






One



 Hannah Byler walked up the graveled lane toward the cabin, her right hand clutching the mail. She glanced down briefly at the letter on top of the small stack. Her mom had written, no doubt to rejoice with her and perhaps to tell her she was praying for her.

As Hannah slowed down to catch her breath, a shadow crossed her face as the dark memories of her miscarriage ran quickly through her mind. It had been only recently that she had known she was with child again, and this time she would make it through the nine months. She *must*. Miscarrying again would be too painful. Jake hadn't said much, but she knew he watched her in the evenings when he didn't think she'd notice. He'd glance away when she turned toward him, shadows from the gas lantern playing on his young bearded face. He loved her, Jake did, but Jake was also a preacher now. And for that reason—in addition to all the others—she must carry this child to full term.

Jake would still love her if she lost another of his children. They would sorrow together, comforting each other, but pity would be stirred in the eyes of the people. “He can preach,” they would whisper when she wasn't around. “But why has God chosen to leave him childless?”

Jake had been ordained so suddenly last year, and just as quickly their lives were changed. They were no longer Jake and Hannah Byler, lost in their love for each other, living in their own world under the shadow of the Cabinet Mountains. They were now Jake Byler, the minister, and the minister's wife, Hannah.

Hannah paused, allowing her gaze to follow the mountain peaks disappearing toward the south. Hadn't Jake quoted the words of King

David this past Sunday while he preached the main sermon? “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Only he had quoted the words in High German, in which he was now becoming quite fluent. Jake was like that—*gut* in a lot of things. Although the community didn’t compliment him on his preaching—that just wasn’t done—Betty, Hannah’s aunt, was one of the few who dared whisper things after church like “My, that Jake of yours sure can preach.”

But Betty dared to do and say a lot of things the others didn’t. She was that way, and even on occasion was known to press the line on the *ordnung*. Her laugh and jolly spirit covered many sins, as Jake would say. Of course Jake liked her, as did everyone in the community. But would Jake’s liking her be sufficient to cover for Betty if he knew she had hired an *English* girl to run her horse riding business last summer, even allowing the girl to wear very *English* clothing while working? Likely not. And so Hannah kept her mouth shut. Jake was kind, but he also had responsibilities that could override his heart.

Hannah studied the mountain range, following the familiar ridges and valleys. This was her home now, her beloved home. Here she and Jake had found each other that long-ago summer and then nearly lost their love while it was still in its infancy, only to find it again by the grace of God. Hannah glanced down, running her hand over the front of her dress. Her pregnancy didn’t show much yet, but that would change soon.

What would it be like to walk into church on Sunday morning when everyone could see that she carried Jake’s child? A thrill ran through her at the thought. It was too wonderful to comprehend. And surely she wasn’t taking pride in the yet unborn child? Was this not what *Da Hah* wanted? Children born to carry on the human race and the *faith* her people believed in? *Jah*, and she was blessed to carry Jake’s child. Surely this time *Da Hah* would have mercy on her. Surely this time, in His great wisdom, she would be permitted to see the baby’s face.

“Please let it be, dear Lord,” she whispered, picking up her steps again. “I want to give Jake a child. His and mine. Jake might be a great preacher, but he is also a man. And a man needs children.”

The soft sound of a truck came over the hill moments before it came into view. Mr. Brunson was driving slowly. Hannah pushed her thoughts

aside and stepped off the lane. Mr. Brunson slowed even more, rolled down his window, and came to a stop.

"Good afternoon there, Hannah," he said, smiling broadly.

"Good afternoon," Hannah said. "And how are you?"

He laughed. "As good as can be expected for an old man."

"You're not that old. Come on, now."

"That's easy for you young people to say. Jake works like a man on fire in the furniture shop."

"I know. He comes home so tired at night."

"Don't blame me," Mr. Brunson said with a grin. "The furniture is selling well enough, but Jake still won't slow down. In fact, it seems to make him work even harder."

"He's probably thinking of his family," she said, a warm blush spreading over her face.

"Can't say I was any different in my day," he said. "Oh, to be young again."

"Would you like to come down for supper?" she asked. "Perhaps next week some night? We would love to have you again. It seems quite a while since you visited, and I could make cherry pie."

"Cherry pie? Now how can I turn that down? But really, you don't have to bother."

"Is my cherry pie that awful?"

He laughed, "You know better than that. It's enough to reduce a man to tears, if that were possible with an old codger like me."

"It's not that *gut*," she said, laughing. "But please come. We could make it suit most any night."

"Most any night is good for me too. You know I don't have much to do."

"Jake tells me you help a lot in the furniture shop, so you shouldn't undersell yourself. You've been a great blessing to Jake and me, and we're very thankful. There wouldn't be much of a shop without your help in starting it up."

"I was glad to do it. And it took more than me. Jake makes beautiful log furniture. I simply came along behind him."

"We're still thankful," she said.

He laughed. "I'd better be going, Hannah. You take care of yourself."

I'll let Jake know which night works next week, and I will expect an extra pie to take along home with me."

"You will have it," she said, waving as he drove off.

Mr. Brunson was a wonderful man, sent by *Da Hah* when they so needed help starting up Jake's business. He was not only a *gut* neighbor, but a *gut* friend.

At the front walk, the roses were trying to bloom, opening half-heartily in the chilly air. Hannah stopped to admire them, the letter from her mother forgotten for a moment.

"It'll be warm soon," she said, bending over to brush their soft petals with the back of her hand. "Then you can really bloom. Just like me with Jake's child."

She laughed but it was the truth. How like a blooming it felt to be with child, and surely this time there would be a cry of a baby in the house by winter.

"Please, dear God," she whispered, standing up to walk toward the cabin. "I know You will help us."

Pushing open the front cabin door and listening to it creak, she stepped inside. After latching the door she walked over to Jake's little log desk. Holding the letter from her mother up to the light from the front window, Hannah studied the familiar handwriting before pulling the letter out.

Dear Hannah,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. This finds us all well, and your dad is busy in the factory as usual. I think summer is coming early around here. We had a really warm day today, which was a surprise since the trees only recently got all their leaves.

Your dad plowed the garden last night after work, and I see the neighbors have also done theirs today. I have half a notion to hitch the Belgian to the disk and work the ground, since I can't wait to get the early things in the ground. I think your dad would appreciate the job being done, but he wouldn't appreciate it if I wrecked something, so perhaps I'd better wait.

I am so thrilled with the news in your last letter. I'm sure

you and Jake are very happy, and if you are careful this time, everything will be fine. We will pray for you and for the health of the baby. Don't worry too much, as the Lord is merciful and does not give us greater burdens than we are able to bear.

I know you don't want the news spread around yet, so I've been keeping my lips sealed with your sisters, even when they dug around for news at the last sewing. You know how they can be, but I think I kept a pretty straight face.

I suppose you haven't told Betty either, which brings me to the point I need to ask you about. Miriam has been pestering us for some time, saying she wants to visit you, perhaps for an extended time. I know how small your cabin is, and so I've not agreed to ask you, but your news brings up an interesting idea.

With the baby coming in late November, why couldn't we have Miriam come out for the summer to work at Betty's with the riding stable like you did those two summers? I guess the first question is, does Betty still run the stable? Perhaps her oldest daughter Kendra is involved?

I suppose I might as well tell you, Miriam has been really discouraged with her romantic options around here. I don't why, as there are a lot of nice boys, but then what do I know? It's not like I'm going to marry them, as Miriam is quick to remind me.

Anyway, she has now turned twenty-one and has dated a few times, but nothing ever comes of it. I think her wish to visit you has more to do with that than anything. Miriam thinks that since you found a good husband in Montana, she might also be able to. I've told her things don't work like that, but she's not convinced. I've never been quite as close to her as I have been with you, but neither has she been as much trouble as you have. So I guess it all works out even in the end.

Anyway, maybe you can ask Betty, if you like the idea, or I can write her. Either way would be fine, but please let me know. Oh, and you could then break the news to Miriam

later in the summer about the baby. You know—once you begin showing. You could ask her then about staying and taking care of you and the baby after the birth. I think that would work out great for all of us.

Think about it, and I'm so happy with the news. We will pray for a very nice, healthy baby.

With love, Your mom, Kathy

"Mom," Hannah said, wiping her eyes as she folded the letter, "I love you so much." Sighing, she stared out the window, remembering. Wouldn't it be wonderful if her parents could visit again like they had last year? But no, that wasn't possible. A visit from Miriam would be second best but greatly appreciated once the baby came. *Jah*, she would ask Betty. And the sooner the better. Miriam might have wrong motives for the trip, but there were wonderful people in the community who would welcome her with open arms. They wouldn't know what her reasons for coming were, and there might indeed be someone special here who would satisfy her sister's requirements.

Perhaps, but who? And wouldn't that be something if there really was? They could both live in Montana, and she would have not only a baby, but a sister nearby.