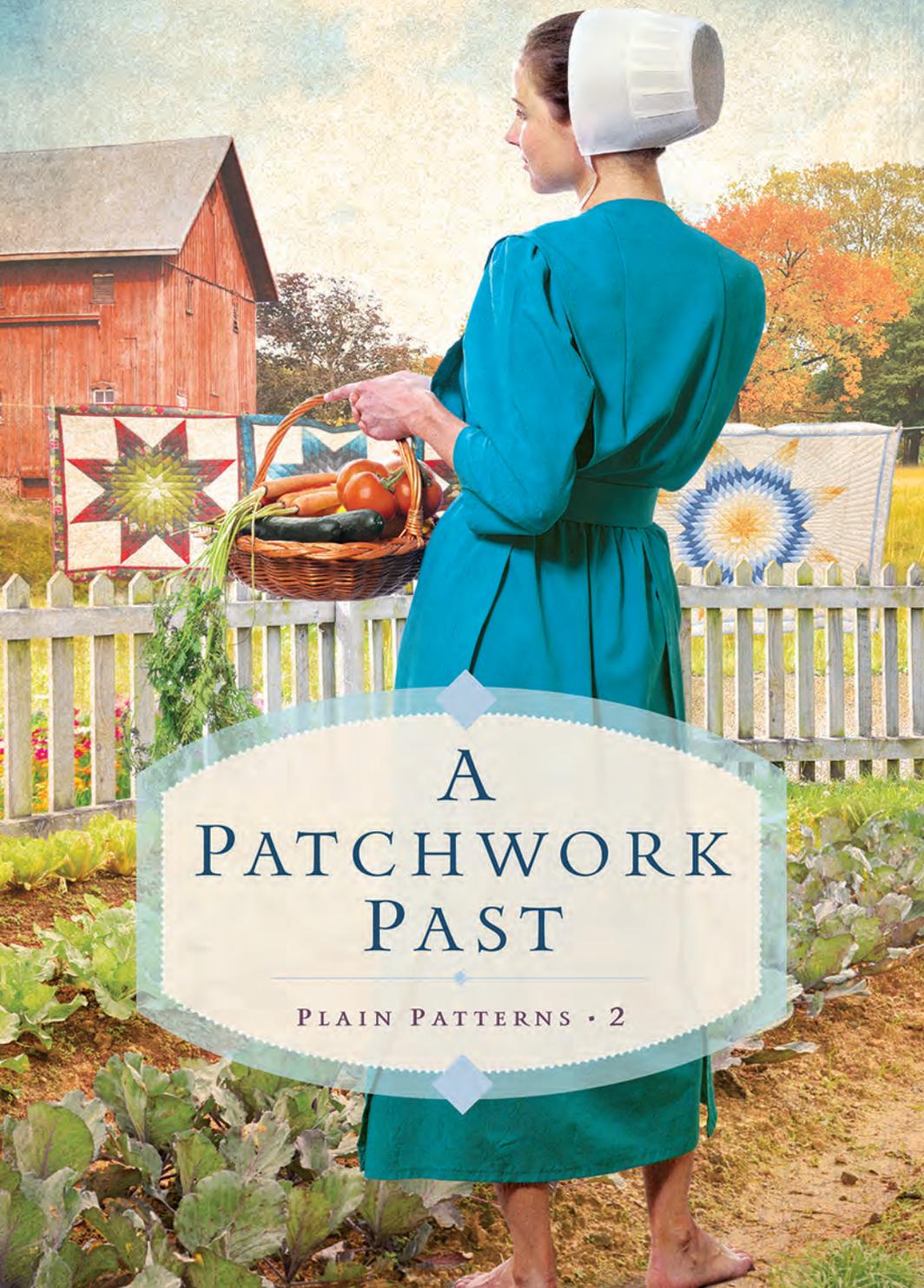


LESLIE GOULD



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PATCHWORK  
PAST

PLAIN PATTERNS • 2



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BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gould, Leslie, author.

Title: A patchwork past / Leslie Gould.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, [2021] | Series: Plain patterns ; 2

Identifiers: LCCN 2020046126 | ISBN 9780764235238 (trade paper) | ISBN 9780764238147 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493429967 (ebook)

Subjects: GSAFD: Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3607.O89 P38 2021 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020046126>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Cover design by Dan Thornberg, Design Source Creative Services

Author represented by Natasha Kern Literary Agency

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In memory of my mother,  
Leora Houston Egger.  
A woman who was always of good cheer  
and knew, without question,  
that Christ overcame the world.

*These things I have spoken unto you, that  
in me ye might have peace. In the world ye  
shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer;  
I have overcome the world.*

*John 16:33*

## PROLOGUE

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◆

# *Jane Berger*

*August 25, 2017*

*Nappanee, Indiana*

**F**ive months ago, planting a large garden on the property of Plain Patterns seemed like a good idea to Jane Berger. But as she stood in the middle of it now, a basket on her arm, she wasn't so sure.

She still had her monthly historical column to write for the *Nappanee News*. She'd finished and mailed the one for September, but now she needed a topic for October. Between her writing, running her quilt shop, and trying to find time for her gardening, she was feeling overwhelmed.

She'd made watering a priority, but she couldn't keep up with the weeds. And now she couldn't keep up with the produce either. Spinach had bolted, fallen tomatoes were rotting on the ground, and zucchinis had grown into the size of baseball bats. Six months ago, she'd imagined hosting preserving classes in the kitchen area of the quilt shop. She'd hoped they'd draw

more English customers to Plain Patterns. Maybe they'd be interested in quilting too.

She'd also imagined the quilters sharing the produce with neighbors and kin. Miriam, the young single mother who was living with her, had planned to set up a vegetable stand on the highway to sell the produce. However, her three-month-old son was taking up all her time.

At this point, Jane doubted she could pay people—let alone charge them—to take away the produce.

Today, before the quilting circle began, she'd concentrate on picking what was ripe and hope someone from the circle without a garden would take some of it home.

She began with the cucumbers, twisting one after another off the vines. As much as she worried about the garden, she had more pressing matters to be concerned about—Miriam and baby Owen, to start with. None of them had gotten a full night of sleep since the little one had been born. She didn't regret having Miriam and Owen live with her, but she'd underestimated how much help Miriam would need. More so, she'd underestimated how much work a newborn was. She'd never married and never had children of her own, but she'd been active in the lives of her nieces and nephews—just not in the middle of the night.

She yawned as she transferred the cucumbers into a cardboard box on the grass. After swiping the back of her gloved hand across her forehead, she started in on the beans, dropping them into her basket. It was only seven in the morning and already growing warm. It would be another scorcher of a day. She reached the end of the row of beans and then dumped the basketful into another box.

She stepped back into the garden, through the weeds. She had to find some help. Her great-niece whom she'd hired to

weed at the beginning of the summer had taken a job as a mother's helper last month. How could the weeds have grown so much since then?

Jane stepped over to the zucchinis and began pulling the medium-sized ones—perfect to be stuffed with meat and rice and then baked—from the vines. The large ones could be grated for zucchini bread. The smaller ones were better for stir-frying.

She paused for a moment and straightened her back, thinking again of a topic for her October column. She had a vague memory of her great-grandfather, *Gross Dawdi Vyt*, telling her a story. It had to do with a long drought. She yawned again. If only she wasn't so sleep deprived. She shook her head, as if she could clear the fog in her brain.

Gross Dawdi Vyt had been born in February 1865, right before the Civil War ended. He'd lived to be ninety-eight, dying when Jane was eleven. He'd been lucid until the end, frequently telling stories from his childhood. Jane had loved sitting at his feet, soaking up his every word. She attributed her love of history to him. By the time she was ten, she'd started writing down some of his stories.

He had two children, a son who'd died in 1918 and Jane's grandmother, Katie. She and her husband inherited the Landis farm and then passed it down to Jane's father.

As Jane bent down to pick the next zucchini, the growing heat of the morning sun rippled up her back and the thought of a fire startled her. She inhaled sharply. Dawdi Vyt had told her about the Great Chicago Fire. Members of his family had been in the city the day the fire broke out.

She stood up straight and tried to remember his story. But she couldn't recall the details, not even what year the fire occurred. It was definitely in the 1800s. Maybe the 1880s? Had she written down what he'd told her about the Chicago Fire?

Could she trust the notes of a child? Or was that story, like so many others, now lost forever?

She finished filling the basket with zucchini and carried it into Plain Patterns, placing it on the table by the door. Then she returned to the garden for the cucumbers. She felt a twinge in her back as she lifted the heavy box. Her age—sixty-four—was catching up with her. She took a last look at the garden. She'd hardly made a dent in picking the ripe produce, and she hadn't weeded at all. She'd come back out after supper to do that.

After she took off her gloves and washed her hands, Jane walked through the inside of the shop, closing the windows and pulling the shades, hoping to keep it cool as long as possible. Then she started to tidy up, which she'd been too tired to do the evening before, putting away bolts of fabric, straightening the thread display, returning patterns that customers had left out on shelves, and straightening the display quilts.

Each year her shop grew busier. More and more tourists were finding their way to Plain Patterns, along with both her regular Amish and English customers. She delighted in every single person who entered her shop, even the rushed tourists trying to get to their next destination as soon as possible, but she especially loved the women who were part of her quilting circle. Phyllis and Betty. Arleta, who was Miriam's mother. Regina Smucker, who was confined to a wheelchair, and her daughter, Tally. Catherine, the bishop's wife. And Dorothy and her granddaughter, Savannah, who had moved to Nappanee last winter.

There was a comradery among the women that encouraged Jane. All were very different, and yet they supported and loved one another. All had some sort of heartache. Arleta had lost her first husband. Savannah's fiancé had dumped her the week before their wedding. Catherine's youngest daughter, Sophie, had left the Amish and now lived in Elkhart. Sadly, Catherine

wouldn't talk about her at all, sharing about her five older children and fourteen grandchildren instead.

*Jah*, each woman had some sort of heartache in her life.

Once Jane had everything in place, she sat down at her desk at the back of the shop. In front of her was her trusty typewriter. But it wasn't time to start writing yet. It was time to do some research.

On her bookshelf was a set of encyclopedias. She took out *C* for Chicago and quickly skimmed until she found the entry for the Chicago Fire. It had started on October 8, 1871. Why in the world would any of her ancestors have been in Chicago in 1871? It was one hundred miles from Nappanee, a town that didn't even exist in 1871. It wasn't until 1874 that the train came through and the town was developed. Of course, they could have taken the train from Elkhart. But why would they? What business would Amish farmers have had in Chicago?

This coming October would be a great month to feature a column on the fire. But as she quickly did the math, she realized that the fire was 146 years ago. Should she wait four more years and write it then?

She remembered her editor had told her to "never hoard a story." She might not even be writing for the newspaper in another four years. If she didn't tell the story now, she might not have another chance.

But first she had to figure out if she even *had* a story. Had one or more of her relatives really been in Chicago at the time of the fire? Had there been a connection between the people in the area that was now Nappanee with people in Chicago? She felt an ache in her heart for Gross Dawdi Vyt, and for her *Mammi* Katie too.

She opened the bottom drawer of her desk and took out the notebook that held her grandfather's stories, ones that she'd

written in her childish hand. But before she opened the notebook, she stopped, folded her hands, and closed her eyes. She prayed the Lord would see to her needs concerning the garden and to guide her as she researched and wrote her next story. And then she prayed for the women who came into the shop.

There was someone specific who needed to be cared for. Perhaps someone besides Miriam. Perhaps someone who was struggling right now—someone Jane wasn't even aware of yet. She prayed, in the midst of her exhaustion and own problems, that the Lord would open her heart—and her story—to minister to a woman who needed it most.

## CHAPTER 1

# *Sophie Deiner*

*August 25, 2017*

The doctor, an older woman with short gray hair, stepped into the office and extended her hand. “Hello, I’m Cassie Jones.”

I shook her hand. “Sophie Deiner.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Dr. Jones said. “I’m taking over your case.”

I nodded. The receptionist had informed me of that when I’d checked in. My last rheumatologist had taken a job at the Mayo Clinic and had left a month before, just in time to miss my latest flare-up.

“Tell me about yourself.” Dr. Jones sat down on the swivel stool but didn’t turn toward the computer.

“I was diagnosed two years ago . . .” I paused.

She nodded.

“My last flare-up, before this one, was eleven months ago.”

She nodded again. Perhaps she'd actually read my chart. "Any fatigue? Have you been running a fever?"

"Yes and yes."

"Hair loss?"

"Some." Although I had so much hair that to lose some wasn't noticeable, or at least that was what my friends told me.

She peered at me closely. "How about a rash?"

"I haven't had one this time. Mostly I'm just exhausted, and I'm having a lot of joint pain, primarily in my wrists and knees. Some in my fingers."

"Tell me about how you spend your time."

"I work at the co-op," I answered. "And I'm also involved in overseeing the community garden up at Union Park."

"How physically demanding is your work?"

I stifled a yawn. "Both are definitely physical. Unloading crates of vegetables. Weeding and watering at the garden. That sort of work. But nothing too strenuous. Weeding has exacerbated the pain in my hands, though."

"Activity is good as long as it's not exhausting." She asked me a few more questions and then said, "Your blood test shows you're in the early stages of lupus nephritis."

My heart began to pound. Inflammation of the kidneys. I knew that was a possibility but didn't expect it, at least not so soon.

"Diet and exercise are two of the most important treatments. Walking, swimming, and yoga can all help. Avoiding sodium and processed foods can too. We'll try you on a new immunosuppressant drug and also a prescription to protect your kidneys."

I nodded numbly.

"Can you take time off work and have someone take care of you?"

I shook my head. I lived in a house with four other girls. I had rent and bills to pay. I could barely afford my life as it was.

I stifled another yawn. My roommates had been up half the night playing beer pong in the living room, so I'd hardly slept the night before.

"What about family?"

"Pardon?"

"What about family?" Dr. Jones asked. "Can they help you?"

I shook my head.

"No family?"

I sighed. "I do have family. I just don't have a relationship with them."

Her dark eyes met mine. "Did you grow up Plain?"

"Why do you ask?"

She shrugged. "Your last name is *Deiner*. You speak with a bit of an accent."

I'd hoped my accent wasn't obvious anymore. Apparently it was.

"Amish or Mennonite?" she asked.

"Amish."

"When did you leave?"

"Three years ago."

Her expression filled with kindness. "When you were only nineteen?"

I nodded.

"I grew up conservative Mennonite." She leaned forward a little. "When I left to go to college, most everyone thought I'd left to go to hell."

I could empathize but didn't say anything.

"I don't know why you left your community, although I could make a guess from your chart."

Again, I didn't respond.

She smiled a little. “It seems like going back might not be best for you.”

I nodded.

For the first time during the appointment, she turned toward the computer. “I’ll send in your prescriptions. And I want you to come see me in about a week.”

“That’s a little soon, isn’t it?”

She swiveled back toward me. “It’s imperative that you take this seriously. If the lupus nephritis continues, you will probably need chemotherapy sooner rather than later. And eventually, you may need to go on dialysis.” Her eyes were kind but serious. “Take time off work. Rest. Exercise. Watch your diet. That’s what you need to concentrate on for the next two weeks, at least.”

I hesitated. She’d grown up conservative Mennonite. She’d guessed at my past. She seemed to want to trust me to take care of myself. “I’ll take another look at my budget, see if I can cover rent this month if I take time off work.”

“Good. Call if you’re not feeling better in a couple of days,” she said. “Call immediately if you’re feeling worse.”

“I will.” I stopped myself from jumping off the table and running from the room. I needed to be back at work at the co-op ASAP and then at the community garden by five. Gardening counted as exercise, right? And the vegetables I grew kept me from eating processed food. Those were both good things, right in line with what the doctor had just prescribed.

Dr. Jones held up her hand. “Don’t go yet. I think an injection is in order, as long as you don’t overdo it just because you’re feeling better.” She extended her hand. “It’s been a delight to meet you, Sophie. I look forward to seeing you again in a week or so.” She seemed so caring, so empathetic. I was more than an interesting case study to her.

Tears stung my eyes. “*Denki*,” I managed to say as Dr. Jones left the room.

I WORKED in the produce department at the co-op and was an expert at displaying the produce so it moved quickly out the door, at training customers on how to pick a ripe watermelon, and at sharing tasty recipes to entice people to try fruits and vegetables they might not otherwise buy. *Waste not, want not* was what *Mamm* always said to me, and that was one of my goals when it came to the produce at the store. And if I failed to sell as much as I possibly could, I whisked nearly overripe items out the door and to the downtown shelter while they were still salvageable.

I’d come straight to the co-op after the doctor’s appointment, and now I had fifteen minutes left on my shift. It couldn’t end soon enough. I felt a little off. A little nauseous. A little lightheaded. More than the constant fatigue I’d been working through.

Maybe it was because of my rough night. In the middle of the beer pong game, my roommate Bri’s boyfriend, Mitch, showed up. His voice boomed through the entire house. Bri giggled and said, “Shh. Sophie’s trying to sleep.” For half a second his voice fell to a normal level, but then grew louder again with each word until, even with my pillow over my head, it felt as if he was shouting above my bed.

Besides Bri, I shared the house with three other women. Haley was a social worker, Paige waited tables at a restaurant downtown, and Ivy was a dispatcher for the Elkhart County Sheriff’s Office. I had heard all their voices, at one time or another, throughout the night.

And once I finally did fall asleep, I woke in a panic. I'd been dreaming about Lyle.

I took a deep breath, trying to rid myself of my dizziness and my thoughts of the night before.

I started to stock the blueberries. As I did, Mr. Immigration Lawyer stopped near me, in front of the eggplants. He had dark curly hair and big brown eyes. He always wore a suit, usually a little wrinkled. Today his blue tie appeared as wilted as week-old spinach.

One of the women at the community garden had pointed him out one day as he walked by. She was an Iraqi refugee and said he'd been her oldest son's lawyer.

I'd given her a questioning look. "Why did your son need a lawyer?"

She'd laughed and said, "Immigration, of course." She'd turned toward the man and called, "Hi, Mr. Jasper!"

He'd turned around, a befuddled look on his face, but then brightened and called back, "Nadine, how are you?"

"Wonderful!"

He'd strolled toward the fence. He was young, maybe in his late twenties. "How are your kids?" Their conversation was friendly and brief.

After that, I had thought of him as *Mr. Immigration Lawyer* or *Mr. Jasper*, although I had no idea if Jasper was his first or last name. When Nadine rejoined me in the garden, she explained how he'd spoken at a meeting she attended for refugees and then soon after took on her son's case. Mr. Jasper had also helped a couple of her friends who needed a lawyer, and he'd given her oldest son good advice to help him adjust to life in America. Nadine went on and on about the man.

He was a regular at the co-op, but he was earlier today than

usual. And typically he headed straight to the deli, avoiding the produce altogether.

“May I help you?” I braced myself against the table.

“I need an eggplant.” He pointed toward them. “Are all of these good?”

“Yes.” I took a step closer and picked up one. “You want one that’s firm and shiny.” I flipped it over, examining it. “And free from cuts or blemishes.” I pressed my thumb against it. “See how the flesh springs back? That means it’s good.”

He nodded seriously. “Thank you,” he said, taking it from my hand.

“New recipe?”

He shook his head. “I’m using it as an object lesson in court on Monday.”

“I see.” I didn’t, though. Why did it matter if it was good if he didn’t plan to eat it? I watched as he strode to the back of the store, toward the deli.

“There goes Mr. Cute Suit,” Bri said. Besides being one of my roommates, she also was a co-worker.

I smiled. “You mean Mr. Immigration Lawyer.”

She cocked her head. “Really? He’s a lawyer?”

I nodded.

“So, he’s rich?”

I wrinkled my nose. “I think you’re thinking of a corporate lawyer.”

“Then he could be rich if he switched jobs?”

“Maybe.” I shuffled back to the blueberries. My fingers ached from the repetitive motion of stocking the tables, and my knees hurt too. I pulled my phone from my apron. Eight minutes until quitting time.

The next thing I knew, Mr. Immigration Lawyer’s face was much too close to mine.

“Are you all right? Can you hear me?” He turned to Bri, whose face swam into view. “Call 9-1-1.”

“No, I’m fine.” I realized I was flat on the floor and started to sit up, but then the ceiling started to tilt.

“Give yourself a minute,” Mr. Jasper said.

“I’m probably just dehydrated.” Had I had anything to drink with lunch? Did I even eat? I’d gone to the doctor over my break and couldn’t remember getting anything to eat before I resumed my shift.

Hopefully that was what was wrong. But what if one of my kidneys was failing?

“Sophie, do you want me to call for an ambulance?” Bri asked, holding her phone up.

“Yes,” Mr. Jasper said at the same time that I responded, rather forcefully, “Definitely not. I can’t afford it.”

His eyes softened. After a long pause, he said, “How about a bottle of water? And a granola bar.”

“I’ll get something.” Bri disappeared.

A crowd had gathered, and Mr. Jasper waved them all away. “Give her some room.” He stood so that he was positioned in front of me. I managed to sit up and scoot against the berry table, ducking my head under the overhang, hoping no one would notice me.

Our manager, Don, followed Bri back. She bent down and handed me the water and then a chocolate muffin, saying, “I thought this might be easier to eat.”

“Denki,” I said.

She laughed. “What?”

“I mean, thank you.” I took the water and drank half of it in a long swig. Why had I spoken in Pennsylvania Dutch? Maybe something was wrong with my brain.

“I called 9-1-1,” Don said.

I groaned. “Call them back. I don’t need an ambulance. I just went to the doctor this afternoon.”

He frowned. He was worried about liability most likely.

“I’m fine,” I said. “Really.”

The manager looked at Mr. Jasper, who shrugged and said, “You can have them check you out—blood pressure and whatnot—and then refuse to be transferred.”

Bri whispered, rather loudly, to Don, “She has lupus.”

“Which is why I was just at the doctor.” I glared at Bri. “Please, I don’t want to be checked out. I’m fine. I just need to rest.”

“Okay,” Don said warily. “But you shouldn’t drive home.”

“I get off at five too,” Bri said. “I can take her.”

“Cool.” Don took a step backward. “I’ll wait outside for the ambulance and let them know they’re not needed.”

Mr. Jasper met my gaze. “What else can I do to help you?” His eyes were bright.

“Nothing,” I said. “But thank you.”

He smiled kindly and then walked away.

BRI WASN’T USUALLY VERY FIRM, but no matter how much I begged, she wouldn’t take me to the community garden. “Don would be upset,” she said. “I promised to take you home.”

“But no one will do the watering.”

“I’m taking you home, where you are going to get something to eat and rest.” Her voice was full of conviction.

After I ate leftover vegetarian lasagna and drank two full glasses of water, I sprawled on the couch and scrolled through social media for fifteen minutes in a blatant attempt to escape

my fears. Should I call the doctor? Were my kidneys worse than she thought?

But then Mitch arrived and distracted me. I liked him well enough, but I didn't like the fact he didn't know how to use an inside voice.

"Sophie!" he boomed. "How's it going?"

"All right." I sank back against the cushions.

"She's not all right," Bri said. "She fainted at work today."

"Oh." Mitch took a step back. "Do you have something contagious?"

I shook my head. "Absolutely not. You're safe as can be."

He smiled and then boomed, "Well, I hope you'll feel better soon."

After they left, I felt a little better. Maybe it was just the quiet or the fact I had some food in my system. Or maybe the injection was kicking in.

Whatever it was, it wouldn't hurt to go to the community garden. I liked my job, but I loved working in the garden. My Amish upbringing had served me well when it came to coaxing seeds to germinate into plants and then to bear fruit or vegetables. Growing up, I begged to work outside instead of cooking, cleaning, or doing the wash. Mamm liked working in the garden best too, so when my older sisters left home, I ended up working in the house far more than I wanted to.

But now I could garden all I wanted. As long as my health cooperated.

I walked back to the co-op, got my car, drove up the hill, and parked.

I slowed my pace once I was on the pathway to the garden. The lavender, purple, and orange dahlias bloomed in the bed that bordered the garden fence. On the west end of the garden, the rows of sunflowers swayed slightly in the evening breeze. In

between the dahlias and the sunflowers were rows and rows of raised beds, with plots assigned to a person or family.

When I reached the gate, I caught sight of Nadine and her thirteen-year-old daughter, Yani, who were working in their plot.

“Sophie!” Yani said, tugging on her hijab as she spoke. “You’re late.”

“Better later than never,” I called back.

“What?”

“It’s an expression.”

“Ah, an idiom.” Nadine grinned.

Was it an idiom? I wasn’t sure. She was probably right. Nadine, who had studied English in Iraq and continued to take classes now, knew the parts of speech better than I did.

“How is your okra coming along?”

“Better.” Nadine pulled some bulbs of garlic from the ground. Her family had four of the raised plots, one that included rows of herbs—sage, mint, cilantro, parsley, and thyme. Then cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, peas, onions, spinach, okra, and beets. Gardening, I’d come to realize, was a universal language.

But it never ceased to amaze me how we could grow the same ingredients and come up with vastly different dishes. Ingredients were like musical notes or the letters of the alphabet. The possible combinations were endless.

Nadine had brought me beet soup with spinach one time. It also had split peas, lime juice, cinnamon, and cilantro in it. Never in a million years would I, or anyone else who grew up Amish, combine those ingredients. But it was absolutely delicious.

The food was just the beginning of my connection to Nadine and her family. We’d all arrived in Elkhart around the same

time and met at the community garden about six months later. Nadine invited me for tea at their sparsely furnished apartment not long after we met. Over fruit, date-filled pastries, and the strongest tea I'd ever had, we talked about our pasts.

Nadine was the widow of an Iraqi professor who had been murdered, along with her two youngest children and driver. After a two-year vetting process, Nadine and her two middle children had received refugee visas to the United States, but her oldest child, Mo, was twenty-one and had to apply and be vetted all over again. At his insistence, Nadine had to make the impossible choice to leave without him and hope he could get out later. At the time I met her, Mo was still in Iraq, in hiding. Thanks to Mr. Jasper, Mo finally made it to Indiana.

After Nadine had finished telling me the story, she asked if I would look at a piece of mail for her. The envelope, which had *Important* stamped across it in red letters, confused her. It turned out to be a credit card application.

Puzzled, she asked, "So I don't need to do anything?"

I assured her she didn't. "It's junk mail."

"Junk?" Obviously that was a new word for her, most likely one not covered in her English classes.

"It's unnecessary," I said. "Advertising, essentially."

"But it says *Important*."

I nodded. "It's just a trick to get you to open it."

She rolled her eyes and shook her head, letting me know she understood.

As soon as I'd left her apartment, I'd gone straight to the library and checked out some books. Because of what the Awad family went through, I ended up educating myself about refugees, and then some about immigration to the US in general too. I'd also read about the recent reduction of refugees allowed to come to our country, even from places where the US had

contributed to thousands and thousands of displaced people through years of war.

Another time, as Nadine and I weeded among the rows at the community garden, she shared her worries for her children. Yani was eleven at the time, and her second-oldest son, Zamir, was eighteen. Would they be influenced by the negative aspects of American culture? Was Yani safe walking home alone? Would she want to stop wearing her hijab? How could Nadine continue to teach her children the values of their culture in this new world?

I listened, realizing her fears were the same as my Amish parents, and that in many ways, I identified with Yani. I too had grown up wearing a head covering and feeling different around English teenagers. But I had been around other Amish girls in the same situation, while Yani was very much in the minority in Elkhart.

I didn't have answers for Nadine, except to encourage her to keep instructing her children—and to listen to them, no matter what they had to say.

I knew Nadine had financial worries too. They'd had a housing allowance for four months to give them time to find jobs and get settled, but by the fifth month, they were on their own. Nadine, who had a degree from the University of Baghdad, found a part-time housekeeping job at the hospital, and Zamir found a job at a fast-food restaurant. Their incomes barely covered their expenses. I made sure they knew about the food pantries in town, but they didn't have a car then and had to take the bus. When I could, I gave Nadine rides.

She often thanked me for my friendship, for how I'd helped her. But the truth was, she'd done as much for me, if not more. She'd expanded my small world by showing me an entirely different culture. She had helped me see my own upbringing more

clearly and helped me understand the worries my parents had for me. And above all, she'd made a connection with me when I truly needed a friend.

With the garlic still in her hand, Nadine touched my shoulder, redirecting my attention back to the garden. "Are you weeding tonight?"

I shook my head. "Just watering." When people were out of town, I often watered their plots for them, especially if rain wasn't in the forecast. "I can't stay long."

"Oh?" Yani grinned. "Do you have a hot date tonight?"

Nadine smiled too. It was amazing what Yani had picked up in such a short time.

I laughed and just shook my head.

As I watered along the north side of the garden, a figure appeared on the sidewalk.

"Mr. Jasper!" Nadine yelled. "Hello!"

Mortified, I continued watering but turned my back to him. A wave of dizziness swept over me at the sudden movement. I certainly didn't want to faint in front of him again.

"Nadine!" Mr. Jasper yelled. "How are you? What are you harvesting today?"

I stepped to the far fence and lowered myself to the ground, tossing the hose behind me into a patch of corn.

Nadine and Mr. Jasper kept talking. "My eggplants are coming on."

"Eggplants? I just bought one today."

"I'll give you a basketful in a few weeks," Nadine said. "I wasn't sure if the weather would be warm enough, so I started the seeds inside. This hot stretch has helped."

"Fascinating," he said. "I grew up in the city. That's why I always walk by here. The garden is so peaceful."

I imagined Nadine's face beaming with joy. She had the kind

of adoration for Mr. Jasper that other women had for their OB doctor or midwife. It was as if he'd birthed her son into this Midwest town of fifty thousand people and made her family as whole as it could be again. She would be eternally grateful to Mr. Jasper for taking on her oldest son's case, preparing the paperwork and appealing to state senators and INS. He had played a huge role in getting Mo to the US and reuniting Nadine's family, at least what was left of it.

After a few minutes of conversation between the three of them, Mr. Jasper said, "Good to see you again, Nadine. And you too, Yani. Tell Zamir and Mo I said hello." Nadine's sons were now twenty-four and twenty-one. Both worked at the RV manufacturing plant outside of Elkhart.

A minute later, Yani called out, "Sophie! Where are you?"

I winced, hoping Mr. Jasper was farther down the street by now. He probably wouldn't remember my name, anyway. I grabbed the fence and started to pull myself up. But another wave of dizziness swept through me.

I waited a minute, my thoughts falling on what I'd read about kidney failure. When I was first diagnosed with lupus, I was determined to beat it. It took me a few months to realize that was impossible. I had to learn how to manage it. It seemed I hadn't been doing a very good job of it lately.

"Sophie?"

I grabbed the hose and then pulled myself up with my other hand. "Over here."

Nadine and Yani both started toward me. "Are you feeling okay?" Nadine asked. "You are pale."

"I think I better go home."

"To your mother's place?" Nadine had been dumbfounded that I was a single woman living away from my parents.

I shook my head as I handed her the hose. "I know this is

a lot to ask, but would you mind finishing the watering? And could you and Yani do it for the next two weeks or so, along with the weeding? But if you can't, I—”

“No problem,” Nadine said, pointing the hose toward a group of blueberry bushes. “We are happy to help.” She grinned. “No reason to beat around the bush.”

I couldn't help but smile. Not only did she understand idioms, but she could use them too. Maybe not perfectly, but almost.