

One



Home.

She was finally home.

Rose felt her heart stir when the buggy turned the bend in the road and the old farmhouse came into view. The big trees that surrounded the house were shedding their leaves of gold, russet, and scarlet. A brisk fall breeze sent them dancing across the lawn.

She took a deep sigh and glanced at her *schweschder* as they pulled into the drive. "It's so *gut* to be home. I missed it. I missed you."

Lillian smiled and hugged her. "I missed you too. Well," she said briskly, "you haven't seen the inside yet. It needs a lot of work. There just hasn't been time to keep up the place since *Daed* died."

"Of course not. You had enough on your hands taking care of him at the end," Rose told her. "I was sorry I couldn't be here."

"You were dealing with Sam's illness, then the farm in Ohio."

Rose sighed. "So much to handle for both of us." She gazed at the farmhouse. "I don't mind work." She needed it, needed to keep busy to keep the awful thoughts at bay. Her *mann* was gone and never coming back. She was going to have to find a way to live without him and raise their *sohn*, Daniel.

"*Mamm!*"

She turned her rapt gaze from the house and smiled at the tow-headed miracle that was her *sohn*.

"*Ya?*"

"Home?"

"Home," she said.

"I'm *hungerich!*"

Rose laughed as she climbed down and helped him out of the buggy. "Let's go explore. Then we can see if there's anything in there to eat. Knowing *Aenti* Lillian, there'll be something delicious for us."

"Me *hungerich* too!" John cried from the back seat.

Lillian helped her own *sohn* out. "We'll find the potty for you too."

The two little boys raced off toward the house on sturdy legs.

"I can't believe they're four already. Time passes so quickly."

Rose watched her *schweschder* gently shake the shoulder of her five-year-old *dochder*. "Time to wake up, *kind*. We're going to look at *Aenti* Rose's house."

Annie woke with a frown and a pout. "She always wakes up grumpy," Lillian said in an aside to Rose. "Then she's her usual sweet self the rest of the day."

"Daniel wakes up happy," Rose told her. "Sometimes I hear him singing in his bed in the morning."

"John is much the same."

Annie climbed out and ran up the walkway to the farmhouse. The boys had found some pieces of board on the porch and were stacking them like blocks. She joined them and began telling them how they should do things, just like a big *schweschder* did.

Lillian retrieved a wicker basket from the buggy, and then she and Rose linked arms and strode up the walkway.

"*Danki* for persuading me to come home," Rose said with a heart-felt sigh.

"You're *wilkumm*." Lillian smiled "You know me."

"*Ya*, you love to organize things. People. Especially me."

Lillian stuck her tongue out at her and laughed. "True. It's what I do best."

They climbed the steps to the porch. The paint on the boards on the porch was peeling, and two of the front windows were boarded up.

"Amos didn't have a chance to take care of this before you let us know you were coming. We worked on the inside first."

"You both did so much while I was gone. It's fine. It just needs a little more love."

"A lot of love," Lillian said.

"You said you had a man lined up to help me?"

"I do. I can't wait for the two of you to meet."

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Something in her tone had Rose glancing at her *schweschder*, but Lillian was shooing the *kinner* inside.

“A lot of love,” Lillian repeated. “Let’s go explore. Upstairs first, then we’ll work our way down and to the kitchen for lunch. *Allrecht?*”

Rose nodded. “We’ll see our new bedrooms, Daniel.”

Her *schweschder* had sent her letters and had written about what needed to be done. Still, it was a bit of a shock when they went inside and Rose got a good look for herself. They each took the hand of one of the boys and climbed the stairs to the bedrooms. Annie trailed behind them.

First stop was the master bedroom. An old bed sat near the large windows.

“We rented it out briefly to a family while they did some repairs to their house after a fire. They left a few things,” Lillian said. “I figured you could get rid of them after yours got here on the moving truck and you decided what you wanted to keep or not keep.”

“*Gut* idea.” Rose walked over to the window that overlooked the backyard. A huge oak tree carried a swing that moved in the wind. The kitchen garden, neglected for the years the property had sat vacant, looked forlorn. Rose couldn’t wait until she could plant it in the spring. She’d brought seeds from her Ohio garden.

Fields stretched out on all sides. The thought of what was involved in planting them overwhelmed Rose, even though she’d been a partner to Sam on their farm in Ohio and had grown up here on a farm in Paradise. But she reminded herself that some days everything felt overwhelming. The widow’s support group she’d attended back in Millersburg had taught her it was a common emotion.

She turned to Daniel. “Let’s go see your bedroom.”

There were four bedrooms to choose from, but she wanted him near, so they walked into the one closest to the master. Daniel squealed and began running in circles. He was such a happy, easily pleased *kind*. Knowing him, he’d have been happy if she’d shown him a closet and handed him a blanket and pillow.

"Look, Daniel, a big-boy bed," she told him, gesturing at the twin bed. "No *bopp*li crib. And we'll paint the walls blue. You love blue."

"Blue," he agreed, his eyes shining.

"*Mamm?*"

Lillian glanced down at her *sohn*. "Ya?"

"I'm *hungerich*."

"Me too!" Daniel chimed in.

"Me too!" Annie told her.

"I brought sandwiches and potato chips," Lillian said. "Let's go downstairs and eat."

There was a big wooden table with chairs around it in the kitchen. Lillian began pulling food from the basket as Rose ran her hand over the worn surface of the table. "Our old family table's still here. So many meals were served on this."

"See if the refrigerator is running. The gas company told me they'd have everything turned on today," Lillian told her.

Rose opened the refrigerator to a blast of cold air. "Ya, it's all ready for some food."

"One less worry." Lillian looked at Rose and bit her lip. "I just want you to be comfortable and happy here. I'm so glad you're back. I didn't like the thought of selling it when it's been in our family for generations." She pulled out a package of paper plates. "It's a small farm. I know you can manage it with the help of Luke Miller, Abraham's cousin. He'll be coming over to talk to you about it in the next day or so. He's from Ohio, too, you know. You're *schur* you've never met him?"

"So you've told me a couple dozen times. And no, I didn't know him. Millersburg was a big place."

"Well, you'll meet him soon and figure it all out. Luke came to help Abraham after a buggy accident and wants to stay in the area, so this works out perfectly."

Rose admired Lillian's optimism. Hers seemed to fluctuate so much since Sam died.

Lillian handed her a jug of lemonade and a package of paper cups, and Rose poured the lemonade into the cups as Lillian set out the

paper plates, putting sandwiches on each, then a handful of potato chips. Before they could call the *kinner* they ran into the room and scrambled up onto the benches around the table. Daniel reached for a potato chip, then caught himself and set it back onto the plate as the blessing for the meal was said.

The *kinner* fell onto the sandwiches and chips. Rose picked up a half sandwich and began eating, aware of her *schweschder's* eagle eye watching her. Lillian had always enjoyed being the oldest. It didn't seem to matter that she was older by only fifteen minutes. Lillian had always worried over her like a *mudder*.

"They're going to live close to us now?" Annie asked her *mudder*.

"Ya. Won't that be *wunderbaar*?"

Annie took a bite of her sandwich and stared with wide eyes at the two boys sitting at the table across from her. "Ya," she said slowly. "*Wunderbaar*."

A loud rap sounded on the front door. They heard it open. "Anyone home?" a male voice called.

"Luke! Come on back to the kitchen!" Lillian called.

A tall man strode into the kitchen and grinned at them. He swept off his black felt hat, revealing thick blond hair. His face was strong and handsome, and he had the deepest blue eyes.

"Luke Miller, this is my *schweschder*, Rose Troyer. Rose, this is Luke."

He stared at her with the expression she knew so well.



Luke realized he was staring. "Sorry, I didn't know you were twins," he said slowly, looking from one to the other. They looked so much alike, although Rose seemed a pale shadow of her *schweschder*—thinner, less vibrant.

"I guess I never thought you didn't know," Lillian said with a chuckle as she leaned over to wipe her *sohn's* chin with a paper napkin. "Have you had lunch? We have plenty."

"I haven't," he said. "I was driving past and saw your buggy, so I

thought I'd stop." He sat next to Annie and accepted a plate with a sandwich and a pile of chips. "My parents had benches at the table," he told them. "That way we had room for all of us. I have five *schweschders* and four *bruders*." He looked across the table at Daniel. "Hi, there."

"This is my *sohn*, Daniel," Rose said, giving the boy a fond smile. "He's four and a half."

Luke studied him. He seemed shy and avoided his gaze. "It'll be fun to play with your cousins here, *ya*?"

Daniel nodded but stayed silent, his eyes on his plate.

"Daniel's not usually shy," Rose told him. "It's just that everything's a little new for him."

"Have you been outside to play on the swing in the backyard yet?" Luke asked him.

"There's a swing?" He looked at his *mudder*.

"*Ya*, my *dat* hung it for us when I was a *kind*. I saw it's still back there."

"Can I go see it?"

He watched as Rose checked her *sohn's* plate. He'd cleaned it. "Of course."

Lillian nodded before John could even ask, and the boys scrambled into their coats and hats and were out the door before Luke could blink. Boys hadn't changed much since he'd been one.

Annie sat there calmly munching on her sandwich.

Luke studied Rose. She was quieter, more reserved than Lillian. He wondered if she was always like that or if it was because she was a widow. Her looks were softer too—more rounded. She wore the dress and *kapp* of the Ohio community she'd lived in. The deep blue of the dress fabric brought out the blue of her eyes and seemed to heighten her pale complexion.

"When is the moving van due?" Luke asked her.

"Tomorrow afternoon."

"I'll stop by and help."

"*Gut*. Can't have enough help." Lillian stood. "I'm going to check on the boys. Annie, come along with me."

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Annie nodded, daintily wiped her mouth with a napkin, then turned to him. "See you later, Luke."

They shrugged into their coats and bonnets and went out the kitchen door.

Luke turned back to Rose. "So, you're back to live here."

She nodded. "The farm's been in our family for generations."

"Why was it allowed to fall into disrepair?"

She stiffened, and he wondered if he'd touched a nerve.

"My *mann* had family in Ohio." She began clearing the table. Her movements seemed slow, mechanical. "Lillian's *mann* already had a farm here in Paradise, and they couldn't care for both."

"Lillian called me when you wrote that you wanted to come back. She asked if I could help you with it."

Rose threw the paper plates and cups into a plastic garbage bag, set it by the back door, and then washed her hands. "And you're *schur* you want to work on a farm that isn't yours?"

"Ya. I like it here in Paradise."

She sat at the table, folded her hands, and looked at him directly. "And how long will you do this? What if you find a place of your own?"

"The prices here are making that difficult. Lancaster County is so much more expensive than my county back in Ohio."

"You're not inheriting your family's farm in Ohio?"

Luke shook his head. "My *bruder*, Wayne, will."

"What if we don't agree on what we should do here?" she asked, looking directly at him. "Are you *schur* you can work for a woman?"

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't think so." He met her unflinching gaze.

"My *mann* and I worked on the farm in Ohio together, and I made a lot of the decisions at the end when he was ill. I'm a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife. I know what to do here, but I'll need help with the heavy manual labor."

"Do you usually look for problems before they arise?" he asked her.

Her gaze fell, and she traced a pattern in the wood on the table. "I didn't use to," she said with a sigh. She looked at him again. "Daniel and I need this to work."

There was a wealth of meaning in her words. "I know. Me too." He leaned back in his chair. "So, have you thought about what crops you want to plant in the spring?"

"Nee, not yet."

"That's fine. We have plenty of time to plan before spring."

A branch knocked against the kitchen window. Rose jumped.

"I'll go take care of that for you now," he said. "Don't want it breaking the window if there's a big wind."

"You sure you have time right now?"

"Of course. I'm helping Abraham out until I start here. And building some furniture for a store in town." He rose and pulled on his coat and hat.

"*Danki.*"

Luke opened the back door letting in a gust of wind before he quickly closed it again. It didn't take long to find a handsaw in the barn. He found himself glancing in the window as he cut the branch. Rose sat at the table looking lonely. She must have sensed he was watching her, for she raised her gaze, and he saw a haunted look in her eyes before she glanced away.

What was it like to lose a mate? Lillian had told him that Rose had been married for six years. He'd been lucky. The only people he'd lost had been his elderly *grosseldres*.

And he'd never even been in love with a woman.

He tossed aside the branch and stored the handsaw back in the barn. When he returned to the house, Lillian was herding the *kinner* in the back door and helping them shed their outdoor things. Luke watched Rose bend to help her *sohn* take off his mittens. She cradled his cheeks in her hands.

"Oh, your cheeks are so cold!"

"Hot chocolate?"

She glanced at Lillian. "I haven't shopped yet, Daniel."

"Maybe you should look in the cupboards," Lillian suggested.

Rose opened one near the sink. "*Ach*, look at this!" she cried and

pulled out a box of hot chocolate mix. Next to it sat mugs all lined up, brand new from the look of them.

Lillian grinned. "I got a few supplies until you could get to the store."

"*Aenti* Lillian thinks of everything," Rose told the *kinner*. "Who wants hot chocolate?"

"Me!" they chorused.

"Me!" Luke said.

"Hot chocolate for everyone." She found a pan in a cupboard and filled it with water. After she set it on the range to boil, she turned. "Everyone wash up and have a seat."

Luke waited his turn and then joined the others at the table. Hot chocolate had been one of his favorite drinks as a *kind*.

"Luke? Do you want marshmallows?" Rose held up the bag of mini marshmallows. "Lillian thinks of everything."

"I'm coming to see that. *Ya*, marshmallows, please."

Soon, Rose poured hot water into the mugs and stirred in the hot-chocolate mix, then added marshmallows to all the mugs. Lillian helped pass the mugs around, urging the *kinner* to let the drink cool.

Luke took a sip, then realized the *kinner* were watching him. "Still a little too hot," he said and got an approving nod from Lillian. He blew on his drink. The *kinner* followed suit, and soon marshmallows were topping—then spilling over—the mugs and laughter filled the room. It was a scene that reminded him of his childhood back in Ohio.

He wrapped his hands around the mug, warming them, and watched Rose talking quietly with her *sohn*. When he took a careful sip of his drink and ended up with a marshmallow mustache, it brought a smile to her lips, and the haunted look vanished.

He wondered what it would be like to work with this woman to bring this farm back to life.

He wondered if being back in her home would bring Rose back to life.

Buried Secrets

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About the Author



Barbara Cameron is a gifted storyteller and the author of many bestselling Amish novels. *Harvest of Hope* is her new three-book Amish series from Gilead Publishing.

Twice Blessed, Barbara's two-novella collection, won the 2016 Christian Retailing's Best award in the Amish Fiction category. Two of her other novellas were finalists for the American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW) awards. She is the first winner of the Romance Writers of America (RWA) Golden

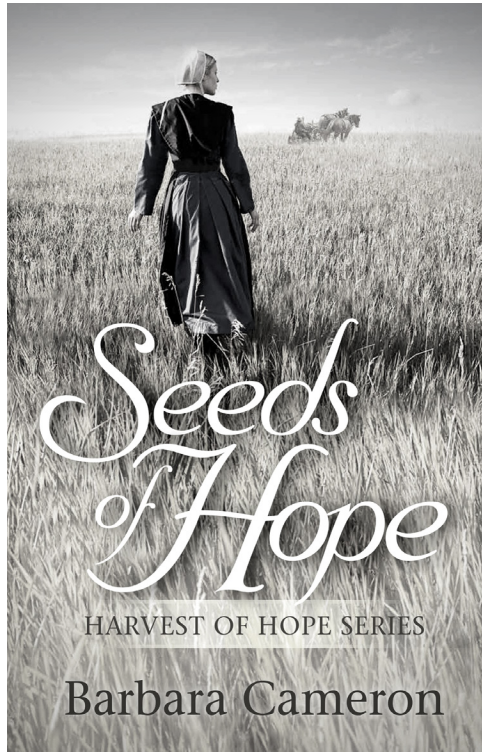
Heart Award. Three of her fiction stories were made into HBO/Cinemax movies.

Although Barbara is best known for her romantic and Amish fiction titles, she is also a prolific nonfiction author of titles including *101 Ways to Save Money on Your Wedding* and two editions of *The Everything Wedding Budget Book*.

Barbara is a former high school teacher and has also taught workshops and creative writing classes at national writing conferences, as well as locally. She currently teaches English and business communication classes as an adjunct instructor for the online campus of a major university.

Barbara enjoys spending time with her family and her three "nutty" Chihuahuas. She lives in Jacksonville, Florida. Visit her website at barbaracameron.com.

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