

A Hidden Hope

A woman in a blue dress and bonnet stands in a green field at sunset, holding a glowing lantern. In the background, a red barn is visible under a colorful sky.

SUZANNE
WOODS
FISHER

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LOST AND FOUND*

A Hidden Hope



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For all the Charlie Kings out there—
those who persevere against the odds,
who never give up on their dreams.
The world is a better place because of you.

Time is the best doctor.
—Ruth “Dok” Stoltzfus

Meet the Cast

Ruth “Dok” Stoltzfus (age late fifties), the dedicated doctor of Stoney Ridge. She cares for both Amish and non-Amish patients alike and is also the sister of Bishop David Stoltzfus. Once upon a time, young Ruth left her Amish roots to pursue higher education and a medical career—a move that shook things up in her family. Married to police officer Matt Lehman, she somehow juggles it all. (To learn more about Dok’s back-story, check out *Anything but Plain*.)

David Stoltzfus (age mid-fifties), the bishop of the Amish church in Stoney Ridge. He’s a father to many, both in the literal sense and when it comes to tending his flock. Brother to Dok, husband to **Birdy**, and the kind of man who wears responsibility like a second skin.

Annie Fisher (age 21), office assistant to Dok, daughter of Sally (who can give hypochondriacs a run for their money), and an aspiring EMT. Amish to her core but with ambitions that go beyond the farm.

Evie Miller (age 26), a traveling nurse on a three-month contract with Dok's practice. Her grandparents were Mennonites, so she's got a foot in both worlds. Skilled, dedicated, and figuring out if, where, and with whom she fits in Stoney Ridge.

Charlie King (age 27), a freshly minted med school graduate (though he just squeaked by) and newly arrived resident at Dok's practice. All eyes are on him to see if he can survive Dok's high standards . . . and pass his boards.

Wren Baker (age 27), also a newly arrived resident at Dok's practice, but unlike Charlie, she's got the grades to back up her credentials. Top of her class, sharp as a tack, and eager to prove herself.

Fern Lapp (late sixties), Amish woman and owner of Windmill Farm. Wise, witty, and always ready with a subtle nudge in the right direction.

Gus Troyer (age 25), Amish EMT and smitten with Annie Fisher. Good with a stretcher, bad at hiding his crush.

Sarah Blank (age early twenties), works at the Bent N' Dent. Has a deep interest in others' lives. Some might call it nosiness.

Hank Lapp (ageless), known for his shocking lack of awareness. In *A Healing Touch*, he nearly met his Maker. He's back and louder than ever!

Edith Fisher Lapp (age: classified), Hank's long-suffering wife.

Matt Lehman (late fifties), Dok's husband and the local police officer. Solid as a rock, all-around good guy.

1



She should've known it was too good to be true. Evie Miller had been floating on air . . . until she crashed back down to earth with a thud.

She had landed her top choice as a traveling nurse at the Stoney Ridge Family Practice, with an incredible doctor named Ruth Stoltzfus. Just a few months ago, Evie had seen a television news feature on Dok Stoltzfus—and decided to apply for a traveling job with her rural practice. Imagine having time with a doctor who still made house calls . . . among the Amish!

But then the story got even better.

Charlie King, fresh out of med school, had stopped by her nursing station at Penn State Hershey with news. Big news. After coming up empty on Match Day in March, he'd scrambled to find an unfulfilled residency. And he had. A great one, he said—serving an underserved area, with the added bonus of medical school loan forgiveness. Assuming, of course, he completed the residency, passed his final board exam, and checked all the right boxes.

“Where is it?” Evie had asked.

Charlie leaned over the counter, his eyes lighting up. “Stoney Ridge Family Practice.”

Stunned, Evie could only stare at him, suspended in shock. Was this truly happening? Was she dreaming? No words came out of her mouth. She had to just pause at the impossibility of it.

Charlie King was going to Stoney Ridge. To a sleepy little Amish village. To the same medical practice as Evie.

The Charlie King.

And then Wren Baker showed up at the nurse's station, leaning on the counter right next to Charlie. Evie wasn't surprised—Wren always seemed to hover around him, like a shadow that never quite left his side.

But what she said next did surprise Evie. “Did you tell her yet?” Before Charlie could answer, Wren said, “We’re both going to be residents at Stoney Ridge Family Practice in Lancaster County.”

Thud. Back to reality. Evie plummeted face-first back down to earth.

So many questions. She didn't know where to start.

It didn't make sense! Wren Baker seemed like the type who was destined for a top-notch residency in a sought-after teaching hospital. Hardly one for a farming village.

Then again, Wren Baker had claimed Charlie for herself.

Even more disheartening—Wren did not like Evie.

Wren probably thought Evie was crushing on Charlie.

She wouldn't be wrong.

Ever since Evie first met Charlie at the hospital—his third year as a medical student, her first year as a nursing student—she'd fallen hard for him. It felt like Cupid had struck her with an arrow, and two years later, her feelings hadn't faded one bit. She sensed Charlie might feel something for her as well. They'd had a few “moments” here and there, exchanged smiles, snatches of conversations. Moments that had felt genuine.

Evie sighed, turning to face the half-packed boxes in her bedroom apartment. She needed to keep going, but her heart

was no longer in it. Grabbing extra hangers from her closet, she headed to the living room where her best friend and roommate, Darcy, was wrapping the television remote in bubble wrap.

Evie set the spare hangers on the coffee table. "Pretty sure I won't be needing these."

Darcy wrinkled her nose. "Doesn't the old-timey village have closets?"

"Amish village. Well, it has both Amish and non-Amish. More Amish than not, though." Darcy was the reason Evie had become a traveling nurse in the first place. She had talked her into joining her for an adventure. But Darcy was thinking Alaska. When Evie came home and said she'd applied for a contract to go to an Amish village not far from Penn State, Darcy questioned her mental health.

Evie plopped down on the couch. "Apparently Charlie King's residency is going to be the Stoney Ridge practice." She scrunched up her face. "The exact same place!"

"What?!" Darcy gave her a puzzled expression. "But . . . isn't that good news?"

"Yeessss," Evie said slowly. It was, somehow—at the exact same time—both the best and worst news she'd ever heard.

"So you're both off to Stoney Ridge. Why aren't you happy?"

"Because Wren Baker is going to Stoney Ridge for her residency too."

Darcy rocked back on her heels. "Whoaaa. Wren Baker? I would've bet money she'd end up in Beverly Hills doing nose jobs for celebrities . . . not an Amish farm."

"Right? Everyone assumed she'd land a top-tier surgical residency. She wanted one."

"So what happened?"

"She didn't get a match."

"No way! Just like Charlie?"

"Not exactly. Charlie didn't match because . . . well, he probably just didn't stand out enough. Wren, on the other hand,

aimed too high. She went for the most competitive programs and didn't get a match. But she never told anyone—Charlie's the one who spilled. Apparently, they both figured, why not apply to Dok Stoltzfus's program? No one else did, so . . . that's where they'll be." Evie groaned, rubbing her cheeks. "How am I supposed to compete with Wren Baker?"

Darcy set down the bubble wrap to give Evie a look. "You're not," she said simply. "Evie, you're an amazing person. You have a huge heart, and you genuinely care about people. If Charlie doesn't see that, then he's the one missing out." She picked up the remote to start wrapping again. "You could always tell him how you feel about him."

No, she couldn't. Whenever Charlie was around, Evie became the most awkward version of herself, and that was saying a lot. The mix of longing, desire, and excitement she experienced when he was near left her completely flustered. She couldn't even say hi to him in an elevator. She'd freeze up, go silent, and end up staring at him, unblinking, like an oddball.

And yet . . . despite how socially awkward she acted around him, she kept getting some kind of undercurrent of attraction between them, like a spark of electricity. She was sure of it.

Or maybe she just imagined it.

And then there was Wren Baker. Ever present, highly territorial. Whenever Evie tried to work up the courage to ask Charlie if he wanted to get a coffee during his break—*boom!*—Wren would appear out of nowhere and whisk him off.

Evie sighed, wrapping her arms around a pillow. "I don't stand a chance. Wren is Velcroed to Charlie."

"But you don't absolutely, positively know they're a couple. No PDA, right?"

"I hardly think two medical students would show public affection in a hospital setting. But everybody talks like they're a couple. Like Wren-and-Charlie is one word."

“Watercooler gossip,” Darcy said, rolling her eyes. “Personally, I never have understood what you’ve seen in Charlie King.”

Where to start? Charlie was basically the most kindhearted human on this earth. He had remarkable tenderness and patience with patients, even the worst ones. He had this almost superpower to lighten up a serious moment. Then there was his goofiness, like wearing an enormous stick-on mustache when he was on the pediatric ward. Or his crazy patchwork pants. And his humility—so rare among physicians. Unlike most, Charlie never hesitated to ask for assistance when he was in over his head. That’s how Evie had been officially introduced to Charlie—he asked for her help putting an IV into the arm of an elderly woman with nearly invisible veins. What med student ever asked a nurse for help? None!

But Darcy wouldn’t know that side of Charlie—she only knew the Charlie-and-Wren-joined-at-the-hip side.

“He does have a good jawline.”

Evie sighed. “Doesn’t he?”

“Did he really pass *all* his classes?”

“Yes, of course.” Just by a whisker. Evie knew that because Charlie was working on her floor at the hospital when the email came in that he had barely squeaked by with a pass in Human Anatomy and Physiology, the class that had him worried. (In his defense, that class was the most repeated one in medical school, because of the crazy amount of detail to be memorized.) He had let out a whoop, picked up Evie (who *happened* to be standing nearby), and twirled her around.

It was the most wonderful moment of her life. So far.

“Well, here’s one positive,” Darcy said. “If you discover that Wren and Charlie are truly a couple, maybe that will convince you to finally drop your obsession with him.”

“Obsession is a bit much. I’m not obsessed.”

Darcy squinted at her. “Yeah, pretty obsessed.”

“It’s not an obsession. Just a regular, all-American crush.”

“Call it whatever you want. I think this experience will finally help wash that man out of your hair. He’s not *that* cute,” Darcy said. “And he’s definitely not that smart.” Darcy placed a high value on book smarts. The highest.

Evie had a different take on intelligence. She believed in all kinds of smarts, each valuable in its own way. Book smarts opened doors, sure, but fixer smarts—the ability to fix anything—were just as important. And then there were people smarts, which might be the best one of all. That’s where she placed Charlie. He just had a way with people. Charming Charlie.

“Look, I get it,” Darcy said, returning to her task. “Just don’t let Wren Baker get in your head. Focus on why you’re a traveling nurse in the first place. The experience, the adventure, the chance to make a difference. And your contract is only for three months in Stoney Ridge, right? When things don’t pan out with Charlie, you can pack up and move in with me in Alaska. That’s the beauty of our jobs.”

Evie gave her a thanks-for-trying smile.

A sly look came over Darcy. “But who knows what’s waiting for you there in your old-timey village? Maybe you’ll fall madly in love with an Amish farmer.”

Evie pretended to laugh, but she didn’t think it was funny. Darcy was spot-on about one thing. If something didn’t shift in the right direction with Charlie over the next three months, after two solid years of an epic, over-the-top crush on him, then she had to face reality. They weren’t destined for each other the way she’d hoped. And prayed.

But what if they were? What if something radical and unexpected did occur in Stoney Ridge? She wasn’t trying to break up Charlie and Wren, though she didn’t think they were suited for each other. Not at all. But she couldn’t extinguish a hope that they might see that for themselves and go their separate ways . . . and she wanted to be there when that happened.



Be careful what you wish for.

Dok Stoltzfus had heard that saying a million times, but she never truly understood it until the Keystone Medical Residency & Service Program finally answered her plea for more doctors. The KMRSP was a prestigious but under-the-radar program based in rural Pennsylvania, designed for medical school graduates willing to serve in underserved communities in exchange for substantial medical school loan forgiveness. Applying to this program had been her husband Matt's brainstorm. He'd been after Dok to find a partner to share her practice with for months now. She had placed ads in medical journals and contacted colleagues, but she'd had no luck. Not a single bite.

Then, late last summer, she and Matt went on vacation to a medical conference in Harrisburg. Bored, Matt wandered through the vendors' booths and picked up a brochure about the KMRSP. Matt became instant BFFs with the woman who ran the program, Stella Penkowski, and that evening in the hotel even helped Dok fill out the application. As in, he did most of it. Dok added her signature.

Dok had agreed with Matt—bringing in a partner to lighten her workload made sense. But supervising a resident? That felt like a whole different skill set, one she wasn't sure she had. She managed her ADHD well enough when it was just her, but adding someone else to the mix? That required structure, consistency—things she still wrestled with. Procrastination might not rule her life anymore, but it hadn't packed up and left either.

On top of her own shortcomings, she was skeptical about mentoring a graduate while the ink was still drying on their degree. Matt reminded her (several times) that there was a national physician shortage in the country, and she really didn't have any other choices.

There was no response from the KMRSP, and before long, Dok completely forgot about it. So much so that when she received an unexpected email—along with a resume—from a nurse inquiring if Dok might consider her for a traveling nurse position and mentioned her Mennonite roots, Dok picked up the phone that same day and offered her the job on the spot. “I’ll be there as soon as I graduate,” the nurse had said, though Dok couldn’t quite remember if her name was Ellie or Eva.

Why couldn’t Dok’s practice seem to attract anyone with more experience? It was beyond frustrating.

When she arrived at the office this morning, her assistant Annie Fisher reminded her that traveling nurse Evelyn Miller was due to arrive tomorrow.

Seriously? How had that detail slipped off Dok’s radar? Somehow, it did.

Then Annie dug out four pink phone messages buried under paperwork on Dok’s desk and frowned at her. “This woman called again this morning, Dok. Each time, she asks you to return her call. All she’ll tell me is that you’ll know what it’s about.”

Dok had no idea. She didn’t even remember who Stella Penkowski was, not until she called her—then it all came back. Stella told her that her application had not only been approved, but that she was getting *two* spanking-new medical school graduates.

Suspicious by nature, Dok immediately wondered what the catch was. “Why two?”

“Well,” Stella said, “your application indicated you were doing the work of several doctors.”

Dok scowled. That was Matt’s version of her job. While it was true that she took her work seriously, she’d hardly say she was doing the work of *several* doctors. Two, maybe.

“And then there was that news story attached to it.”

Dok cringed. A few months ago, a local TV news station

had done a feature on her called “The Doctor Who Still Makes House Calls.” Apparently, it went viral—whatever that meant. Social media was the last thing on Dok’s mind. But one thing she had become aware of after the feature aired: Her practice had been flooded with new patients and, with it, an increased expectation for house calls. At one point, Annie put a cap on the patient load and insisted on a waiting list.

“Of course,” Stella said, “I’m sure it will be very tempting to offer one of them a full partnership at the completion of the residency.”

That comment snapped Dok right back to the present. “What?!” What all did Matt say in that application?

“Yes. We’ll provide a stipend for housing, but it’ll be up to you to find living arrangements for all three. There are, of course, some minor expectations required of you. Training, mentorship, supervision. I’ll email you a packet of information today.”

Minor expectations? This sounded like a full-time job. Dok was no stranger to the demands of being a chief resident. She’d worked in hospitals for two decades until she finally bought Max Finegold’s practice in Stoney Ridge. And she really, really didn’t think she was cut out to be anyone’s supervisor.

“Well, if that’s all—”

Not so fast. Dok could sense that Stella was ready to wrap up the phone call, but she had a lot more questions. “Tell me what you know about them. Why did they apply to this program?”

“Well, neither of them matched on Match Day. And they’re both deeply in debt.”

“What? They didn’t match?” Dok saw red flags waving in front of her. Most every resident got a match on Match Day, unless . . . “Did they graduate from a legitimate medical school?”

“Of course.”

Dok wanted clarification. “An accredited medical school that is actually *in* the United States.”

“Yes. Penn State College of Medicine.”

Dok let out a sigh of relief. “But they didn’t match? Do you know why?”

“No idea.”

Red flag, red flag. “Well, do you know why they want to work in an underserved area? And do they know anything about the Amish? Because cultural sensitivity is very important. The Amish don’t view health care in the same way that most Americans do.” She hoped Matt had added all that and more in the application. Probably not.

“How’s that? What do you mean?”

“Well, one example is that they don’t try to deny death is coming. They don’t fight beyond a body’s biological end.”

“Hmm, interesting. Well, honestly, I’m not sure what your two know or don’t know.” The sound of a phone rang in the distance. “I’ve got to go. Oh, before I forget, your residents are planning to arrive at the Lancaster train station tomorrow afternoon.”

“No car?”

“No car. You’ll need to arrange a pickup. And room. Not board.”

“Hold it! I have to find housing for them?!” Dok’s voice rose an octave.

“Just room. Not board. Part of the program. You’ll be reimbursed, of course. Best of luck to you! To all of you!” On that cheery note, Stella hung up.

Luck. Dok leaned back in her chair, holding the phone receiver. Luck? She didn’t believe in it. Hard work, determination, resiliency—those were her truths. Growing up Amish, she had seen luck as something devilish, like gambling.

She blew out a puff of air. She didn’t even know if these doctors were men or women. Both? How was she supposed to find housing when she didn’t even know their gender?

She looked out her window and saw her brother David drive

by in his buggy. She let out a happy sigh. She didn't need luck! Not when she had an Amish bishop for a brother.



David Stoltzfus had barely hitched the buggy reins to the post when his sister Ruth pounced on him. "Are you here as a sister or a doctor?" he asked, their usual greeting.

"Both," she said, as always. And then she added something about new doctors showing up on her doorstep tomorrow, with only one day's notice, and how she had no idea where to put them.

David squinted at her. "Put them?" he said, confused.

"House them," Ruth said. "Apparently, I'm responsible for getting them housing."

"Housing? For how long?"

Ruth shrugged. "I didn't think to ask. This whole thing is Matt's idea." She launched into an overly detailed explanation of the Keystone Medical Residency & Service Program, of the applications sent in to Stella Penkowski, of the phone conversation she'd just had with this Stella woman. His sister grew increasingly exasperated as she described each step of the process. "And now I'm suddenly a supervisor to two first-year residents! They're completely inexperienced. Just interns. And David . . . they didn't get *matched*."

He wasn't entirely clear what that might indicate about these two residents, but from the look on her face, it was inauspicious. "And why are there *two* doctors coming?"

"Matt's doing. He thinks it would take two doctors to replace me."

Good thinking, Matt. Next time David saw his brother-in-law, he would have to remember to compliment him. "But . . . you're not retiring, right?"

"No. Absolutely not. Matt's working on a retirement plan, but I'm not on board. He wants to work another two years to

pay off our house, take early retirement, and then he wants us to take some real vacations. All his idea. Not mine.” She shrugged, calmer now. “I mean, a real vacation does sound nice.” A look of longing came over her.

As David listened to his sister’s lengthy rant, it occurred to him how worn-out she looked. Her strawberry-red hair had more white than red in it. Dark circles rimmed her eyes. More wrinkles than he remembered lined her cheeks. He knew she’d been on the search to add a partner to her practice for a while now, but he felt it was a half-hearted hunt. He could see why his brother-in-law had taken the matter into his own hands. “So let me get this straight. You *have* wanted to find a partner. You tried. Yet you haven’t had a single bite. So, with Matt’s prodding, you applied to this program, but no interest. Until today. And thanks to Matt, you’ll be able to choose the best out of two options for a partner.”

Her brow furrowed.

“Is that so bad?”

“Yes. No.” She frowned. “I don’t know.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“You’re missing the point. These two med school grads aren’t qualified yet. They still have to pass their final boards to get licensed. Remember, they didn’t get *matched*. I wouldn’t feel comfortable having them hand out two aspirin without supervision.”

David was sympathetic, but this really wasn’t his problem. He had a full day of problems waiting for him—half with the store, half with the church. The store’s were much easier to solve—delayed shipments, missing boxes, spoiled produce. Annoying but fixable. The church’s were the ones that weighed him down. A beloved father of eight, dying of cancer. A young couple having marital difficulties. One of his ministers was thinking of leaving Stoney Ridge to move to a less expensive area. “Ruth, they’re educated. Now they need experience. Just observing you will be beneficial to them.”

“But how does it help when it means I have to be the one to supervise them? Me! You know how hard it is for me to plan ahead. I thrive on pivoting at a moment’s notice. Somehow, I’ll have to teach them all the basic skills while still keep on top of my practice. You can’t just hand off patients to new residents. Medical students have had very little hands-on experience. They’ve spent most of their time in a classroom or in a morgue with their cadaver—”

David’s eyebrows shot up.

“—or just observing other doctors. I wanted to find a *partner* who can spell me, not brand-new graduates who need constant supervising.”

Fair enough. “So maybe at first you might need to do some hand-holding. But I would think it won’t be long before you have confidence in them. Start small. Give them duties you know they can handle. Like . . .”

Her eyes squinted, like she was starting to buy in. “Like . . . filling out insurance forms.”

David smiled. “Well, um, I guess that’s a place to start. And you can go from there. Give them actual patient experience.” It was past time for the Bent N’ Dent to open, and the graybeards would be arriving for coffee soon, so he gave her a pat on the arm and started to go.

“David, hold on. I need a place for them to live.”

He turned, then tilted his head. “Why do I get the feeling that you’re asking me to solve that problem?”

“Because you know so many people. And because they arrive tomorrow. Maybe you can find a place for just a short period, until they look for their own living arrangements.”

“How long is a short period?”

Ruth let out a puff of air. “I don’t know . . . a few weeks? Just until I can figure out how this is all going to work.”

Still, David hesitated.

“You must know of someone with a spare room or two.

Someone who'd be willing to offer room. See if they'll include board for a reasonable fee. They'll be paid, of course. The program lady said so. Not really sure how much, but I'll find out."

Ruth made it sound easy, but David knew how busy farming families were, especially during the summer. Providing room and board to an English stranger was not a small ask. Decades ago, it would've been unthinkable. But offering hospitality to non-Amish was a more acceptable practice in the last ten years or so.

"I'd have them stay with us, but Matt just demoed our spare bathroom. He needed a project after baby Gabe was . . . well, you know." Her voice drizzled to a stop.

David filled in the rest. After baby Gabe's birth father gained full custody of him. It had been a painful yet poignant chapter in Ruth and Matt's life as foster care parents. For the first time, his sister had talked about slowing down and working less. About having more time for church work, hobbies, interests. More time for Matt too. All good intentions, but in reality, Ruth seemed to be working harder than ever.

"Can you think of anyone? Please, David? I'm really in a bind. What about the Inn at Eagle Hill?"

"I just bumped into Rose last evening, when I was picking up our mail. She said the inn is booked solid through July."

Ruth let out a tired sigh.

David felt himself caving in, like he always did when his only sister needed his help. "Well, maybe Fern Lapp. Luke and Izzy Schrock had to return to Kentucky to help his cousin for a few more months."

Ruth's eyes went wide. "Would you mind asking Fern for me? And did I mention that they arrive tomorrow?" She started backing up, as if the conversation had concluded.

He knew that particular trick. "Ruth . . ."

She started walking faster, still backward. "You know how that saying goes, David. You can't say no to a bishop." She gave

him a five-finger wave and turned around, marching toward her office in that Dok-like way she'd always had, even as a young girl, striding fast like she was being chased.

David blew out a puff of air. Her problem had just become his problem.



This might be the miracle Annie Fisher had been waiting for. She had just finished preparing an exam room for the next patient when she overheard a sort of one-sided whisper-yell conversation drift in through the open crack of Dok's office door. Annie stopped in the hallway, just for a moment, as she heard Dok say something about two new doctors joining the practice tomorrow.

Tomorrow?

Annie wasn't one to eavesdrop. Not like her mother Sally, who had been working at Dok's on Saturdays and reported back everything she overheard in the waiting room, often mixing up names and details. Rumors started. When Sally had been "overcome" with a vague illness in mid-May and had to stop working to recover her health, Dok didn't ask if she planned to return.

Annie was *nothing* like her mother. Complete opposites.

Anyway, so Annie wasn't one to eavesdrop, but Dok's voice had risen quite a few decibels, in that staccato way she had that meant she was not happy. It didn't take long to figure out that Dok was talking to her husband Matt and that he was responsible for the arrival of the nurse and doctors.

If so, Annie wanted to give Matt Lehman a big pat on the back. She knew firsthand how tirelessly Dok worked. The practice had been inundated with patients ever since that TV news story ran. Every single day, Annie had to respond to phone calls of people who begged, literally begged, to see Dok. She had to tell them that Dok couldn't take on any new patients right now,

then apologize profusely, and finally offer to add their names to a long waiting list.

That list felt like a lie. There'd only been one new patient accepted and that was because old Simon Miller had died. Annie felt bad turning prospective patients away, but she had no choice. There was only one Dok to go around.

Until tomorrow. Then there would be two additional doctors in Stoney Ridge. *And* a nurse.

Annie smiled.

Then her smile faded.

How would it work to add two new doctors and a nurse? The office was already cramped. There was only one exam room. Dok had one office. The waiting room was tiny and always full. How could they possibly accommodate more doctors and more patients?

Even though Annie felt a bit anxious, she couldn't ignore the flicker of excitement at the thought of Dok getting some much-needed help. With Annie's final EMT exam to occur in August, she had felt increasingly unsettled to leave Dok's practice. She loved working here. She loved being around Dok. Leaving the practice weighed on her like an overstuffed suitcase she'd been lugging around for weeks. She kept trying—and failing—to find the *perfect* moment to tell Dok. In her mind, she'd have enough time to find the right replacement, help train them, and then start looking for an EMT job. But so far, that perfect moment was playing hard to get. Or maybe she just didn't have the nerve to seize it.

Her very special friend Gus Troyer was eager for her to hand in her resignation and start interviewing—at his fire station. “Tell Dok!” he said often. “She'll understand. She's had plenty of assistants come and go.”

That was exactly why it was so hard for Annie to tell her. Dok invested so much in people, and some assistants took an enormous amount of effort to properly train—the bishop's

daughter Lydie Stoltzfus, for example. Annie had replaced Lydie and spent months reorganizing her confusing work system. Sometimes, she thought that Dok did more for Lydie during her tenure than Lydie did for Dok.

But she did appreciate Gus's consistent enthusiasm for her becoming an EMT, especially as her mother kept trying to change Annie's mind.

Annie knew that Gus had more on his mind than the finishing of the EMT course. He was eager to start courting Annie. And she was just as eager. But they had an agreement to remain "just friends" until she finished her EMT course, to avoid becoming distracted. Gus had not only respected her request to remain "just friends" but even offered to tutor her in the EMT classes. It was no wonder she thought of him as Mr. Wonderful.

Becoming an EMT was extremely important to Annie. She had felt a calling from the Lord to the work, but that didn't mean it was easy. Dok had to step in—not only to get the bishop on board but also to convince her parents.

Dok's voice on the telephone grew so loud that Annie didn't need to feel guilty about overhearing the private phone conversation. Everyone in the waiting room could hear her. Dok asked Matt how he'd like it if she came down to the police station and gave everyone advice about how to do their job?

Poor Matt. He might have meant well, but he was in the doghouse. Husband-wise.

Quietly, Annie returned to her desk in the waiting room. When she'd prayed for a way to resign without leaving Dok in a bind, she never imagined Heaven's answer would be sending not one but two doctors and a nurse.

A big smile spread across her face. *Ask and ye shall receive*, right?