

# The Strange Visitor

A short story by Jerry S. Eicher

*When an outsider visits the Fraserwood Amish community, he discovers some surprising insights into the simple way of life. Dan Ludwig is convinced he knows and understands the Plain people and their way of life. But how accurate are an outsider's impressions?*

“Just think, Susie,” Beth was saying as she scrubbed the kitchen floor, “Fred will be here now for this weekend. He let us know some time back that he will be off this week from his school teaching.”

“Look, Beth,” Susie half-turned from the kitchen sink toward her older sister, “I know that you like our brother Fred, but that is not the only reason you are happy. You always get happy as weekends come around.”

Beth wondered if she should be ashamed of herself, but she rallied. “I guess I do, but why should I not? We work all week, hard you know, and weekends are a time to, well, to see other people and go to church.”

“Yes, go to church.” Susie gave her a sly grin. “Now is that not fun? Sing the old songs of the forefathers, wait for the preachers to come back in, listen to sermons. Yes, Beth, I can see why you are happy.”

Beth was shocked a little by her sister's comments. “We should be so thankful that we can go to church. Our forefathers did not have this freedom. Look at the freedom we have! Many in the persecuted church still do not have this opportunity to gather like we can. We are a blessed people.”

“Yes, church is a privilege,” Susie acknowledged. “And you know I would not have it any other way than being Amish. But you know what I really mean. You just want to see the boys.”

“I do not,” Beth protested. “I don’t care about the boys at all. Why, who is there around here that I would even care about?”

“You do have a point, but I think you still like them.” Susie’s sly grin returned. “Don’t you ever imagine that the motley bunch we have around here might be someone else? Like maybe Henry Zook’s nose would be straight and he would not smell like the cows he milks? Just think what Mose Mast would look like if he walked straight and quit twitching nervously when he looks at you? Don’t you ever think, Beth, of what a man, a *real* man, must look like?”

Beth just stared at her sister, her cheeks blushing.

“The color of your face tells me everything,” Susie smiled. “I am glad you own up to it. You scare me sometimes.”

The hired driver pulled into the driveway at 8:30 p.m. The sun had set, its last light still lingering in the late Ontario fall sky as Beth and Susie came to watch by the kitchen window.

Their parents, Peter and Annie Stoltzfus, went out to meet the car. Fred came out and walked over to shake hands with his parents standing at the end of the walk.

“How do you do, Son?” Peter asked.

“Just fine,” Fred replied. They exchanged warm pleasantries, as their relationship was close.

Behind Fred, to everyone's surprise, the other car door opened. The man who was getting out didn't emerge the most gracefully, but he landed with his feet properly placed. When he stood, the girls noticed his clothes were not fancy, nor did they look high-priced. They were plain, in fact—a black overcoat with black pants and a light-colored shirt without designs or markings. His clothes had a remarkably well-kept look and they exuded confidence, as if they possessed a life of their own. His face was sharply chiseled and yet looked fresh, as if the owner had seen many parts of the world and yet still believed. He smiled easily and walked with a grace that almost lent itself to a bow as he moved toward Peter, Annie, and Fred at the end of the sidewalk.

Beth and Susie looked at each other. Neither of them spoke a word, but they did not need to. The air between them already spoke their thoughts: *a man*.

"This is Dan, Mom—Dan Ludwig," Fred introduced his friend. "He is staying with me now at the trailer near the schoolhouse. He was studying for the Catholic priesthood. We just decided he would come along for the weekend."

"Well, of course, you are most welcome." Both Peter and Annie extended their hands with smiles. Any friend of their son was welcome in their home.

"Now that we are settled in the new house there is plenty of room," Annie informed Dan. "Fred can have his own room this weekend, and we still have a spare one for you."

"This is most kind of all of you." Dan's words were crisp and precise. It was plain that he was an educated man. Then, to the surprise of Peter and Annie, he switched to the Amish dialect. He pronounced the Amish words in the same careful and exact way he had the English. The result sounded strange. Each area of the Amish world has its slightly

different version and accent of the dialect, but this was something different still. Dan Ludwig spoke as if he had learned to speak on purpose, as if in trying too hard to get it right he left out the slurs and mumbles of the native speaker.

“You are welcome,” Peter said, looking at his wife. Together they thought it: This was a man they were glad to have as a friend of their son.

“So, you are studying for the Catholic priesthood?” Annie asked.

“I was. I think I have decided on another course, though,” Dan said. “My background is non-Amish. I came into contact with the Amish around the area where Fred is teaching school and became interested in joining the plain people. Sounds kind of out there to some, perhaps. I have come to understand that the Amish do not have many outside converts.”

“That is sadly true,” Peter shook his head slightly. “Not many people join, mainly, I think, because we do not try to evangelize. I am an Amish person who believes that we have much to offer the world and that we should be more open with offering it.”

“Not everyone shares that opinion,” Fred spoke up. “In fact, most Amish, including our bishop, think that we need to keep ourselves free from any influence the world might bring in by evangelization.”

“I will leave those arguments to those of you who know,” Dan said. “As for myself, I am just glad that you do accept outside converts. I find myself strongly drawn to your lifestyle and Christian witness. I still have several years left in my training at seminary, but it seems to me that I may be better able to live out my desire for a deeply committed Christian life in the Amish community instead of the Catholic priesthood. There is much of the Catholic life that is segregated between the religious and the secular.

From what I have seen of the Amish, they try to blend the two together.”

Peter smiled slightly around the corners of his mouth. “You are an insightful young man. We will see if we can talk some more about this later. In the meantime, supper is waiting.”

Beth and Susie left the window and were standing by the door waiting. They had heard the conversation out by the end of the walk.

“A real live Catholic priest,” Susie whispered. “Is that as bad as it sounds?”

“That’s not bad at all—that sounds exciting.”

“You know, Beth,” Susie sighed, “I just give up. You are so hopeless. Makes one wonder about your upbringing.”

“But we don’t know if he is really as bad as you make it sound,” Beth countered. “Just think, a real live Catholic priest! Not everyone can be the same like some people I know. Life like that gets kind of boring. Besides, Fred has not said anything bad about Dan, has he?”

“No,” Susie reluctantly admitted.

“Imagine a real live Catholic priest visiting in one’s home.”

“Keep your voice down,” Susie shushed. “They are coming up the walk.” She linked her arm with her sister’s. “And he is not a Catholic priest yet. Just studying to be one.”

Fred opened the screen door first and shook hands with his sisters. He turned around. “This is Dan Ludwig, the boy who has been boarding with me at school. Dan, this is Beth and Susie.”

“Hi.” Dan stuck out his hand. “How happy you girls look, and such beautiful dresses you are wearing.”

Both of their faces turned red.

“Beautiful dresses,” Susie responded. “What do you mean? These plain outfits are nothing but plain.”

“They are beautiful—I really mean it,” Dan said quietly. “See, where I come from, I am used to seeing so much worldly dress, even in the church people. The world thinks they dress pretty, yet they uncover their bodies in such wanton fashion.”

Dan’s voice was sincere, his remarks delivered without any shame or embarrassment. He did notice the red deepening in the girls’ faces, though, and he sensed the men behind him were tensing up as well. He wondered whether Amish did not talk about such things.

“It is a true beauty that I see among the Amish,” he calmly continued, keeping his expression the same, “coming from something inside the person, such as you girls have. It is the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit. Where I come from the beauty is mostly on the outside and only a little on the inside.”

The girls nodded their heads slightly but said nothing. Dan wondered if he had gone too far with them and overstepped some hidden boundary line. Fred was moving on toward the living room, so Dan smiled and started to follow.

That was when Beth spoke up. “Fred has not told us much about you,” her voice sounded a little nervous, “but we are glad you could come. Supper is ready. I am sure you are hungry after all the traveling.”

“Yes, we are,” Dan said kindly as he followed Fred into the living room.

Susie turned to her sister after Dan was out of earshot. “How did you dare say that? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking to him after he told us that about our dresses! Whoever heard of a boy talking to girls like that?”

“There was nothing wrong with what he said,” Beth replied. “I liked his sincere heart. At least he can talk, which is more than I can say about some boys I know. I *like* how he talks. It sounds educated. Surely there are more things a man can do than throw a good pitchfork of manure.”

Susie said nothing but caught her mother’s eye. They looked at each other like they were not sure if certain people were really made by God.

“You have a real nice place here, Mr. Stoltzfus,” Dan said as he took a seat on the couch. “I just love the way plain people farm. So much of your work is done by hand and horses. It makes me think of how Adam and Eve must have done their work in the Garden.”

Peter chuckled. “Well, we do not consider ourselves on the level of Adam and Eve, but we do enjoy the lifestyle. There is something godly in working so close to the soil. To run one’s fingers through freshly plowed and disked ground does good to your soul. I imagine the modern farmers could do the same, but seems they have no time to get off the tractor. Maybe it is the power of the tractor that keeps them moving. Our horses have to rest, and it gives you time to pause and see and feel the earth as God has made it.”

“I’ve never farmed the soil,” Dan responded, “but I do like the Amish way of doing it over modern methods. You also keep your places up so well. How do you find time for it? Fred told me when your house burned, yet you have quickly rebuilt. I assume

that the place across the drive is where the old house stood?” Dan turned around and pointed through the window to the other side of the lane where there was still some evidence of burned bricks and disturbed ground.

“Yes, that was the place,” Peter said. “Our home practically burned to the ground.”

“That must have been a traumatic experience to go through,” Dan stated simply. “I think, though, that being Amish gives you an inner strength to bear such things. You and your family look quite well for having suffered the shock of such an experience.”

“It was hard,” Peter agreed, “but we are thankful to God that no one was hurt and for His protection over all of us. Beth could have been closer to the stove when it blew up, as well as other things.”

“If this fire had happened to my family,” Dan added, “they wouldn’t have fared so well, I don’t think. My sister, well, you just can’t imagine. And my father...even though he has insurance that would cover most of the loss.” Dan threw his hands in the air. “That is just how things are out there in my world. People don’t take things well. Yet, I am looking at you and your family, and none of you needed a therapist? And you didn’t have insurance to cover the loss of the house?”

“No, and no, because none of us needed it.” Peter chuckled again. “Really, therapists just cost money, and if we need to talk, there are plenty of people around to talk to. And without television,” he grinned, “there is *plenty* of time to talk. Plus the neighbors gave us a hand, and church people gather around at such a time for support. Then there is, of course, our faith to support us in time of need.”

“It’s remarkable to find such a thing, and such a community of faith, in our



modern day and age. Most of you are farmers, close to the soil. You are solid in your commitments to your families and to each other in your community of faith. You live a deep faith in God expressed not just in words but also in your lifestyle. Are you aware how unusual that is in our culture?"

Peter nodded his head. "We are aware of it. That is why so much effort is expended in keeping what we as the Amish have."

"I was studying for the Catholic priesthood," Dan continued, "and I was looking for this very thing, this community of faith. In the Catholic faith you find this type of lifestyle only in the monasteries or in the dedicated lives of the priests and nuns. It's practically unknown in the laity at large. But here, among the Amish, it's not just the priest who lives his unworldly life—it's the whole community of believers. You have managed to include the family--wife, husband, and children--your business, your community, *all* incorporated into the church. This is what I want."

Peter nodded his head again. "You have touched on the best of the Amish vision, but you know surely that all is not roses in anyone's life."

Dan laughed. "I am sure it's not, but at least it must cut down on the therapy needed to live an ordinary life. Where I come from, no one has time anymore, it seems—time for each other, time for themselves even, and so little time for God. They're always running everywhere. Everyone is gone most every night. Their cars are always on the road. Most people I know have stopped using public transportation—trains, buses, and such things. I hardly feel safe driving on the highway anymore with the number of cars on it! Here, there are no cars in the driveway, no tractors in the field. I have hardly heard a car go by on the road even. This is such a peaceful setting. Heaven feels close to

me.”

“Yes, sometimes,” Peter Stolfus said quietly. “And sometimes it seems far away.”

Dan seemed not to notice Peter’s comment. “This is so wonderful, and I would like so much to be a part of it. I would like to be as secure and unpretentious as you are. I would like to live my religion all the time, not just in church. Here I could marry, have a family, and still have the holy life that I was seeking in the priesthood.”

Annie interrupted them as she entered the room. “Supper is ready. Would the two of you come to the table? And Fred—where is Fred?”

Dan and Peter looked at each other. They had been so engrossed in their conversation that they hadn’t noticed Fred had left the room. Annie went to the bottom of the stairs and called up. A faint voice answered from the bedroom, followed quickly by footsteps and Fred’s appearance.

Peter led them into the dining room where the girls were already seated, surrounded by steaming bowls of food—mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, and a meat casserole. After they were seated, Peter led in grace. His voice rose and fell as he said the German words with feeling and emotion.

After an appropriate silence Annie encouraged them, “Everyone help themselves. There is pie out in the kitchen.”

Dan Ludwig wanted to be awakened in time for chores the next morning.

“That will be at 5:30 a.m., Dan. Think you can handle that?” Fred asked “This is not like getting up for prayers.”

“Just be sure and wake me.”

It was dark the next morning as they entered the barn, Fred swinging the gas lantern he had lit in the house. “We will light some more once we are in the barn. The girls will be out too. They help with the milking.”

Dan breathed in the morning air. The sun sent up its first slight coloration in the sky behind them. “This is better than morning prayers, Fred. The air is so sweet. It’s easier to smell it here than from the inside of the chapel.”

Fred did not respond right away but then mumbled something about never having been to morning prayers.

“You know what I think?” Dan was undaunted by Fred’s mumbling. “I think there is a part missing from my life. I never even knew what would satisfy it. Yet here I get a glimpse of it again. Somehow your lifestyle has found a connection between the natural and the spiritual. This morning draws me to God, more than saying prayers ever did. It’s as if you not only put God first, but you are finding Him in the first things, the natural world around you. Who would have thought that doing chores would open one’s heart to the Almighty?” Dan paused. “Did you actually say you milk by hand?”

At first Fred only nodded his head to the question, but he remembered it was dark and said “yes” after receiving no response. “The whole family helps at one time or the other, everyone except mother.”

The barn door creaked as they entered. Fred hung his lantern on a nail hammered into a beam. He went to open the door to the outer yard and the cows began filing in. They found their way to their own stanchions, banging loudly against the holding bars, waiting for their feed. Dan was watching Fred scooping it out when the barn door opened

behind them. Beth entered and, with a muffled good morning, took a three-legged stool from against the wall and grabbed one of the stainless steel pails from the milk house. Fred soon joined her with his own musical *swish, swish* of milk squirting against stainless steel, followed by the deeper sound of milk into milk through a layer of foam.

“Your milking sounds great, Beth,” Dan said. “I wish I could learn.”

“How do you know what milking should sound like?” she asked. “Have you ever heard it before?”

“No, but something tells me that I’m hearing the sound of a capable and well-done job.”

Beth pretended not to hear as she moved on to the next cow. After finishing her fourth one she headed for the door. “Breakfast will be on the table in fifteen minutes—eggs, bacon, the works this morning.”

An hour later Fred and Dan left on the way to town for Saturday business. They made a strange sight on the open buggy—an Amish young man sitting on the right side, driving, and a young man who looked sort of Amish on the left. The hat looked right with its three-inch rim pressed straight out all the way around. It was hard to tell about the pants since the young man was sitting, but they looked homemade. The sports coat created a problem. No one in town ever saw an Amish boy wearing one before.

Dan Ludwig was chuckling. “We do look strange. As soon as possible I would like to get Amish clothing. It would feel good this morning to have on what you’re wearing. People look at you differently than they do me. They look at you with a certain expectation on their faces. It’s as if they have already drawn conclusions in their own

minds that could not be easily changed.”

“You may be dreaming,” Fred observed, “but what conclusions would that be?”

“They seem to have already decided that you are a good person who would do no wrong.”

Fred did not think anyone looked at him like that. Dan told him that it wasn’t him personally he was referring to, but the looks seemed to be caused by the clothing more than anything else.

“See, this is what I want, Fred. When people look at me, they look as if they have a blank mind concerning my character. They look as if they do not know me, but it’s more than that. A man likes an opinion, a conclusion, to be drawn about him simply by his presence. This is what you Amish have. People are convinced you are good, and you would have to prove them wrong. For me, they look as if they don’t know, and I would have to *prove* that I am good. It would be much better, I think, to have it the way you have it.”

Fred looked rather unconvinced. “We have always been taught the value of our clothing, but not for those reasons. We are not trying to make ourselves special. Rather it is things like unity that we are after. By having uniformity in our clothing, it draws us together into a unity with one another. What better way to be one with each other on the inside, or spiritually as some would say, than by being one with each other on the outside? Such oneness lends itself to maintaining our unity first with each other, and then with God. A simple dress code brings more agreement and equality among us than a thousand sermons against the self-life. In being called away from our own desires on how to dress, we lay the foundation for the larger decisions when self must be ignored to be

our brother's keeper. You are making it sound as if our clothing should be worn for personal, selfish reasons."

Dan was nonplussed. "Not at all. I am just seeing another angle of this that may not be apparent to someone like yourself, who is living on the inside. I'm still looking at it from the outside. What I see today driving in town with you is what I want to have. I feel a longing to be surrounded by people who are at peace and in unity with each other. It would be wonderful to share a common identity, a common hope, and a common face that is presented to the outside world. One would not feel so alone, then, but rather surrounded by a sense of belonging. When you're by yourself, the task of establishing your own place and purpose in the world seems so hopelessly difficult. That's why there are so many lonely people in this modern world of ours."

Fred nodded his head slightly. "There is a lot of truth to what you are saying, but we are lonely at times, too, even when we are among people who are like us."

"Well, that's probably true, but look at some more of the benefits. Take this sport coat I wore today. When I bought this coat, it was, now that I stop to think about it, purchased with very impure motives. I bought it, first of all, just for myself, because I liked it and wanted it. How much better would it be if I bought a coat thinking about others and not about myself? In this way, I would be practicing a constant turning away from my own selfish motives to a concern for the well-being and consideration of others. I would be laying a foundation for Christ-like behavior in my life."

Fred could not resist a grin even in the face of Dan's expressions of devotion. "You are forgetting that this coat I am wearing cannot be bought in any store. It takes a sewing machine pedaled by someone's own feet to make it. There is a lot of work

involved.”

“I would be willing to do that, and that’s how it should be. The people who follow after God should be so separated from the world that they cannot even buy the world’s clothes. You have clothing that reflects your spiritual values and furthers your walk with God and each other. The world does not make clothes like that. Of course your clothes have to be made. I’ve never thought of it like that before.”

“Well, that does put sewing by hand in a different light,” Fred observed wryly. “I am sure the girls and Mom will be inspired to hear that their sewing machines have been the source of your lofty thoughts.”

“You can be amused about all this if you want, Fred, but I think you should show a little respect and reverence to what your upbringing has given you. That must be a problem for those who have been brought up around these things. I am sure, though, that the older ones like your father—and yourself even when you get older—will appreciate the value of what I’m talking about.”

“You are right,” Fred nodded. “Our people some five hundred years ago were moved by high motives and intentions. We have tried in our day and age to follow that. Things just get a little dim after a while. Maybe that is hard to explain to someone who has not grown up around these things. It is hardest to see what is closest to our noses.”

Dan thought for a long time in silence as he watched the landscape go by. “I suppose it is,” he finally said, “but I feel as if I should have grown up here. It feels like home. By the way, Fred, you have two nice sisters.”

Fred said without turning his head, “Which one would that be?”

“Well, the oldest one.”

“You wouldn’t, would you?”

“Oh, yes, I would.”

Sunday, a day of socializing for the Amish, includes both the young and old. After the service of each Church Sunday, a meal is served. In all Amish communities, a full Sunday service with all the trimmings is held only every other Sunday. For the Sunday service in-between, Sunday School Sunday, communities hold a slightly shorter service oriented around a Sunday School class format. After a full Sunday service, the older people get to fellowship until early afternoon—first around the bench tables set up where the services had been held, and then later in circles in the yard or inside, if the weather is colder.

Regardless of the Sunday, the young people get their own singing for the evening. Depending again on the arrangement, supper is served, but the singing always begins at 7:30. At nine o’clock the young people, having experienced all the socializing they could handle, make a beeline for home. Depending on the weather and the size of the gathering, the horses can be a problem as the buggies line up at the front doorsteps. A few get impatient and try to break the line. It is a matter of pride to keep your horse under control.

The boys hitch up the horses, and then brothers pick up their sisters and the boys who date pick up their girls and take off on their own. Dating is done at the girl’s house with the intention being to supply supervision from the parents if needed. Depending on the community, the curfew is usually midnight, with some communities strictly enforcing it. Fraserwood, the Amish community of Peter and Annie Stoltzfus, is still young enough that it possesses both the zeal for such moral rule enforcement and the ability to see the



results because of their small size. Fraserwood believes in a two-chair rule with other added details going with such an arrangement. The degree of enforcement depends not just on the conscience of the couple but also on vigilance from the older folks. There is a way of checking things out, if one really cares about it.

On this particular Sunday evening, Dan Ludwig sat with Fred Stoltzfus on the bench with the first row of boys. It was precisely 7:28 p.m. in Albert Yantsey's basement. The clock hung on the furnace wall to their left. As one of the oldest boys, Fred felt a responsibility to sit there, and his visitor was to be taken along. Behind them sat four more rows of teenage boys followed by three rows for the married men. Tonight most of the benches were full. Directly opposite Fred and Dan, separated by a mere six feet, were an equal number of empty benches behind which were a corresponding set filled by older and married women. There was total silence. Hardly a muscle moved on the front benches. Behind them, on what sounded like the third row, Fred heard a foot or two being moved across the concrete floor. Songbooks were being held and opened soundlessly.

Then down the basement stairs they came. It was 7:29. Alma Chupp was in the lead. She was twenty-nine years old and never known to have dated. Following her was Martha Byler, a sunny girl just turned twenty. Her boyfriend was sitting to Fred's right. They were now dating for two years. He was smiling, and Martha was too, but Fred did not think it was at each other. They both seemed to be enjoying life. The third girl was Esther Schrock, followed by Fred's sister Beth, and so on. They all filed in and sat down till all three rows were filled. These were the girls--not that anyone in the room felt the

need for questions.

Fred moved in his spot on the bench, ever so slightly. Even after going through this since he was sixteen years old, it still caused emotion in him. It was like putting magnets close together with the polar ends turned against each other. The effect cut through the humdrum and haze of Amish living. It made life seem immediate and clear. It was like turning the pages of a blurred book and suddenly finding the letters clear and readable. It was like having asked many questions and finding they all had one answer. Fred shook his head and tried to think of something else. He glanced over at Dan. To his surprise, Dan looked like a boy who was enjoying himself and quite at home.

*No nervousness around our girls at all, Fred thought, not sure he liked this. Looks too much like a duck coming into his own pond. He must be used to being around girls.*

The German song number was given out—the song would start from the girl's side of the group. It was 7:30. The Amish hymn singing had begun. For the first 30 minutes, the young people would sing the same songs in German as had been sung that morning, only faster. (Dan thought those Sunday-morning hymns had sounded like the Catholic Gregorian chant, but Fred told him he thought there was no connection between the two.) After that, a ten-minute devotional was followed by English singing till 9 p.m.

Albert gave the devotional that evening. As the head of the hosting family, the father of the house took his turn in presenting Scripture and commentary to the youth. Amish public scriptural presentation was strictly controlled by the ministry. Within the ministry team, commentary was carefully guarded. Only on special occasions like this, and in some Sunday School and Parochial school functions, were the lay people allowed to expound Scripture publicly.

As Albert cleared his throat and gave out the Scripture text, the young people gave him their attention. There was no rustling of Bible pages opening to the text. Amish people do not carry the Bible into services, except perhaps for Sunday School Sunday. Even the ministry does not carry Bibles into the church service. Only after all are seated on Sunday morning is the Bible given to the presiding bishop for use in the service. It is considered a great mark of pride to carry Scriptures around in one's hand. Such an individual would be regarded with suspicion as believing he possessed superior learning and abilities. To carry the Scriptures would be interpreted as believing one contained the powers of private interpretation. Walking into a church service with the Bible in hand would be stating for all to see that one needed not his brother and his brother's guiding hand in life but only one's own grasp on Scripture.

The text was the third chapter of John, the story of Nicodemus and his night visit to Christ. Albert read haltingly through the High German. As he prepared to make his follow-up remarks, he searched for German words. Not being a minister, he was not used to speaking fully with German words. It is only when an Amish person tries to talk completely German in his dialect of Pennsylvania Dutch that he sees how many English words have crept in. Albert was embarrassed as he searched for German words for what he normally would have said quite fluently in the English-afflicted version of Pennsylvania Dutch. The English words were like bright red salmon going through the water. Albert was looking for the gray salmon, for the acceptable word, and then here came another red salmon! Fred felt for him as the stream of his speech continued haltingly. Dan asked Fred about it later and found the explanation surprising.

"You people have to be careful about this," Dan cautioned, "or you're going to

lose touch with your language. It's good that there is still at least the consciousness of the dangers to your language. I was glad to see that Mr. Yantsey was trying to leave out the English words. Where I learned Pennsylvania Dutch they were careful to teach me Pennsylvania Dutch, not English-modified Pennsylvania Dutch."

Fred agreed but mentioned how easy it was to pick up English words. "There is no written language for the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect," he pointed out. "What we know is learned only by ear, by what is verbally passed down. So the temptation always is to use the English word when one does not remember the German word. Some of the words the old people do not even know anymore. In that case we have to reach back to the High German for guidance, or use that word itself. There is also the conflict between the High German language and the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect. Put in the different variations of Pennsylvania Dutch spoken by the different areas of Amish communities, and things can get difficult."

"I'm glad to see that people are trying, at least," Dan said. "I'm going to stick to German words from the beginning."

The last song was given out at 8:57. It was "Blessed Be the Tie." Conversations began within a few minutes of the last sounds of singing. A few of the boys and girls talked across the front benches, but mostly the buzz of conversation was within the male and female zones.

Outside, the first buggy could be heard rolling past the basement window on the graveled driveway. Fred nudged Dan and said he was ready to go. Together they went out to harness the horse to the buggy. Dan was not much help, but he wanted to know what was going on. "When is the courting done?"

“It is done mostly about right now. As soon as we have this horse hitched up we will pull up to the line over there.” Fred pointed his chin towards the sidewalk coming out of the basement door. There a buggy waited at the end and two in line behind it. “My two sisters will come out as that girl is coming out right there. In my case, it is my sisters. If I am dating, it is my date. I would then drive her home and stay for the time allowed. The parents may set that time, but in our situation the church has the rule of midnight. At midnight, I would go home.”

“Is that all? What happens on your dates? Does your buggy serve as your car? They seem a little tighter than a car. Not much need to sit any closer together, is there? Does a buggy lend itself well to kissing?”

Fred was not amused, but since it was dark Dan could not see his face. “No,” Fred said gruffly, “we do not do that stuff around here.”

“You don’t?” Dan couldn’t hide his surprise. “They do at the Amish community where I learned my Dutch. At least some of the boys I talked to spoke of kissing, and something about a broomstick under the rocking chair, but I never learned how it was all done. I just figured Amish were male and female like everyone else.”

Fred was glad his red face did not show in the darkness. “We have rules against those kinds of practices. I have dated but I have never kissed a girl in my life. Hopefully it will stay that way until I marry. We believe that strong marriages start with strong disciplines, and those include keeping your hands off of each other until marriage.”

They got in the buggy and pulled up to the end of the sidewalk. Beth and Susie came out of the basement door almost immediately. They climbed in the back seat of the double-seated buggy, as Fred had borrowed his parent’s buggy for the night. The

conversation on the way home was chatty between the girls and Fred as they caught up on community and family news that meeting people brought to mind.

Dan Ludwig did not have much to say as the buggy rolled along in the darkness. He was thinking of dating, and of Beth, and of how much he knew that he was finally home.