

Chapter 1

Monday morning

Lana looked up from her computer, startled. She turned to Tuper. “Hey, Pops, why is there a horse and buggy outside?”

Tuper stood up from the table and stared out the window. “What in thunder is he doing here?” A man in his early seventies, Tuper wore jeans, a plaid cotton shirt, western boots, a black cowboy hat, and a holster on his belt.

Lana shook her head. “This is the twenty-first century. Isn’t the better question: Why is he using a horse and buggy?”

“Good point,” Tuper said. “Why *does* he have the buggy?”

Lana watched outside as a bearded old man dressed in plain black and gray clothes and a wide-brimmed hat made his way to the front door. A younger man, dressed similarly but without a beard, remained in the buggy. As a millennial, Lana knew her fashion sense was questionable, but at least she was in this century.

“*Willkommen, Brüderlein,*” Tuper said as he greeted the man.

The familiar German tongue sounded pleasant to Lana’s ears. It reminded her of her grandma who’d never really mastered the English language, or at least not the American accent. Clarice, the woman who owned this home, reminded her a bit of her grandmother, but she was much younger. She was more like an aunt to her—a favorite aunt. Lana listened

intently as the men continued to speak in some form of German dialect, understanding most of it.

Tuper switched to English. "Come in. I was just having a cup of tea. Join me."

The man followed Tuper to the table. "Lana, this is Jacob. We go way back."

"Nice to meet you," Jacob said.

"You too."

"Have a seat," Tuper gestured. "The teapot is on."

Lana tried not to stare at Jacob. He looked so different. She'd seen many pictures of Amish people but had never met any. She had so many questions, but she didn't want to embarrass the man. He looked so stoic and almost sad.

Tuper set cups of tea on the table, then sat down. "It's nice to see you, Jacob, but I know you didn't just seek me out for a social call. What's up?"

Jacob glanced at Lana.

"She's okay." Tuper nodded. "Lana's a big help with my work, but if you'd rather talk privately, we can step outside."

"If you trust her, I trust her." Jacob wrapped both hands around the tea mug, holding on tightly. "It is my granddaughter, Rita, Tobias' youngest daughter. She left the *Bruderhof*."

"On her own?"

"I don't think so, but I cannot be certain. She's a rebellious girl and her head is filled with adventurous thoughts. Even as a small child, she wandered away and explored. She always wanted to go to town or wherever anyone was going away from the colony. Unfortunately, she

was allowed to go more than she should. Her father hoped it would fulfill her needs, but she only seemed to develop a greater thirst.”

“How long has she been gone?”

“Since the night before last, but we do not know where she is, and we are afraid she might be in danger. That is why I am here to get your help. Will you look for her?”

“Of course,” Tuper said. “I’ll need more information.”

Lana opened a document on her computer and started to take notes.

“What’s her full name?” Tuper asked.

“Margarete Pullman.”

“And her physical description?”

Before Jacob could answer, Lana cut in. “Don’t you have a photo of her? That would be best. We can tell a lot from a photo.”

Tuper glowered at Lana. “They don’t believe in taking photos.”

“What’s to be—? Never mind. Sorry.”

“It is okay,” Jacob said. “She is five-four, with long blonde hair, almond-shaped blue eyes, and pale skin. She is way too beautiful for her own good.” He paused. “I just mean that she can be a little vain and men stare at her when she goes out in public. It must be hard for her to be humble.”

Lana flinched, but kept her comments to herself.

“When exactly did you notice she was missing?” Tuper asked.

“She was there for supper, but she did not return to their room after kitchen chores.

Annie P. said Rita took out some trash from the kitchen and that was the last time she saw her.

The same with other girls who were working in the kitchen. They did not really notice until they got back to their room and she did not show up. No one seems to know anything else.”

“And what if I find her? Do you want me to bring her home?”

“She turned eighteen two days ago. I cannot legally make her come home.”

“Didn’t ask you that,” Tuper said.

Jacob sat in silence.

“If you want me to bring her home, I will. Just tell me what you want.”

Lana glared at Tuper, but neither man seemed to notice.

“When you find her, let me know.” Jacob closed his eyes. “We will decide then.”

~~~

The late autumn sun was bright and felt good on Tuper’s face as he walked Jacob out. He greeted the young man in the buggy, then turned back to his old friend. “Try not to worry. If it’s all right, I’ll go to the colony now and ask a few questions.”

“I have to stop and take care of something, and then I will be there. I will call my wife and tell her you are coming.”

“You have a phone at the house now?”

“Yes. Ever since that problem you had with your friend, Ron, we got a second phone. I carry one with me and one stays at the house. I had to teach Mary how to use it. She does not like it much, but I think she feels a little safer.”

“Does anyone else use it?”

“No one is allowed except with permission.”

“Tell Mary I’ll be there shortly.” Tuper started toward the house, then stopped. “Can Joseph run your errand? You’ll get home a lot quicker if you ride back with me in Ringo’s car.” Tuper called it that because Ringo, his last dog, had torn up the seats when he was a puppy. “My car is in pretty bad shape, but it can’t be as bad as riding all that way in that buggy.”

“Are you okay with that?” Jacob asked the young man.

“I can handle it, *Opa*.”

“And you do not mind making the drive by yourself?”

“I know the way. I’ll be fine.” He held back a smile.

“Okay then.”

“Let me get my keys and my jacket,” Tuper said.

“I’ll wait here.” Jacob stepped toward the buggy. “I want to go over a few things with Joseph. Take your time.”

Tuper turned and went inside.

“That was strange,” Lana said, still at the table.

“I’m sure he thought the same about you.”

“Is he Amish or something?”

“Hutterite.”

Lana was typing almost before Tuper finished the word. He waited for a few seconds, hoping she wouldn’t come at him with a lot of questions.

She launched into a summary of her search. “The Hutterites are anabaptists like the Mennonites and the Amish. The Mennonites formed first to avoid religious persecution, and the Amish are an offshoot of them. But the Hutterites formed on their own out of Austria,

following a man named Jacob Hutter. They all believe that you shouldn't be baptized until you're an adult and can make your own choice. The biggest difference is that the Hutterites live communally." She paused for a breath. "I wonder what that's like. I don't think I'd like it. I like my own space. Have you ever been to their colony?" Before Tuper could answer, she continued. "And he talks without using any contractions. That's a little odd. Do they all talk like that?" She scowled at Tuper. "Why would he think I'm strange? He did look at me like I was the odd one."

Tuper tipped his head to the side and gave her a look, hoping she was finished jabbering. "Really? He's a man who lives a plain, simple life. You have bright red hair that sticks up like you just put your finger in an electric socket. You're wearing combat boots and banging away on a machine that I'm sure looks as foreign to him as a UFO."

"Good point. By the way, I found out why they don't take photos. They believe the Bible's second commandment—*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*—prohibits them from taking photographs. Although, in some colonies they allow it as long as the pictures are candid shots. They believe posing for them is the actual sin."

"Agony, I know full well what the Hutterites believe."

"So, how do we find this girl? And what if she doesn't want our help? What if she left because she wanted her own life? It sounds like it wouldn't be much fun living the way they do. I can't blame her for running away." Lana's expression tightened. "Although, maybe she didn't run away. Maybe someone snatched her up. We'd better help. What can we do?"

"We don't do anything. I'm gonna go to Little Boulder Colony to see what else I can find out. We don't really have much to go on."

“Did they call the police?”

“I’m sure they didn’t. They’re not much for outside government help. They prefer to police themselves.”

“But they asked for *your* help. Jacob must really trust you.” But Lana knew if anyone could find Rita, Tuper could. He seemed to know everyone in the state of Montana, and most of them owed him a favor. He’d even saved her once from being accosted by a drunk cowboy. She hadn’t asked for his help, but she was grateful for it, even though she would never admit it to him.

“We go way back.”

“How far back? How do you know him?”

Tuper retrieved his jacket from the back of the chair and headed for the door. “I need to go ask some questions.”

“Can I go with you?”

“No. You stay here and learn what you can about the Hutterites on that machine. It might help us later.”

Tuper opened the door.

“Hey, you didn’t answer my question. How do you know Jacob?”

“You’re right, I didn’t.” Tuper walked out.