denki.” I gave her the time and said a quick good-bye.

As I neared the house, I heard men’s voices on the porch. One was Mervin’s. I couldn’t place the second one, but it wasn’t Ivan’s.

Instead of going through the back door, I headed around front with Love following me. Too late, just as my head popped above the railing, I realized the second voice was Phillip’s.

I quickly retreated while Love headed for Mervin. If either Phillip or Mervin saw me, they didn’t call out my name. Ivan stepped onto the porch from the front door, saying hello to both, and Mamm followed, asking everyone if they’d like lemonade. It should have been me being hospitable, instead of my poor mother, but I simply didn’t feel up to it.

I headed to the back door and into the house, finding Beatrice in the sewing room, kneeling on the floor next to the box I’d left. My little sister looked up, her face streaked with tears. “How’s Mamm?” She clung to Dat’s green shirt.

“She’s okay. It’s probably nothing.” I knelt beside my sister. “It wasn’t a stroke, but she needs to have another test—to rule other things out.”

Beatrice put her head in her hands and said, “What will happen to us if she dies?”

I could barely hear her and leaned closer. “What do you mean?”

“Where will we go to live?”

I took a deep breath. “We’ll stay here.”

Beatrice shook her head. “Ivan will want to sell the place. He won’t want us to keep it.”

“No, that’s not true,” I said, even though I wasn’t at all sure

what Ivan would do. He didn't think it was right for the *three* of us to be living alone. He'd think it even worse for just the two of us. "Our home has been in the family for over a hundred years. We wouldn't sell it to strangers."

"That's not what Mervin was just telling Phillip." She swiped at a tear. I was certain the farm meant far more to me than my sister, but still this was home to her too. "He said we're bound to lose the farm no matter what."

"Bea," I said, "you shouldn't be eavesdropping." The last thing I wanted was for Bea to know how dire our situation was.

"That's not all they said." She held Dat's shirt to her face. I could barely hear her words. "Mervin said if you marry soon, maybe your husband could save the farm."

"He said that in front of Phillip?"

She nodded.

"Oh goodness," I said. "That's ridiculous."

"Mervin didn't seem to think so." Beatrice dropped the shirt to her lap.

I lowered my voice. "Did he say anything else?" I feared there was more.

"No, that's all I heard. I came in here after that . . . and then found this." She placed her hand on the box of shirts.

I'd intended the quilt as a surprise, but sometimes there was comfort in anticipating a gift. "I'm going to make a quilt for you out of Dat's shirts."

Tears filled her eyes again. "Denki," she said.

I heard someone in the kitchen. "Where's Edna?" I asked, hoping maybe she was going to serve the front porch gang her famous sticky buns.

"Resting, but she's going to stay here tonight and tomorrow night too. She said we need some extra love."

I was relieved to hear that. It would be a blessing to have

her cook while I worked the market the next day, and for her to help keep an eye on Mamm too. Our district had cared for us well during the weeks after Dat's death—helping with the chores, bringing meals, chopping wood, and cleaning. But that had come to an end, as it should have.

Bea swiped at her tears.

"Enough of that now," I said. "Pull yourself together and go help Mamm."

Beatrice leaned back, away from me. "Don't be so bossy," she said.

"We have a porch full of men to serve a snack to." And I didn't want to be the one to offer Phillip a glass of lemonade.

"You were bossy enough before Dat died, but now you're nearly intolerable."

I stood. "Bea, I—"

"You always have to be in charge," she said without looking at me as she refolded the shirt and put it back in the box.

"Well, jah," I said. "Someone has to be."

She rose to her knees and looked out the window, toward the barn and greenhouse, and then sniffled again. She was sensitive, even more than usual since Dat died. And with good reason. She'd lost her father, and now she was afraid of losing her childhood home.

I stood and followed her to the window. "Nothing's going to happen to the farm. This is our place. This is where we're going to stay." I could only hope my words were true.