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LEWIS



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Mercy and truth are met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Psalm 85:10

To Julie Marie,
darling first daughter,
long awaited . . .
one of the great joys of my life!

Prologue

My first-ever night away from home, I struggled with sleeplessness, having abruptly left with two other Amish girls. Linda and Vicky Zook had been ousted by their bishop in Ronks, not far from Gordonville, Pennsylvania, where I'd lived all of my eighteen years. I had agreed to split rent on a two-bedroom apartment with them after they encouraged me to join them in their flight to the world, saying they had a friend of a friend living out in western Kansas who knew of a place for the three of us.

And here we were at long last, though I never would've considered doing such a thing if I hadn't been in a hurry to get away. I needed time to think. *Just for a while*, I told myself. Truth be told, I was furious with my twin sister . . . and heartbroken. It was impossible not to keep replaying the horrid last moments between us. And I knew for sure *Dat* would be just sick over it, if he were still alive.

Sitting in the small, nearly empty bedroom, I recalled my father's fondness for Arie and me, and felt terribly alone.

Though it might surprise some, my sister and I had never been

treated like twins. *Mamma* had seen to that. In fact, no one in our immediate family ever referred to us as *the twins*, like most families of multiples. No one ever said, “Go tell the twins to dress around for Preaching service,” or “The twins are over ice-skating on Uncle Mel’s pond.” *Nee*, we were called by our given names and, thankfully, weren’t required to wear matching color dresses, not even when we were tiny. From the start, Arie and I were our own persons, each free to have our own interests. Nevertheless, an indescribable bond had connected us. We were more than sisters; we were best friends. *Till now*.

I got up and paced the floor, staring at the moon through the window. How had it come to this?

Jah, I had plenty of good reasons to put some distance between my sister and myself. And then there were *Mamma*’s heated words to me, as well.

There was no getting around it, no way to sugarcoat the truth. Arie Mae had betrayed me.

OCTOBER 21: FIVE YEARS LATER

Pulling into the parking lot at the Scott City, Kansas, florist where I’d been working for nearly five years now, I couldn’t help but notice the familiar white ornamental windmill near the entrance. The sight brought back visions of dairy farms and milk houses, waterwheels, and *real* windmills nestled among rolling hills tinted with Lancaster County’s dazzling autumn display.

Leaves are turning in Mamma’s yard right now . . . like flames of fire. I thought of my childhood home, roughly fifteen hundred miles away. For as long as I’d been gone, it was still easy to picture the stand of sugar maples near Old Leacock Road, and *Mamma* out raking the leaves into big piles with my sister.

“You’re right on time,” Karyn Fry, my employer’s wisp of a

wife, greeted me as I stepped inside the small shop. I inhaled the heavenly fragrance of flowers, thankful for this job. Working with flowers was ideal for a young woman raised with hands in the soil, and arranging bouquets of all types and sizes gave me creative freedom.

I reached for my work apron and removed it from the wall hook, noticing today's date on the wall calendar. Oh, how I dreaded the coming weekend—tomorrow, October twenty-second, would be my twenty-third birthday. Instantly, my heart was tangled with memories of growing up in my family's sprawling farmhouse turned Amish bed-and-breakfast. "Five birthdays away from Butterfly Meadows," I whispered, slipping the apron over my head. It felt like a lifetime ago.

"Everything okay, Mandy?" Karyn glanced up from a fresh shipment of coral-colored roses. Her short dark hair revealed the dangling silver earrings she liked to wear.

Sitting down at the shop's computer, I checked on the latest FTD order and smiled over at Karyn. "Just feeling older," I said, rising to find the appropriate vase.

"Aren't we all." Karyn wrapped three long-stemmed roses in green florist paper. "By the way, Tom asked to meet with you before you leave today."

Her husband was the one who'd hired me, but meticulous Karyn ran the place. "Okay, I'll check in with him," I said, noting the strange, flat tone of Karyn's voice as I trimmed the thick stems on a few stargazer lilies.



Hours later, I rose from the work stool and stretched. Through the window, I could see a teenage girl riding bareback in the meadow across from the rural shop, her hair flowing behind her like a golden waterfall in the breeze. It stirred up recollections of

riding Ol' Tulip, one of our faithful road horses . . . and later, my father's attempts to teach me to hitch her to the family carriage. I was just ten years old that first time, and real curious, so while I held the driving lines for him, I had asked what my name would have been if the Lord had seen fit to make me a boy.

My father chuckled and gave me an indulgent look. He knew me well enough to humor me with an answer. "Well, let's see. Ammon, it might've been," he said, twitching his eyebrows.

I grimaced at the notion. "Really, Dat . . . Ammon?"

His eyes twinkled. "Ain't ya glad ya were born a girl?"

Real glad, I thought.

"And Arie Mae?" I pressed.

"Oh, prob'ly Aaron."

"Were ya hopin' for more boys, then?" I held my breath.

He gave his big shoulders a shrug. "Your Mamma and I s'posed after four sons in a row, we might just get two more."

I waited for him to add something, but Dat simply leaned down to kiss the top of my head. "I'm glad we figured that wrong, Mandy Sue," he said with a grin. "After all those boys, it was mighty *gut* to have daughters."

Relieved, I beamed all the way back to the house. And later, while Arie and I dusted and mopped the front room, I relayed Dat's comments and could tell she was pleased, too.

After Dat passed away due to a silo-filling accident, our world became a whole lot less carefree. I felt I'd lost the one adult I could turn to with any question, no matter how fanciful, and always find a patient, good-natured response, despite my tendency to "*create drama*," as Mamma sometimes put it. Perhaps too much drama for her liking.

It was ever so hard to say good-bye to Dat. I poured out my heart in a note of loving farewell, and late that night, while his long body rested in the hand-built pine coffin, I snuck downstairs

to the gas-lamp-lit front room and slid it under his heavy right arm when no one was around, trying not to cry. It was the hardest thing I'd ever done.



The shatter of glass on the cement floor startled me, and I brushed off the cherished recollection and glanced over at Karyn, who had never once dropped anything during the years I'd worked there. Her eyes were wide with embarrassment, and she shook her head as if to clear the clumsy cobwebs.

What's bothering her? I wondered.

Without asking, I went to help sweep up the jagged remains of the vase.



At five o'clock sharp, Tom Fry opened the door to his office, having been gone most of the day. He was a clean-shaven man of modest build and graying auburn hair as thick as a horse's mane, and his rare frown concerned me. I followed him into the small space where he kept the books on his computer.

"Somethin' the matter, Mr. Fry?" I asked, taking a seat and folding my hands tightly, like Mamma when nervous.

"I'm afraid there is," he replied, taking a breath and letting it out slowly. "You see, it's getting harder to compete with the larger florists in Garden City, and since money is tight, I have to cut back."

My heart beat hard. I needed this job, but I managed to thank him after he said he'd allow me another week's work before letting me go.

"I'll give you a good reference," he added, clearly frustrated at the shop's predicament.

"Thanks . . . that'll help."

Afterward, I trudged out to my car in a daze, wondering how I could make the payments now, let alone cover my rent to Don and Eilene Bradley, reasonable though it was. While I'd tucked away enough to get me through until I found another job, I dreaded the idea of saying good-bye to the Frys. I'd found such pleasure in making bouquets, and sometimes even handling deliveries, bringing joy to various people in the area, seeing the happy expressions on their faces. Someday, once I saved up enough money, I hoped to start my own florist shop, determined to keep moving forward with my life.

Pressing the key into the ignition, I headed in the direction of the pretty house where I had a sunny, spacious room and private bath on the third floor. The Bradleys had been kind to take me under their collective wing when I met them at the community church up the road after the month-to-month rental arrangement with Linda and Vicky had fizzled.

Two good-looking English fellows had started showing up for supper with them, and the last I heard, both couples had married, the young women abandoning their Amish life, no looking back. I, however, was "*too wounded for a beau*," as Linda had so bluntly put it a few weeks after we became roommates. Loneliness seemed to color my life back then, which was a discouragement to potential suitors, English or otherwise.

Although I've long since moved on, making a way for myself in the outside world, there are times when I miss the way my life used to be. Surprisingly, Arie wrote two letters in the months after my departure, letters I never opened, each one marked *Return to sender* by my own hand. Doubtless my sister had gotten my address from careless Vicky Zook, who'd written home a few times.

I figured Arie would have gotten the message after the first letter came back, and I suppose my actions might have seemed

punitive to others. Still, I felt justified, considering what she'd done.

Oh, in time I regretted it, but it was too late. Besides, I simply could not bear to read what my sister might have written, to see the words that would confirm my deepest fears.

Chapter

1

The tale of the arrival of the butterflies had been passed down through the Dienner family tree for many years. It was said that butterflies of various species and colors had flocked like bees around a hive to the surrounding meadows that long-ago June when Ephraim Dienner's grandfather first flung wide the windows of his newly built farmhouse off Old Leacock Road. No one had ever determined what attracted so many of the fluttering beauties, but *Dawdi* Dienner had insisted they were a blessing from the hand of God. Certain Amish folk in Gordonville back then had wagged their heads at that, just as some did to this day, baffled as to which trees or wild flowers were the butterfly magnets.

Other folk around the area simply enjoyed the graceful creatures and let it go at that. Amanda Dienner had been one of them. And sometimes she wished she could better describe the return of the butterflies each spring, as well as The Butterfly Meadows Amish Bed-and-Breakfast, to Don and Eilene Bradley. There were no pictures or online ads—not even a website. For the past decade since her husband's death, Saloma Dienner's clientele had

come mainly because of word of mouth, regular guests returning every summer or fall to sit in the rockers on the side porch and sip Saloma's delicious meadow tea as they watched the brilliant butterflies and whiled away the stress of their lives.

After this many years, Mandy had no idea how daily life at the inn was going. She had heard a few times from her mother, who had reached out by letter early on, but that correspondence had been infrequent. And while Mamma had written an apology for her words prior to Mandy's leaving, Mandy was certain she was just trying to get her to return to Gordonville.

"Mandy, would you mind jotting down another Amish recipe for me to try out on a gathering with my church friends?" Eilene asked while sitting at breakfast that Monday. "Something sweet, perchance?"

"Are you interested in baking a pie or cookies . . . or making homemade candies?"

Eilene stirred her hot Earl Grey tea and turned to look at her husband, who was dressed in a pressed blue shirt and tan trousers as though he were heading off to church again. "What do you think, dear?"

Don lowered the morning paper, his brow momentarily creased. "A slice of pie and maybe a scoop of ice cream for your hubby, too?"

Eilene gave him a good-natured glare. "More like a spoonful, I'm thinking, considering what the doctor said."

"That's hardly enough to taste," Don said, giving Mandy a wink.

"Be happy to get any, dear."

Mandy smiled at their happy bantering. "How about my mother's recipe for shoofly pie? I know it by heart," she told Eilene, who agreed and excused herself to get a blank recipe card and a pen from the side drawer of the nearby hutch.

“Here we are,” Eilene said, returning to sit at the table and handing Mandy the card.

Printing neatly, Mandy began to write down the ingredients and instructions, then handed the recipe to Eilene, who looked it over and thanked her.

After helping to clear the dishes and place them in the dishwasher, Mandy asked to see the day’s newspaper, anxious to search the help-wanted ads. Scanning the columns, she spotted an opening for a grocery store cashier, as well as a clerk at a family-owned bakery. She asked to borrow that section, saying the florist shop was cutting back on help. “I’m being let go after this week,” she said.

Eilene frowned and shook her head. “So sorry to hear it.” She pushed her chin-length blond hair behind one ear. “How can we help?”

Mandy appreciated the offer. “Please cross your fingers that something opens up soon.”

“We’ll certainly pray to that end.” Eilene set down her teacup on the saucer with a clink. “Won’t we, Don?”

Removing his reading glasses, he nodded repeatedly. “Why not right now?”

They bowed their heads, and Don led in prayer, asking for a “divine appointment” for Mandy. “Amen and amen,” he said emphatically as he finished the prayer. “Now we’ll wait in anticipation for the answer. And meanwhile, I’ll ask around, too.”

Mandy respected his confidence, though she’d never approached her own prayers in such a bold manner. Since leaving Lancaster County, praying hadn’t been the easiest thing, though she still made a point of it. “I best be headin’ out the door,” she told them, taking up her tan all-weather coat. “I don’t want to be late for the start of my final week.”

“Good. Be conscientious right up to the last minute,” Don encouraged her with an approving smile.

Same fatherly way Dat used to talk, she thought as she waved good-bye to the charming middle-aged couple.

On the drive toward town, Mandy hummed one of the praise and worship choruses from the local church. It hadn't taken her long to pick up the English words and new melodies, so unlike those in the *Ausbund*, the traditional Amish hymnal. She appreciated the songs, though when she sang in church, it didn't feel the same.

Thinking now of her upcoming job search, Mandy remembered applying for work at the florist shop, giving her only job reference—her work at the inn with Mamma and Arie Mae—and wondering if Karyn Fry would contact Mamma, and if so, what she might say. “*My impulsive daughter left us in the lurch.*”

Nee, *Mamma wouldn't have been unkind*, she thought.

Yet if Karyn had contacted Mamma, she'd never said.

Mandy clasped the steering wheel and wondered how Mamma and Arie were getting along with the demands of running the B and B all these years later. Surely by now they had established new patterns of doing things, managing quite well without Mandy's help.

She hadn't forgotten what it was like to introduce wide-eyed *Englischers* to the Old Ways. New guests had arrived every few days, some coming from as far away as England and Germany just to spend time in Amish farmland. There had always been such good fellowship around the table with Mamma's regulars, too, while Arie and Mandy served them scrumptious high-cholesterol breakfasts by the cozy hearth in the large breakfast room. Eggs made to order, bacon and sausage, and fluffy pancakes topped with handpicked berries and real whipped cream . . .

Her mouth watered at the thought of Mamma's cooking, which never failed to draw rave reviews from the guests. Indeed, her mother's cooking was one of the primary reasons people returned year after year.

On chilly autumn or wintry days, Mandy had made extra-rich hot cocoa for the guests while Arie played the harmonica Dat had given her for Christmas one year. And when winter came in earnest, Mandy and Arie had accompanied any guests who wanted to ice-skate on Uncle Mel's pond up the road, the soft snowflakes tingling against their cheeks. Sometimes, a few of their boy cousins had built a bonfire in the late afternoon, which brought contented *oohs* from the delighted guests.

But Mandy had especially liked the summer and autumn seasons, when she had showed families with small children around the farm, letting them pet the barn kittens and giving carriage rides.

Why am I thinking about this now? she wondered.

Glancing in the rearview mirror, Mandy noticed a yellow school bus make a turn onto the road. "So many differences here on the other side of the fence," she murmured, recalling the initial jolt of becoming established so far from home—Kansas might as well have been a foreign country. *But I've managed all right so far. . . .*

Mandy spotted the florist shop and felt a twinge of sadness, not for herself so much but for Karyn and Tom, who'd been so good to her. During her coffee break, she would call the bakery and hope for the best. And if that job or another didn't bring in enough, she'd try to get part-time work on weekends.

Her father's words returned to her unbidden: "*The Lord's Day isn't meant for work.*"

Yet what would Dat say now if he knew of her plight?

I'll be fine, Mandy thought. Someone will give me a chance.