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THE PLAIN CITY PEACE SERIES

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—**Cindy Sigler Dagnan**

author and speaker

The
BACHELOR

The
BACHELOR

PLAIN CITY PEACE



BOOK TWO

STEPHANIE REED

 Kregel
Publications

The Bachelor

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

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*To my parents, Walter and Clara Morgan,
who loved me, took me to church, answered thousands of my questions,
and made sure I always had plenty to eat and plenty to read.
Thanks, Mom and Dad.*

*To my mother-in-law, Mary Jo Reed,
who raised a fine son and graciously accepted me into my second family.
Thanks, Mom.*

*In memory of Donald W. Reed,
the bravest man I've ever known. We still miss you terribly, Dad.*



P R O L O G U E

from The Bargain

CHARLEY WAS SOLEMN, star-lit blond hair framing his angel face. “*Mem* is sick with what Miriam Bontrager had. Sadie stayed late to help care for her, and when I brought her home, I asked her to wake you. When she told me you weren’t in your bed, I didn’t know what to think. How can I watch out for you when I don’t know where you are, Betsie? It’s not good for you to spend so much time with the English, especially alone with that boy so late, ain’t so?”

“*Ach*. I thought—never mind.” A quick fire of shame blazed across her cheeks, and she rushed to explain. “Michael is my friend only.” Her conscience pricked like a needle through a thimble. “He’s very troubled, and I was trying to help him. But don’t worry, Charley. He’s leaving. And he won’t be back.” The words caught in her throat.

Charley ducked his head. “*Ach*, that’s so good, Betsie. Come here and sit by me, why don’t you?” He patted the step.

She’d waited forever to be near him again, and she did not hesitate.

“Betsie, I have another question to ask you.”

Her heart pounded. “What question?”

But now Charley hemmed and hawed. “*Ach*, maybe I’m no good with fancy words, but I do know where you need to be and what is best for you.” He stopped to ponder, searching for a better way to put it. His face lit up with a thought. “You know it is true that you will never get to heaven if you stay with the English.”

Betsie felt a quick stab of fear. “But Charley! *Mem* and *Dat*—”

“*Ach*, no.” Charley groaned and cradled his face in his hands. “I told

you I am a *Nixnootzich* when it comes to words. Of course I pray that your *mem* and *dat* will return soon." He raised his head. "I am trying to say that I want you to stay here. I want you for my special friend." He added, very low, "I hope one day we will have a home together. What do you say, Betsie?"

She nodded, a lump in her throat. "I . . . I'd like that more than anything."

"Then kiss me once, Betsie," he said.

Excitement fluttered through her; she'd waited a long time for this. She raised her lips and closed her eyes. His kiss brushed her mouth like a moth's wing, tentative and chaste.

He drew back and smiled, visibly relieved. "Well, it's awful late. I'd better get back to *Mem*. She needs me."

Betsie bobbed her head. "All right, Charley. See you soon." For the second time, she waved good-bye. She touched her lips as she watched Charley unhitch the horses and drive away into the darkness.

So that was a kiss, she mused as she stepped inside the door. She turned up the lamp and sat down at the scarred oak table in the kitchen. Now, now she was free to think of Charley and all the wonderful times that awaited the two of them.



C H A P T E R 1

“Trouble is easier to get into than out of.”

—FANNIE TROYER, QUOTED IN BETSIE’S JOURNAL

BETSIE TROYER COVERED her ears as another rented moving truck roared southward past her farm, bound for Interstate 70. A white passenger van chugged in the truck’s wake along State Route 42. Betsie squinted to catch a last glimpse of the Hershberger family as they left Plain City, Ohio, for Missouri.

The van slowed a bit where the road dipped in front of the Troyer farm. Betsie scanned the faces of the occupants, recognized Zeke McCoy, the English driver who regularly transported Amish passengers out west, and came to rest on Atlee Hershberger, a neighbor boy the same age as her pretty younger sister, Sadie. Oblivious to the siblings crowded around him, Atlee’s dark eyes smoldered at the Troyer farm. When he caught sight of Betsie in the shadows, his hand shot up in a wave that knocked his hat from his head. He ignored the lost hat and pressed his palm to the glass. Taken aback by his ardent gaze, Betsie wiggled her fingers tentatively and quirked her eyebrows into question marks. Atlee did a double take, blushed, and slid down in his seat until only his mop of curly brown hair was visible as the van passed.

“Was I that awkward at seventeen?” Betsie grinned and shook her head as she walked to the back of her home.

The ringing blows of an ax punctuated the morning bustle. Joe

Miller, her neighbor across the road, must be splitting firewood in his woodlot. Betsie sighed. Joe's great-niece Katie would miss Ruthie Hershberger something awful. So many have moved away, Betsie mused as she pumped more water for her horse.

When the creak of the pump handle ceased, a sharp rat-tat on the front door caught her attention. "Now, who could that be, Judith?" In no particular hurry, Betsie caught the last dribbles of water in the priming jar and lugged the bucket to the trough. Judith, her bay mare, blew ripples across the water's surface before drinking deeply.

"Not a neighbor." Betsie fended off Judith's slobbery nuzzles. "Neighbors would walk around to the kitchen door, ain't so? Not Charley—" She pursed her lips. "Oh, Amelia, you'll shed all over my legs if you strop yourself on my ankles that way! Hush your meowing; I will feed you soon." With her toe, she gently nudged her persistent calico kitten aside. "Not Charley Yoder, because he's been here already to pick up Sadie, so who . . . ?"

Curious now, Betsie stood on tiptoe to get a better view and sucked in her breath. A familiar station wagon idled on the tree-lined driveway. She spied Gerald Sullivan, English owner of the harness shop where Betsie was an apprentice, on the front porch of her square white house. Behind him stood his daughter Sheila, shoulders slumped, brown ponytail limp, suitcase by her feet.

Betsie pushed open the gate and trotted toward the house, wiping her bare feet clean on grass damp with morning dew before she climbed the steps. A strand of wheat-colored hair strayed from her *Kapp* and tickled her nose before she tucked away the wisp.

She didn't bother to beat around the bush. "*Was in der welt?* Why have you come?"

Mr. Sullivan looked old as he hunched in the morning sunlight. "Oh, there you are, Betsie. Sorry to barge in on you unannounced. I should have figured you'd be out working hard already." He adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses and smoothed a nonexistent cowlick. "I'm sorry we're so early. Do you have a minute?"

Betsie regarded her boss with caution. Though 10 AM was early for the English, she'd been up for hours. Much of today's work she still

had to accomplish on her own, what with her sister working at the bakery and *Mem* and *Dat* gone. She opened her mouth to say she was pretty busy, really. Then she caught a glimpse of Sheila's reddened eyes and her heart melted. She pulled the screen door wide and directed father and daughter to the couch while she hurried to the kitchen and retrieved Amelia's dish. She scraped both of the breakfast plates into the bowl and added some dry cat food. Returning to the front room, she scooped up her ravenous kitten with a gentle hand and deposited her on Sheila's lap.

"Want to feed her, dear heart?"

The girl nodded with a tiny smile. She sniffled as she set the dish on her lap and bent over to rest her cheek against Amelia's downy fur. The kitten vibrated with purrs and made short work of the meal before licking her chops clean and settling onto the girl's bare legs.

All the while, the pendulum of the old eight-day clock sliced away the seconds. Betsie gave Mr. Sullivan an inquiring glance. "You said the harness shop would be closed for Memorial Day. Is there something else you wanted, maybe?"

His sigh was like a great gust. "I knew you would want to help, Betsie. You're very understanding." He tried to continue, but no words came.

Betsie folded her arms and waited. The less said, the better. That was a good rule when dealing with the English. She'd learned that a long time ago.

"Mom wants a divorce." Sheila whispered the shocking words for her father, her fingers buried in Amelia's fur. "She said so in a letter that came Saturday. Dad's flying to Idaho to change her mind; the catch is, he doesn't want me to go. But I know I can help, Dad!" she burst out, her lips trembling as fresh tears spilled. "I know I can!"

Mr. Sullivan sighed and Betsie's heart went out to him as he tried to speak. "Squirt, can't you see—"

"Don't call me Squirt! I'm not a little girl anymore!" Sheila's grip tightened until Amelia ceased licking her chops to mew in protest. "Y-you're the one who drove Mom away with all your yelling! How can you get her to c-come back without me to help?"

“Easy now.” Betsie reached to smooth Sheila’s hair but stopped short. “You’re scaring the kitty and you’ll make yourself sick. Besides, it seems like your *dat* wants your *mem* to come back as much as you do.”

“Of course I do, Squ— er, Sheila,” he chimed in with a grateful glance at Betsie. “It’s just that I need to do this on my own. I was hoping Sheila could stay with Michael until he reports for the service, but he hasn’t been around for a couple of days. We left him a note, but I can’t depend on him for something this important, not with his track record.”

Betsie flushed. Apparently, she was the only one who knew that Michael was planning on dodging the army’s draft for Vietnam. “You mean you want Sheila to stay with me for the day while you hunt for someone she can stay with?” She brushed Sheila’s sleeve with her fingertips.

“That’s just it. Debbie Keith and her family are out of town this week, and none of our relatives live close by.” Mr. Sullivan removed his steamy glasses and rubbed the lenses with his handkerchief. “And I don’t have time for a long drive. The sooner I get to Idaho, the sooner I can bring Phyllis home where she belongs.”

“It sounds like I will have no ride and no work at the harness shop for a good while, then,” Betsie remarked, doing some rapid calculations to figure out how she and Sadie would purchase supplies now that her money concern had become a reality.

Mr. Sullivan shook his head. “No, and I’m truly sorry about that. I’ve got to get to Idaho before Phyllis does something drastic. She thinks she’s about to make it big as an actress. She doesn’t want to hurt us, so she thinks it’s best if she ‘sets us free.’ But I don’t want to be free. I love my wife and I want her to come home.” He took a deep breath. “Is there any way Sheila can stay here with you until I come back with Phyllis? To tell you the truth, she refuses to stay with anyone *but* you. If you can’t help, I’m sunk.” He buried his head in his hands.

No. Betsie knew the answer, plain and simple. Her sister Sadie, Charley, her Amish neighbors, bishop Jonas Gingerich, and possibly even her best friend Rachel Yutzy would advise her to refuse. The Sullivan family had caused her enough trouble already.

Mr. Sullivan raised his head when Betsie didn’t answer right away.

“Look, I realize assuming responsibility for Sheila is a lot to ask. Maybe I should talk to your parents. Why don’t you call them?”

“*Mem* and *Dat* aren’t here . . . right now, so I can’t ask them.” It still hurt to admit they had left for the English world, leaving Betsie and Sadie to fend for themselves. “My sister is at work.” A whisper of warning nudged at her conscience and she gave Sheila’s knee an awkward pat. “Anyway, if you want Sheila to stay here, it’s really my bishop I must ask for permission. It would take a while, though.”

Mr. Sullivan tamped at his nonexistent cowlick. “But I can’t wait! Can’t you help me out just this once?”

The hurry-up English never grasped that a big decision required time, but it really didn’t matter one way or another. Deep down, Betsie suspected Jonas would never grant her permission. The Troyers were already on shaky ground since Betsie’s parents had left Plain City to “follow Jesus Christ,” as if they couldn’t do so just as well here. Now they were shunned. Betsie and Sadie had prayed that Lovina, *Dat*’s sister, could persuade Betsie’s parents to honor the long-ago vow they’d made on their knees before the community. But lo and behold, Lovina now followed the same worldly teachings that had lured Fannie and Noah Troyer away from their home, their family, and the good Lord.

More than anything, Betsie knew she should follow Charley’s advice: “Make up your mind to do what’s right. Then do it.” What was right was to avoid all contact with the worldly English—the doomed English who were far behind even the camel trying to pass through the eye of the needle on the way to heaven, if you listened to some. No good would come of allowing Sheila to stay in Betsie’s Amish home. Nothing else must come between Betsie and Charley, especially now that he’d declared his intentions to her. One day, one beautiful day in the near future, Betsie would become a good, obedient wife to Charley, a wife determined to avoid the poor choice her parents had made. Betsie Yoder will be my name, she reminded herself, and Charley will be my husband. There now, it wasn’t so hard, after all. She knew she must refuse.

Betsie pressed her tongue to the roof of her mouth to give the only

right answer. One simple word coupled with a regretful shake of her head and she could go back to the plain, peaceful life she loved.

Saying no would have been easy had she not glimpsed pure misery in Sheila's eyes. Somehow this young girl with the pointed chin, the sprinkle of freckles across her nose, and the chicken pox scar on her forehead had worked her way into Betsie's heart despite her firm resolve to remain separate from the English. Sheila had already lost contact with her mother and brother just as she was becoming a young woman. Now her father was off on some English version of a wild goose chase.

Betsie's throat constricted—she would not cry over losing her own parents to the English, especially not in front of Mr. Sullivan. The pain of their leaving was still fresh. How could she allow a young girl like Sheila to experience this same pain on her own? She gripped her hands tight together and spoke, barely above a whisper. "*Jah. Dummel Dich.*"

Mr. Sullivan raised his head and poked at his glasses. "What? I'm afraid I don't understand."

Betsie rubbed her forehead in an effort to focus. "*Ach*, I meant to say Sheila can stay with us for a little while, but hurry back." She eyed the door, worried that a neighbor, or Charley, might hear.

"Betsie, that's— I can't— you—" Mr. Sullivan stammered. He held out an awkward hand to shake, but Sheila leapt to her feet and wrapped Betsie in a fierce hug, leaving Amelia to hiss and scramble to safety under the couch.

"Ouch!" Betsie teased. "Who will you stay with if you squeeze me in two pieces?" She tried her best to laugh off her decision, but her heart pounded. What had she done?



C H A P T E R 2

“The problem with a little sin is that it
usually grows into a big one.”

—FANNIE TROYER, QUOTED IN BETSIE’S JOURNAL

As Sheila relinquished her hold, Betsie heard a car pull up and went limp with relief. Surely it was Michael Sullivan, Sheila’s big brother, come to her rescue. In a flash, Betsie surmised that he had seen the note his father left and given up his foolish plan to dodge the Vietnam draft—foolish because even her Amish cousin Nelson had not escaped serving, although he’d been able to remain stateside at a Chicago hospital.

As far as Betsie knew, Michael hadn’t told another soul that he was heading to some outlandish place called The Farm in Tennessee. Her cheeks grew warm as she recalled that he’d asked her to go along, but she’d quashed that idea. How *gut* of him, though, to come to his senses and show up at the eleventh hour, as he so often did. Now Michael could take care of Sheila until her dad returned.

She gently dislodged Sheila’s grip and stepped quickly to the porch. With a grin, she craned to peer over the lilac hedge for a glimpse of the yellow jacket car she knew so well.

Her grin slipped. Parked in the driveway was a red pickup truck hitched to a horse trailer. An ominous whicker accompanied a metallic clang and the drumming of hooves. Betsie saw Judith raise her head and prick her ears with interest.

Mr. Sullivan loomed behind Betsie. "Oh, he's here. Good."

"Why is that truck at my house?" Betsie pointed.

Mr. Sullivan shuffled his feet. "Uh, that's my friend, Rick. He brought Fledge over. Hello, Rick!" He waved.

A man in a cowboy hat eased out of the truck cab and glowered up at Mr. Sullivan before hobbling to the back of the trailer. From her limited experience with the pony, Betsie could certainly identify with the man. The devil pony, that's what Michael had playfully called Fledge. Even Sheila, to whom he belonged, admitted that Fledge did pretty much as he pleased. A few weeks ago, Fledge had made it painfully clear to Betsie that he preferred not to be ridden.

Betsie narrowed her eyes and rubbed her backside. "You expect me to keep the pony here, too? Why can't this Rick care for him?"

Mr. Sullivan shook his head. "No one I know would touch Fledge . . . er, take him on such short notice. Your mare will tolerate another horse, right?"

"It is not Judith's manners that concern me." Betsie frowned and glanced at Sheila, who listened with anxious eyes. "Since Fledge is already here, I guess he can stay."

Mr. Sullivan patted his pockets, relief evident.

"Here you go." He pressed a wad of bills into Betsie's palm. "This should cover Fledge's feed and then some while I'm gone, especially if you supplement it by turning him out to graze." He winked at his daughter. "Remember how I cured you of saying, 'Hey!' all the time, Squirt?"

"Dad." Sheila rolled her eyes. "Every time I said 'hey,' you said, 'Straw's cheaper. Grass is free,'" she mumbled.

Betsie left the pair of them and crossed to the pasture fence, careful to keep any trace of resentment out of her manner for Sheila's sake. More ringing thumps and frantic exclamations issued from behind the horse trailer as Rick attempted to back Fledge down the ramp. Betsie marveled that he'd managed to load the pony in the first place.

"Come, Judith," she coaxed, and the mare trotted readily to hand. "Let's put you in the old cow pasture out back and we'll put that *loppich* pony closer to the house where we can keep an eye on his naughtiness."

When Judith was taken care of, Betsie called to Rick. "Turn him out here." She pushed open the other gate and stepped lively to get out of Fledge's path. The brown and white spotted pony's ears slicked flat to his skull. He bared his teeth and snapped at Rick's checkered shirtsleeve. Rick howled and jerked his arm away, leaving a triangle of fabric in the pony's mouth. With a jumble of swear words, the man hustled Fledge through the gate and slammed it shut. He glared at Mr. Sullivan.

"Never again, you hear me, Gerry? You keep that beast away from me. He kicked me good when I loaded him up, more'n once, too." He pulled up his shirtsleeve and rubbed a reddened patch of flesh. "Another fraction of an inch and he would've broken the skin." He wagged his head at Betsie. "I don't envy you, ma'am, and that's a fact."

Betsie pressed her lips together. She mustn't let on to Sheila how *ferhoodled* she felt. This mess wasn't her fault. In fact, up to this point, the girl had shown more mettle than the English adults in her life, especially noticeable since she had been "saved," as she called it.

Rick clanged the ramp shut, hopped in the truck without another word to Mr. Sullivan, and drove away. Betsie flapped her apron to dispel gravel dust as she trudged to the porch. There she took Sheila's cold hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

Mr. Sullivan pulled another piece of paper from his pocket. "This is the telephone number at the hotel where I'll be staying. If there's an emergency, you can leave a message with the front desk."

Amused, Betsie took the paper. She didn't bother to remind the man that she had no telephone.

"Do you have your house key?" Mr. Sullivan asked his daughter.

"Yes, Dad." Sheila pulled a leather thong out of her pocket and dangled the key.

"Then I guess this is it. Listen, if you need anything . . ." His words trailed off. "Squirt"—he gripped her shoulders—"I wish I didn't have to leave you here, but it's the only way. You know I love you. You know I love your mom. I want to bring her home so we can all be a family again." He hugged her tight.

"Michael, too?" Her words were muffled against his cotton shirt.

Betsie saw Mr. Sullivan's jaw flex. "If that's what he wants, I'm all for that." He kissed the top of Sheila's head. "I'm certainly all for that," he repeated with a brittle smile.

He headed for the car as Betsie and Sheila watched from the porch. Betsie saw tears pool in the girl's eyes as she waved good-bye.

Where she would find the courage she needed to face this long day, Betsie had no idea. And what would Sadie say when she got home from her job at Yoder's Bakery and discovered that a strange English girl had come to live with them? And even worse, how could Betsie face Charley? With trepidation, she guided her new charge into the house as Mr. Sullivan drove the station wagon out of sight.