

# The Farmer's Daughter

By G. R. Driver

## Preface

On Mennonites:

Mennonites and The Amish descended from the Anabaptist movement. Mennonites are not The Amish. They are different in many ways. One such difference is their use of technology. Mennonites have electricity and drive automobiles.

Conservative Mennonites dress modestly and plainly. You may see them driving dark, or black painted vehicles. Moderate Mennonites may dress modestly, but more colorfully. A moderate Mennonite might escape your notice because they dress the same as you. Conservative Mennonites do not drink alcoholic beverages, but some moderate Mennonites do. Teenaged Mennonite boys and girls are just like other teens, they have hormones, and they talk about and do the same things that you (probably) did.

Our home has Mennonite families living on three sides. Two families are conservative and one is moderate. They are all fine people and excellent neighbors.

As for my fictional Mennonites, the Schmidts: They are moderates.

Thank you for reading my story,

G. R. Driver

## Prologue

"Jonathan Schmidt, I'll be having a word with you," growled the figure in the milk house doorway.

Farmer Schmidt stopped shoveling, he recognized the man and knew why he was here.

"Tommy?" Johnathan turned to his son. "Go to the north field and count the fence posts." Tommy stared at his father and started asking a question. "Do it now son. When you're finished, check in with your mother."

Tommy grunted an affirmative, leaned his shovel in the corner and headed for the north field.

Johnathan did not relish this confrontation, but he would see it to the end.

Stepping to the center aisle of the milk house, Jonathan faced his antagonist. "If you want a word with me Klaus Hanslein, you'll come in here for it." Johnathan couldn't see Hanslein's face, but he could imagine Hanslein's annoyance. While the floor between the stanchions was clean, cow dung still littered the section nearest to the door. If Klaus wanted to come in, he would have to dodge cow shit.

Klaus must have wanted to talk; he made it through the droppings and stopped about an arm's length away from Jonathan.

"Schmidt, my son asked you for permission to court your daughter."

Jonathan crossed his arms and replied, "Aye, and I told him no."

"Klaus Junior is a fine match and would not need your support."

"Your son attacked my daughter in the school library." Johnathan shook his head, "My daughter does not want him. Nor do I want your family as kin."

Klaus clenched his teeth, but he kept his arms open, "My son made a few mistakes, but those are in the past. Schmidt, what is the worth of a daughter? She is not a son that can pass on your name."

Klaus paused to calm himself, then continued. "Consider this: If my son married your daughter, there would not be a need for my fire insurance."

"Fire Insurance? You mean your protection money." Jonathan's eyes blazed, "I love my daughter and she will *not* marry your son."

Klaus' face turned red. He poked Jonathan in the chest. "You would lose everything for a stupid girl? A worthless daughter? Your fire Insurance just doubled!"

Jonathan smiled while Hanslein made his way out; dodging cow shit humbled everyone.

That evening Mr. Schmidt discussed the situation with his wife. They both agreed that their daughter did not need to know about this. Rebecca would marry that deranged young man if she thought it would help her family.

Hanslein's doubled extortion payment would be a crushing burden. Farm equipment broke down and parts are expensive. Mrs. Schmidt suggested renting out their extra bedroom. It would bring in some of the needed money.

The Schmidts also prayed for help. "Surely, God will deliver us from this strong enemy."

## Chapter One

Kevin Butcher:

I'm watching *Pale Rider*, one of my favorite westerns when I receive an email. My handler, at the agency I contracted from, has a new job for me. "Mr. Kevin Butcher, we have a temporary assignment ..." I tapped the screen to open it. They want me to take a six-month contract, and set up a data center, over in Berks County. Berks is about two hours east and that is going to suck.

If a job is distant enough, I use my customized travel trailer. Compared to the cost of a hotel, a camping spot with utility hookups cost less and I pocketed the difference. I had not expected to need my trailer this soon and I stripped out the interior for an entertainment system upgrade. If I took this contract, I'd be in a hotel.

I'm not sure why, but I decided to take the contract. I believe that I can do good work there.

The hotel was comfortable and clean, and expensive. I grumbled about it at lunch and a local tradesman suggested I consider renting a room. I called to ask about several rooms listed in the local paper, and then drove by to check them out. The first two houses were unsuitable. The third house, an older Victorian home on a dairy farm, stood about a hundred yards down a private lane. I parked, got out and took in the view. Everything was tidy. The out buildings showed some wear. Well-tended flower beds surrounded the front of the house. This farm belonged to a family that cared.

A woman came onto the porch and asked if I phoned about the room. I walked up to the porch and we introduced ourselves. Mrs. Schmidt is an attractive woman in her thirties. She wore an ankle-length, patterned dress, and she kept her blonde hair tucked under a small white Mennonite-style prayer cap. She told me her husband was out on his tractor but she would call him. Two kids, a boy around twelve

and an older girl, came out of the house. The boy was unremarkable, but the girl was striking. Slender with blonde hair and incredible cornflower blue eyes. She dressed the same as Mrs. Schmidt, a long patterned dress, and a small white prayer cap.

Mr. Schmidt arrived a few minutes later. I stood to meet him. His weathered features made him seem much older than his wife. We shook hands and I could feel his strength. We sat down and he asked me about my work and I explained that I was setting up the data center. He nodded and asked how long I would need the room.

I must have passed muster as he offered to show me the room.

Their extra room was on the upper floor. It had a private bathroom, and access to a balcony across the back of the house. The room's furnishings included a bed, desk, and dresser. The price for the room included breakfast, lunch on the weekends and dinner. Meals would be on the farmer's schedule and not to order. I paid for three months in advance and arranged to move in the next day.

Moving took little effort and I arrived in time for dinner. As we sat at their kitchen table, the Schmidts introduced me to their son Tommy and daughter Rebecca.

Their farm seemed huge with make-shift dirt roads connecting the fields. Mr. Schmidt gave me free access to his roads and I established a circuit for running. My frequent long work days made regular exercise difficult. But, when I did manage a normal quitting time, I often exercised before dinner.

Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Kitchen

When Mrs. Schmidt entered the kitchen, she noticed her daughter looking out of the window. Rebecca was so focused; she didn't notice it when her mom walked over to peek over her shoulder. In the yard, Mr. Butcher was doing a martial arts exercise. He had taken off his t-shirt and was wearing just a pair of shorts and running shoes. Sweat was running down his well-defined chest and abdomen. It was so fascinating. ... Shaking her head, Mrs. Schmidt said, "Doesn't Mr. Butcher look interesting?" Rebecca jumped as soon as her mother started to speak. She started to turn but her mother stopped her and asked, "He's caught your attention, hasn't he?"

Rebecca's face flushed and she lowered her eyes. "Yes Momma."

Mrs. Schmidt mused aloud, "I suppose your father could ask Mr. Butcher to be more modest."

She and her daughter peered back out of the window. Mr. Butcher started to do pull-ups from a tree branch. "However, your father is a busy man; it would be a disservice to take him away from his work. We don't need to bother him with this."

Kevin Butcher:

At the start, the data center job needed a lot of late nights and I missed dinner. Mrs. Schmidt felt sorry for me and on those nights, would ask her daughter to heat something up for me. I sat in the kitchen and studied while eating. After a few nights of heating up my dinner, Rebecca and I started talking. She asked me if my wife minded me being on the road so much and I told her I never married. She seemed surprised and wanted to know why not. I guess it seemed strange that I was single. I gave her an honest answer and told her, "I haven't met a girl interesting enough."

Another evening Rebecca sat across the table from me and asked about my homework. I told her that I was studying electrical engineering. She wanted to know how I managed school when I worked so much, and how I paid for it. I told her that all the classes were online and that the G.I. Bill paid for some of it.

"What, you were in the army?" she asked.

I shook my head, "No, I was in the Marine Corps."

"What's the difference?" "Well, marines are tougher and much better looking," I said with a grin.

Rebecca giggled, "You don't look that tough."

"We could go outside and wrestle." I offered.

"Right—if my parents catch us—you'd have to wrestle Daddy."

Sitting at the Schmidt's kitchen table and talking with Rebecca became a usual thing. I worked at my studies while Rebecca cleaned. When finished with cleaning, she sat across from me and we talked. She always wanted to know about me; the places I had been and the things I had done. It was difficult to get Rebecca to talk about herself. At a lull in our conversation, I said, "Tell me about Rebecca."

She didn't say anything at first, and then she lowered her eyes. In a subdued voice she said, "There isn't much to say, I'm not interesting."

I leaned forward, touched the back of her hand and matched her lowered voice. "That's not right at all, Becky. I think you are very interesting."

She glanced up at me and I met her eyes. We both smiled and I didn't want to move my hand away from hers. Then we heard her father stand up from his family room chair. Rebecca jumped up and started drying dishes. From that night on, Rebecca and I spent more time together and I didn't mind it at all.

If I came down to breakfast before her father, Rebecca would greet me, "Good morning, Mr. Butcher." I would reply with equal cheerfulness, "Good morning, Miss Schmidt." Mrs. Schmidt watched us with equal measures of restrained amusement and wariness.

Some evenings Rebecca would be busy with chores and I sat on the porch with Mr. Schmidt. He asked me about my homework. I told him that I was working towards a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

"How close are you to that degree?"

"I only need three more credits. I should finish about the same time as I finish this job."

Rebecca and I became more comfortable with each other. Tonight, she was taking a break from washing the dishes and I was taking a break from homework. Rebecca pointed at my textbook on antenna systems. "How hard is it to learn about antennas?"

"Antennas? They can be crazy, but the basics are easy."

She raised one eyebrow and asked, "Easy?"

I glanced out the window. Hmm, it might be dark enough to see the lights from one of the local AM radio tower arrays. I stood, "Come on, let me show you." We went out in front of her house. I spun, scanning for the red lights on the antenna towers. "There, this way." I reached and took her hand and pulled her with me. There was a better view over by the lane and I stopped there. With my free hand, I pointed out the line of antenna towers and explained how they worked together to direct the radio signals. As I talked, I became aware of how soft and warm her hand felt. My talk started to falter. I turned towards her, "You see, antennas are simple."

Rebecca squeezed my hand and said. "Some things are complicated though. I better go back." She released my hand and we walked back.

Back in the kitchen, Rebecca went back to the dishes and I picked up a towel and started drying. While I worked, I thought about complicated things. After we finished the dishes I went back to my homework.

All the late nights paid off and my team was ahead of schedule. Our manager decided to let us go home early. This worked in my favor as I had homework to do. I arrived at the farmhouse and Mrs. Schmidt told me her husband was out looking for a tractor part. She asked if I would take her and Rebecca to the

grocery store. I tried to hold the truck doors for her and Rebecca, but Mrs. Schmidt looked at me and raised an eyebrow. "Rebecca and I can manage car doors just fine, Mr. Butcher."

I scurried around and got in. As I buckled my seat belt, I made eye contact with Rebecca, who was in the back, and she waved.

On the way to the store, Mrs. Schmidt asked me questions about my family. Sometimes, when I glanced in the rearview mirror, I would make eye contact with Rebecca. At the store, I offered to push the shopping cart. Sure, I wanted to be helpful, but I was more interested in watching Rebecca walk around. Mrs. Schmidt told me to stay in the truck. After dropping them at the door, I found a convenient parking spot close to the store's exit.

Something unusual happened when Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca came out of the store pushing their cart. A young man wearing Mennonite style plain clothing, but with long hair, approached them. He ignored Mrs. Schmidt and focused entirely on Rebecca. Rebecca shied away from him, but he seemed insistent and grabbed her arm. Before I knew it, I was out of my truck and walking towards them.

The man pulled Rebecca away with him. Mrs. Schmidt tried to force herself between the long-haired man and Rebecca. "Mr. Hanslein, stop this at once!"

Rebecca struggled, "Klaus, let me go!"

The man faced Rebecca and he never saw me coming. I slapped him, hard, across the back of his head. He startled and dropped Rebecca's arm like it burned him. He spun to face the new and unexpected threat. As his right hand came into range, I took it and put him in a thumb lock. His left hand was still free, so I stayed a little behind him to make it difficult for him to hit me. He tried punching and kicking; I just increased the pressure on his thumb and wrist until he stilled.

"Apologize to the ladies and I'll let you keep your thumb." I applied some pressure to his wrist when he seemed to hesitate.

The pain from the wrist lock caused his voice to rise in pitch. "I apologize, Mrs. Schmidt, Rebecca."

Nodding towards my truck, "Ma'am, if you and Rebecca would get in my truck. Lock the doors too. I'll bring the groceries along in a minute." As soon as Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca got into my truck. I released Klaus' thumb and stepped back. I told him, "I don't know what your problem is, but you need to learn better manners."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, should I?"

Klaus stood there holding his strained wrist and thumb. His eyes studied me as he evaluated his chances. He tried, but couldn't meet my eyes and I knew he lost this round.

"This ain't over," he mumbled and walked away cradling his strained hand and wrist.

On the way back to the farmhouse. Mrs. Schmidt expressed her displeasure with me. I shouldn't have gotten involved, and I shouldn't have resorted to violence. I stayed unrepentant. "I'm sorry ma'am but I will not stand by and see Rebecca manhandled." In the rear-view mirror, Rebecca smiled at me, I didn't think she minded my intervention at all. In fact, if we were alone, I might have tried to claim a reward for defending her. After dinner, Mr. Schmidt and I went out on the porch and he filled in some details. Klaus Hanslein junior was a spurned suitor. Klaus had asked for permission to court Rebecca and Mr. Schmidt rejected him as being unsuitable. Mr. Schmidt wouldn't go into what made Klaus unsuitable, but I gathered that the two families had problems.

Thursday night, Rebecca and her mom were busy with chores in the kitchen so I went upstairs to do some homework. It was a warm night and I propped the bedroom door open for the increased ventilation. Rebecca stopped by and knocked. "Mom wanted to know if you could check our computer. It isn't working right."

"Sure." I saved my homework and followed her downstairs.

The family PC, an old Dell OptiPlex, sat on an antique roll top desk. Mrs. Schmidt told me it would start, run for a bit, and shut down. I pressed the power button and held down the keys to enter the bios. The CPU temperature rose too fast. I pressed and held down the power button forcing the PC to shut off. Mrs. Schmidt and her daughter looked over my shoulder as I popped the case open. Pointing at the clogged cooling duct, "I think your CPU is having a cooling problem. Is there a workbench and a vacuum with a hose I can use?"

Mrs. Schmidt turned to her daughter, "Take Mr. Butcher out to your father's workshop. Show him where the vacuum and tools are." After unplugging the cables from the PC, I picked it up and asked Rebecca to show me the way. To the north of the house was a detached garage. We went in through a side door. Rebecca turned on the lights and led me over to the work bench. Mr. Schmidt's shop was well equipped and organized. New, old, and antique Craftsman brand tools hung from silhouetted pegboard. I sat the case on its side and pulled off the door. "Could you get the vacuum, Becky?" Rebecca rolled over an ancient Sears brand tank vacuum. "You're the only person who calls me Becky."

"Am I in trouble?"

"I don't mind it, but Daddy would."

I plugged in the tank vacuum, grinned at Rebecca, and said, "I'll try to not let him catch me."

Rebecca stepped next to me and peered into the case, "It's all full of dust."

I decided to treat Becky as my apprentice and gave her the nozzle. She didn't need any directions about vacuuming. We had fun identifying components as she removed the dust. Sometimes we bumped into each other and neither of us was in a hurry to move apart. We talked for about fifteen minutes while cleaning out the dust. I just enjoyed her company. We were standing close and I caught a whiff of wild flowers. Unfortunately, we ran out of dust and had to reassemble the computer.

After we finished cleaning up, I suggested her school may offer computer classes. Rebecca shook her head, "Not at my school. Boys go to the smart classes. They teach girls to keep house and to raise babies."

I had a brief mental image of Becky raising our baby. Then I took the thought further and imagined, in fine detail, the two of us making that baby. "I'll teach you whatever you want to know Becky, and you can read any of my books." Thinking aloud, "I wonder if I could take you into my work some afternoon and show you around."

Becky said, "I wish." Then she turned the garage lights off and we walked back to the house.

Rebecca reconnected the cables with my directions then sat at the keyboard. I hit the power button and told her how to enter the bios. We made sure the temperature stabilized at a safe point. Rebecca started asking questions and I gave her an entry-level course on the common PC bios. As Windows XP Pro started, Mrs. Schmidt told us that Mr. Schmidt and Tommy were back. Rebecca stepped away from me saying that she needed to start drying dishes. Mr. Schmidt and Tommy came in while I finished a diagnostic. Mr. Schmidt saw me at their computer and asked what I was doing. Mrs. Schmidt told him that I fixed their computer. I explained the case had filled with dust and I vacuumed it out. No one mentioned Rebecca's involvement.

I'll give Mr. Schmidt credit; he asked if I could show him what I did, and dragged a chair over. I showed him the bios and how to find the temperatures. He was a quick study and remembered everything we talked about. I had no question where Rebecca got her intelligence. After shutting down the PC, Mr. Schmidt and I went outside to the porch. We talked about my education and my work.

Mrs. Schmidt sent a silent Rebecca out with iced green tea for us.

I don't think Mr. Schmidt liked my contractor lifestyle. He asked me why I hadn't settled in one place or another. "I'm not sure. Mr. Schmidt, but I like the challenge of a difficult job.

"This isn't any of my business Mr. Butcher, but does your job pay well?"

"How well depends on a person's standards, but a person with my skills and experience can gross over six figures per year."

Mr. Schmidt sipped his tea. In a contemplative tone of voice, he said. "I had no idea."

"Tomorrow is Saturday and I'm working a half day. If you have an interest, I can bring you and your family in for a tour of the data center."

"We'll see, I have to milk the cows late tomorrow afternoon and there is work in the fields that needs doing. For now, I'm going to check the weather forecast and go to bed. Thank you again for working on our computer. "Mr. Schmidt got up and went inside.

I stayed out on their porch and enjoyed the night scenery. The lightning bugs flitted about and the moon was almost full. After a while, the screen door opened and Rebecca stepped onto the porch. She held the door and allowed it to close without making noise.

The moon gave enough light for me to see her lovely face and several stray hairs that escaped her prayer cap. I got up and stood next to her at the porch railing. A slight scent of wildflowers tickled my nose. I looked at Rebecca, "Good evening, Miss Schmidt, the view tonight is beautiful."

She glanced out at the yard, then back to me, "Mr. Butcher, I wanted to say goodnight."

"Becky, when we're alone; my name is Kevin."

"I can't let my parents hear me use your given name but, goodnight Kevin."

The moon was high and bright; the summer night clear and warm. Becky glanced up at me with her eyes full of moonlight. Without any worry for negative consequences, I bent down and kissed her. Our lips touched for a few seconds. The scent of flowers and fresh air filled my head. I opened my eyes after we broke off the kiss. She hadn't flinched or pulled away. She lifted her right hand and touched her lips.

"Goodnight Becky."

She looked into my eyes for a few seconds; then slipped back in the house without allowing the door to make any noise.

The next morning at breakfast, Rebecca, sat opposite from me. Sometimes we'd make brief eye contact and share silly smiles. Tommy ate with his usual enthusiasm. Mr. Schmidt detailed the day's schedule while he ate. Then he mentioned that I offered to take the family on a tour of the data center that afternoon. This announcement got me a glance from Becky. Mrs. Schmidt thought it would be interesting but she and Rebecca had canning to do. With breakfast over, the women started to clear the table. Tommy went off with his father to milk the cows and work in the fields. I went back upstairs to grab my laptop before heading off to work.

Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Kitchen:

Mrs. Schmidt worried about her daughter. Rebecca used to be so sensible, so reliable. Now she seemed preoccupied and forgetful. The best word to come to mind was ditsy. It was all the fault of Mr. Butcher. That polite young man noticed Rebecca and Rebecca certainly noticed him. Any place where Mr. Butcher was, Rebecca would soon find an excuse to be there.

And something happened last night: Rebecca came in from the porch with a glow on her cheeks. The girl's mind must have been a hundred miles away because she walked right into one of the kitchen chairs. Later, when Mr. Butcher came in from the porch; he was smiling and looked much too happy.

Then, at breakfast, Mr. Butcher and Rebecca couldn't keep their eyes off each other. Oh, they thought they were being discreet. Ha, maybe Tommy hadn't noticed them carrying on. Mrs. Schmidt glanced around: *Hmm, where is Rebecca now?*

Kevin Butcher:

I heard Rebecca's familiar footsteps on the stairs. I got up and stood in the doorway. Rebecca strolled by. "Hello, Miss Schmidt. It's delightful, to see you again."

Rebecca paused and met my eyes. She was smiling, her cornflower blue eyes bright. "Hello, Mr. Butcher."

"Becky, last night on the porch, kissing you meant a great deal to me. I like you a lot and I hope you feel the same."

She moved a little closer. "I like you too, but we shouldn't have done it." The open windows allowed a light breeze to blow down the hallway and she checked her prayer cap.

I met her eyes. "You just, you looked so beautiful. I couldn't help myself."

She lowered her eyes, and whispered, "I'm not beautiful."

"Ah, Becky," I reached and pushed the loose strands of hair from her face. "You're so wrong about that."

Rebecca lifted her head and met my eyes. "Last night on the porch meant a lot to me as well, but it was not proper."

"Proper? What would it take to make it proper?"

"You need to talk to Daddy, and ask for permission to court me."

"Would you like it if I asked him?"

She nodded and vanished into her room.

Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Kitchen:

Mrs. Schmidt followed her daughter's motions handling the sterilized canning jars. They were putting up bread and butter pickles today. The sliced cucumbers only needed put into the jars and covered with the brine and pickling spices. Rebecca was doing everything right. At least with Mr. Butcher off at work, Rebecca had her sense back. This might be a suitable time to talk to her daughter.

Mrs. Schmidt said, "That Mr. Butcher seems to be pleasant enough. How are you getting along with him?"

Rebecca paused for a few seconds before filling the next jar. "We're getting along fine Momma."

"Your father has noticed that Mr. Butcher seems to pay a lot of attention to you. He is trying to decide if it is a problem."

Rebecca waited until they finished with the pickles. "Momma, it isn't a problem. I told Mr. Butcher if he wanted a relationship with me; he needed to ask Daddy for permission to court me."

"Are you fond of Mr. Butcher?"

"Yes, Momma."

"I was your age when I met your father, and I couldn't think straight when I was around him."

"That's what I feel like with Kevin, I mean, Mr. Butcher."

"Well I'll talk to your father. But you know his concern will be about Mr. Butcher's ability to provide for a family."

"Kevin said ..." Rebecca glanced down, "Mr. Butcher said he owns a house and some land over in Fulton County."

"Hmm, well that sounds good, and he is going to be an engineer, not a farmer. Your father will like that." Mrs. Schmidt continued to discuss the merits of a match with Rebecca and Mr. Butcher. They worked their way to a frank discussion on courting. "If your father gives his OK, and you start courting, you will need to keep a level head. Mr. Butcher is a man and he may want to do more than spoon. We've talked about how babies are made. I do not want you to make me a grandmother until nine months AFTER you marry."

"Yes Momma, I mean no Momma."

"Remember, you can talk to me about anything. I mean that. Anything. If Mr. Butcher gets a little free with his hands, it is not the end of the world. Just talk to me."

Rebecca was blushing furiously. "Yes, Momma."

"We have the canning done. If your father can make the time, we'll be able to go see where Mr. Butcher works. I'm going to go and talk with your father. You might want to wash up so you don't smell like a pickle when your Mr. Butcher comes home."

Kevin Butcher:

A slow half day at work gave me time to think about my relationship with Rebecca. Maybe I should have studied anthropology because I was up against pronounced cultural differences. Her community had well-established courting customs and I wasn't following the rules. I was certain that Rebecca liked me, and I liked her a lot.

If I succeeded in circumventing the approved dating conventions. I risked diminishing her value within the community. Regardless of my intentions, I did not want her labeled as a whore. I had a decision to make: Did I like this girl enough to make a commitment? Talking to her father is the first step towards marriage. Time to do some soul-searching.

Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Milk House:

Mrs. Schmidt found her husband working in the milk house. It was between milkings and the cows were out in the field. Mr. Schmidt saw his wife come to the open door and he told her to wait and he would come to her. "Tommy, you keep cleaning. I'm going to talk with your mother."

Tommy nodded but kept an eye on his parents. No telling what was going on.

"I've had a talk with our daughter. It's as we expected. They are both infatuated with each other."

Mr. Schmidt grinned. "Well, she is definitely your daughter."

"Very funny, Jonathan, but you remember what it was like when we courted."

Mr. Schmidt stopped smiling. "Do I need to run him off?"

"No, I think he may be an outstanding match for Rebecca. He's going to be an engineer soon, and his income is considerable. Rebecca told me he owns a home and property over in Fulton County. This match may be best for Rebecca because he won't keep her from an education."

"Hmm, you could be right. At least I wouldn't need to support them."

Kevin Butcher:

I pulled into my parking spot in front of the farmhouse and Rebecca came out to meet me. She wore nice patterned long dress and her scuffed tennis shoes. There was a bit of a breeze and she kept a hand on her skirts. Seeing her standing there, made all my doubts vanish.

We walked together around the side of her house. When we were out of sight, Rebecca stopped me. She stood close to me, and her blue eyes pinned me. "Are you going to ask my Dad?"

"Yes, can I do it now or should I wait until later?"

Rebecca smiled. "Tonight after dinner, you can ask him then."

She started walking, but I grabbed her hand. "Wait." She turned towards me but she didn't take her hand back. "What if he says 'No'?"

She stepped back to me and, with her free hand, straightened my collar. "He isn't going to say no, I talked with Momma, she's fixed it."

"Still, I think I need a kiss to help with my courage." Rebecca glanced around. Then she put her hands on my shoulders. My arms went around her waist. She tilted her head up, closing her eyes as our lips touched. Her thin cotton dress let me feel every warm curve and she felt wonderful pressed against me. I resisted the urge to crush her to me. Along with her usual scent of wild flowers, I caught a whiff of the oddest thing, "You smell like pickles!"

Later that afternoon, I was sitting on the porch when Mr. Schmidt and Tommy came home from the fields. They smelled like manure and Mrs. Schmidt sent them to the showers. Rebecca brought me out a glass of their excellent iced tea. She kept her voice down but told me her mom and dad were getting ready. Rebecca put a little extra sway into her walk and I think she noticed my appreciative glances.

We took two vehicles to the data center and while I would prefer Rebecca in my truck, I got Tommy instead. Tommy didn't talk much until I gave him a bag of peanuts, and then he said thanks.

Our little convoy stopped at the front gate and I got them visitor passes. I gave them the technical tour. We examined the diesel generators and power supplies and we toured the racks of servers. Mr. Schmidt wanted to see where I worked so I took him to the server maintenance office. We looked over the servers I set up and repaired.

Later that evening, Mr. Schmidt and I were back on the porch drinking iced tea. He told me my work was interesting, but he didn't understand it. When the conversation lulled, I knew it was time to ask the question.

"Mr. Schmidt, there is something I want to ask you."

That got his attention and he gazed at me and asked, "Is this about my daughter?"

"Yes sir; may I have your permission to court Rebecca?" I asked the question and had no idea how it would play out.

"Humph, I'm not too surprised. Mrs. Schmidt and I have seen you two eyeing each other. Tell me, Mr. Butcher, are you a Christian?"

"Yes sir, I'm Lutheran."

"Well, at least you're Protestant. Go to church much?"

"No, not since my parents passed away. I haven't been comfortable going to church since."

"Young man, anger at God serves no purpose. Your parents are in a better place. If you want to court my daughter, you'll be coming to church with us. God won't mind a Lutheran in his house." Mr. Schmidt

stood. I stood as well. "Yes, Mr. Butcher, you may court my daughter. I think that the two of you will be good together."

"Thank you Mr. Schmidt."

Mr. Schmidt and I shook hands. He said goodnight and went back inside.

I stayed on the porch to enjoy the night and to contemplate the future. Neither the lightning bugs nor the moon offered any hints. Rebecca came out onto the porch, tonight she allowed the screen door to close by itself. I stood to meet her.

"Your Father said yes."

"I know. He told me you were coming to church with us in the morning."

"What happens now?"

Becky took my arm and we went to the end of the porch and sat on the glider. "Now, Kevin, we can talk and get to know each other. Momma will make sure we don't do anything wrong."

## Chapter Two

Some things bring more change than you might expect. For example, last night, Mr. Schmidt gave me permission to court his daughter. But I never expected to step out of the shower and find her in my bedroom.

I finished my shower, stepped out onto the bathmat and reached for a towel. Through the open bathroom door, I saw Rebecca looking through my closet. She wore a bathrobe and fuzzy slippers.

I snatched that towel and jumped right back into the shower. While drying my arms and back, I called over the curtain, "Good morning, Miss Schmidt."

"Momma thought you might need help picking out clothes for church."

"Great idea, thank you."

After drying off, I knotted the towel around my waist and stepped back out of the shower. Rebecca turned around holding a pair of pants and a shirt. Her cheeks colored pink as she realized what I wore.

From out in the hallway Mrs. Schmidt called, "Rebecca?"

Rebecca laid my clothes on the bed, "Wear these." She waved and left the room. The door closed with a click.

How interesting, had she come in here with her mom's permission?

I came down for breakfast which Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca were busy finishing. Mrs. Schmidt took a few seconds to inspect my outfit and gave Rebecca a nod. Mr. Schmidt came down next and gave me a once over as well. Tommy came in from outside. While we ate, Rebecca told me about the church service and how I needed to behave. Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt filled in the occasional detail. Tommy just stared at me as if I had grown antlers.

-----

I followed the Schmidts to church. Before we left, I lobbied for Rebecca to ride with me. "In case I get lost." Mr. Schmidt smiled and gave me Tommy.

On the way to our vehicles, Mr. Schmidt told me, "Nice try, young man."

Tommy couldn't wait to ask why I was going to church with them. I told him I was courting his sister and that meant going to church. Tommy said something odd. "Aren't you afraid of the Hansleins?"

"Who?"

"Klaus Hanslein and his son."

I remembered Klaus at the grocery store. "The guy at the grocery store who grabbed your sister?"

"Yeah, he always liked Rebecca."

"Did Rebecca like him back?"

"No way, all the girls think Junior's creepy."

"What about his dad then, Klaus Senior?"

"He's scary; you should talk to my dad about him."

I asked Tommy some more questions but he would not say anything else.

-----

The Schmidts are moderate, not conservative, Mennonites. As such, the service at their church was similar to the Lutheran service I grew up with. We all sat together, I was between Rebecca and Tommy. The biggest difference was the lack of an organ or other type of musical accompaniment. Instead, they sang a cappella. Like any group of church people, some few sang in key, many of them did not, but they all sang with enthusiasm.

After the service, the Schmidts acquainted me with their peers. "This is Kevin Butcher of Fulton County. He is a former serviceman and now self-employed in the electronics industry. Mr. Butcher also attends college and studies Electrical Engineering." Almost as an afterthought, they added that their daughter Rebecca and I were courting.

Rebecca and I received several invitations to visit people's homes. I was not sure how to respond, but Rebecca nodded so I accepted with thanks.

Most of the people I met greeted me in a warm and friendly manner. Several, all distant Hanslein relatives, did not. A few of the younger single men glowered at me when told that Rebecca and I were courting. Later, Mr. Schmidt told me that he and Mrs. Schmidt had a few errands to run. Would I mind driving Rebecca and Tommy back to their house?

Tommy smirked when he volunteered to ride in the back seat. On the way back home, I asked Rebecca if any of those young men had been old boyfriends.

Miffed, Rebecca replied, "I haven't had any real boyfriends before you."

"As pretty as you are, the guys at school had to be chasing you."

"It started in the eighth grade . . ."

Shortly after Rebecca started eighth grade, several older boys started sniffing around. This group of older boys included one senior named Klaus Hanslein Junior. Rebecca spurned all but one of these boys. The one she accepted was in the ninth grade. This boy would carry her books, and they would talk, whenever they walked to the same class. Rebecca admitted to being fond of this boy and mused that if they were of age, they might have courted.

Gym class for the boys featured a rough and tumble game called Corner Ball. During one such match, a freak accident occurred involving Rebecca's boyfriend and Klaus Junior. Her boyfriend ended up in the hospital and later, with no explanation, he and his family moved to Ohio.

Due to his poor grades and attendance problems Klaus Junior repeated twelfth grade. Klaus entertained himself by harassing eighth and ninth grade girls. He liked to trap them in the library or the auditorium. A few of the girls were so intimidated that they allowed Klaus to do whatever he wanted. This only emboldened him and he refocused his attentions on Rebecca. Rebecca, then in the ninth grade, enjoyed the attentions of several boys. At least until Klaus made his interests clear. One of Rebecca's admirers defied Junior but ended up with bruises and a black eye. The rest of her beaux scattered like chaff. Two days later, while Rebecca worked on a book report, Klaus cornered her in the library stacks. He managed to grope her, but when he bent to kiss her, she kned him in the balls. Klaus collapsed to the floor and Rebecca ran to the librarian for help.

The principal found Klaus Junior curled into a fetal position and called 911. The EMTs examined the damaged area and transported him to the hospital. With Klaus out of school, many of his victims came forward. The principal expelled Klaus Junior soon after.

Klaus Senior hired a lawyer and sued to keep Junior in school. At the trial, the school's lawyer offered into evidence statements from Junior's victims and several color pictures of Junior's bruised and swollen testicles. The judge reviewed the pictures and winced, "Res ipsa loquitur" *the thing speaks for itself*. The trial lasted a few hours and the judge decided in favor of the school. Soon after, Junior dropped out of school.

After the civil trial, rumors abounded that Klaus Senior paid a significant amount of money to keep the District Attorney from bringing criminal charges against his son.

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Back at the farmhouse, Rebecca and her mother gave me a crash course in how to behave in a modest manner. There would be no kissing in public. There would be minimal public displays of affection. When alone, it would be permissible to be more affectionate. Mrs. Schmidt pointed out that, even in private, our displays of affection needed to be proper. I declined to ask for clarification.

After lunch we took a walk around the farm buildings. When no one could see us, I stopped and pulled Rebecca to me and we kissed. "I hope that was a proper kiss. I wouldn't want to disappoint your mom." Rebecca laughed.

-----

My favorite part of the work week was coming home. Weather permitting, Rebecca would meet me at my truck when I pulled in. Rebecca and I took our time walking around the house to the kitchen door. We would turn the corner, and once out of sight, we would stop for a few kisses. Becky liked kissing.

One day I touched her lips with my tongue. She jumped, her eyes popping open, and she pulled her head back. I grinned. Rebecca fixed me with her beautiful blue eyes and gave me an impish smile. She leaned in and kissed me back; this time her tongue traced my lips. I met hers with mine and we shared a delicate full kiss. Becky's hands began to squeeze my shoulders and arms; I responded by pulling her to me. Our mouths pressed harder against each other and the kiss became heated. I felt myself stiffen and Becky pushed against me. My hands slid down far enough to touch the swell of her buttocks.

"Rebecca? You better check the biscuits," Mrs. Schmidt called out from the kitchen.

We broke apart, both of us breathing hard. We glanced around but didn't see anyone. I told her, "I want more of that."

Becky just said, "After dinner." She checked her hair and dress, took my arm and we walked to the kitchen door.

-----

On the weekends, if I didn't need to work, we would take long walks around the farm. Rebecca gave me a tour of all the buildings. Our favorite was the old barn and she knew all the hiding spots. There was a rope swing, piles of hay, and a loft. Mrs. Schmidt warned us not to come back covered with hay. Rebecca's solution was to stash an extra blanket up in the loft. The first time she went up the ladder and reached for the blanket, I stood below her. And I got an amazing view: not all the way up, but almost.

“Oh, sweetheart, you have beautiful legs.”

Rebecca looked down and saw where I was looking. “You ... you looked up my . . .” and she threw the blanket over my head.

You know that sudden sinking sensation when you realize that you screwed up? That horrible, awful bottomless sensation? “Sweetheart, it wasn’t like that, I just stood here to catch you if you fell, not that I don’t want to see err look at your ah . . . but I wasn’t trying to.”

I pulled the blanket off my head in time to see her vanish around a stack of hay bales.

My girlfriend may be a slender little wisp of a girl, but she is a farm girl and she is strong. How strong? Just remember how badly she injured Klaus Junior when *he* tried to take liberties. I swallowed and held the blanket in front of me as I followed her around the bales.

Rebecca waited for me, arms crossed and leaning against the wall. Her face was red. If from anger or embarrassment, I could not tell. I stopped, just out of knee range.

"I'm sorry Becky. I didn't do it on purpose."

She let out her breath and her face regained its normal color. "Do you really think I have nice legs?"

I nodded, "You could model lingerie."

She helped me spread the blanket on top of the loose hay.

-----

After dinner, I studied analog beam forming while Rebecca cleaned. I did not realize how focused I was until her lips touched the back of my neck. "I'm done cleaning, want to show me the pictures of your house?"

The seat on my side of the kitchen table is a long bench. I slid over and she sat next to me. I slid my laptop and wireless mouse over to Rebecca and showed her the Picture folder. There were several sub folders, named for different projects. I directed her to the one named, *Home*. Rebecca clicked through the pictures and I added context and comments. She liked my house, if not the colors that I chose for the walls and trim. It pleased me to learn that she disliked the Country decorating style. While looking at pictures of my deck, she said, "You have a hot tub!"

Rebecca had read about hot tubs, even seen them on the television, but had never been in one. She thought it would be enjoyable, even fun, or relaxing, but she had one question: "What do you wear in your hot tub?"

I told her if I was alone, I didn't wear anything. But, if she wanted to climb in it with me, she could wear whatever she wanted. She clicked through the pictures, and I put my left hand under the table and on her knee. Rebecca gave me a little glance but didn't say anything. I drew little circles on her knee.

"I should take a day and go back to my house and make sure everything is OK."

Rebecca sighed, "I wish I could go with you."

"Why can't you? Talk to your mom. We would be back in six or eight hours."

Rebecca looked interested. I leaned over and kissed a sensitive spot on her neck. She shivered as I pulled away, and in a quiet voice I said, "It would be a shame if my truck broke down and we had to stay there overnight."

"I'll talk to Momma."

I reached for my laptop and opened a picture of my hot tub, "You could pack a swimming suit—or not."

Rebecca dragged me out to the porch where we "discussed the possibilities" in depth.

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Interlude: Kitchen, Schmidt Farm

“So daughter, how are things with Mr. Butcher?”

“Fine Momma, but I wish that we could spend more time together. He works late most nights and his job is only going to last a few more months.”

“Hmmm, well you don’t want to rush something like this, but I understand the problem. Tell me, is he respecting your boundaries?”

“Yes, Momma, he is pretty good at pushing my boundaries, but he'll stop when I ask. He says that he values our relationship more than, 'getting some.'”

“Now daughter, how are you doing with your boundaries?”

“Um, Momma, like I said, he is good at pushing my boundaries, sometimes I want to do more. If he pushed harder, I’m not sure if I would stop.”

“I understand what you mean. What you are experiencing is both a curse and a blessing. Some women live their whole lives and never know the true pleasure of the marriage bed. Going back in our family, our women have never had that particular problem. I can give you some suggestions, but you must be honest with me. Is Kevin Butcher the one? Are you going to marry him and have his babies?”

“Yes Momma, if he'll marry me.”

“Don't worry about that, we will bind him to you.”

-----

It was our third week of courting and we still had not resolved how Rebecca and I could go out on dates. Rebecca was pushing that one, or more, of her girlfriends serve as chaperones. I thought about taking her posse to the movies. Wednesday at dinner, Mr. Schmidt announced that the county fair had started. Would I like to go with them on Friday? Friday night's featured activities were a tractor pull and fireworks! Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt informed me the normal rules of public behavior would be more relaxed. For example, in a crowded area, Rebecca could take my arm, or we could hold hands. Tommy would be our chaperone anytime his sister and I were out of sight of the parents. The Schmidts took pains to explain that this would be to prevent gossip of improper behavior.

Arriving early on Friday turned out to be smart as the closest parking lot only had a few spaces left. I did not mind the crowds at all because they gave Rebecca all the excuse she needed to take my arm. We set out with Tommy and I bought him anything he wanted. At the pistol marksmanship booth, I won a giant teddy bear for Rebecca. The only downside was having to run it out to my truck. By the time we finished the circuit of game and food trucks, Tommy and I were best friends.

Becky and I enjoyed rides like the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Scrambler because they crushed us together. Afterwards, we rode anything that gave us an excuse to sit close to each other. At the head of the line for the Haunted House, Tommy didn't notice me tip the ride operator to send him in alone. Becky and I had a car to ourselves and we took advantage of the darkness. Tommy stood at the exit, and he smiled and waved to us. He was afraid of getting in trouble because losing us meant he failed his chaperone duties.

I told him, "You and I are buddies, I won't tell your parents you screwed up."

Later, as the sun started to go down, we moved towards the dining pavilion where we were to meet Rebecca and Tommy's parents. Along the way, we passed a concrete block bathroom and I suggested

we make a pit stop. There was a line inside the men's facilities and it took longer than I expected. I came out drying my hands, looked for, but did not see Rebecca.

There was a commotion around the side of the building. It sounded like someone was fighting.

The corner was only a few steps away and I heard Rebecca and she sounded scared. A gruff male voice said, "Whore." There was the sound of fabric tearing.

Rounding the corner, I saw Rebecca with three men. Two held her arms, and the third with his hands on the front of her dress, was Klaus Hanslein Junior. All three of the thugs had their eyes fixed on Rebecca. I needed their attention on me. I growled, "Hey, let the girl go."

Klaus Junior turned and sized me up, "Butcher, I've been waiting for this. I'm gonna fuck you up, then I'm gonna fuck your girlfriend." He squared up on me, assumed a boxer's crouch and swung a right roundhouse at my head.

Junior was fast, but he telegraphed his swing and I side stepped it. As his fist moved past my head, I took hold of his wrist and elbow. Using his momentum, I twisted his arm down and around until I felt the 'pop' of his shoulder dislocating. Releasing his elbow, I held his now useless arm out by his wrist and delivered two punishing strikes to his right kidney. He grunted with the first punch, staggered, and started to collapse with the second. I released his wrist and allowed him to fall to the ground.

In my peripheral vision, I saw Tommy step beside me. "Tommy, go find your parents." The gravel crunched as he ran off.

The two thugs holding Rebecca didn't seem so sure of themselves. I said, "Last chance boys. Let Rebecca go or I will kill both of you."

They glanced at their leader writhing on the ground and back at me. I stepped back and delivered a kick to Klaus' right side, "Junior here can live with just one kidney."

The thug on the left nodded, and said to the other, "Let's go." They released Rebecca's arms and she ran over to me.

I pulled her behind me and stepped back to allow them to collect their broken friend. They helped him to his feet, and one of them said, "This ain't over."

Keeping myself between them and Rebecca, I said, "If I see any of you again, I will kill you."

The three thugs disappeared behind the parked trailers and trucks. I backed into the light with Rebecca, and we went to find her parents.

I kept my arm around her while we walked. Rebecca spotted her parents while I watched for thugs.

Tommy led his parents back to us. They had questions and I let Rebecca and Tommy answer most of them. I was too busy scanning for threats.

The Schmidts wanted Rebecca to ride home with them, but she refused to leave me. I promised to drive slowly so they could follow me.

Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt disliked that I used violent means to protect their daughter, but they thanked me for protecting her. I told them I disliked being violent but a man named George Orwell once said:

*"People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."* "I guess I'm a rough man."

-----

Early Sunday afternoon, Rebecca and I had been home from church for about an hour. I was in the kitchen trying to finish antenna theory. Rebecca gave me a glass of iced tea and sat across from me. I had just taken a sip when Rebecca spoke. "Momma is going to talk with daddy about us starting to bundle. Maybe we can start tonight."

It took a supreme act of will to swallow the mouthful of tea and not spew it out. I coughed, "Bundle? As in sleep together?" She nodded. "We're going to sleep together?" I felt light headed, and feverish.

Bundling is a traditional adjunct to courting in North America. Back in the old days, prospective couples didn't have much free time to find out if they were compatible. Efficiency minded parents started to allow the young men to sleep with their daughters. The functional word was sleep and it was not intended as a free pass to sample the goods. Concerned parents would bundle their daughter in a sack, or wrap her in blankets, to prevent sampling.

Yep, Rebecca and I are going to be sleeping together. It would give us a little more time to talk and get to know each other. The sooner we found out if we were incompatible, the sooner we could move on.

Becky told me we needed to behave ourselves and the bundling would end if her parents thought we were fooling around. She told me to wear pajamas or a night shirt.

"Um Becky, I don't own pajamas or a nightshirt."

"What do you wear when you go to bed?"

"When it's hot, nothing. In the winter, sometimes a t-shirt and sweat pants."

I saw her start to think; the nights had been hot. "Penny for your thoughts?"

"Never mind."

“That morning when you picked out clothes for me, if you had been a little earlier to come in my room I would have been in bed. You might have gotten a chance to sample the goods.”

“You wish!”

“Or, you could have washed my back. Did you think about it?”

“You wish!”

I reached across the table and tickled the back of her hand. “I thought about it.”

-----

Later in the afternoon, Rebecca told me I needed to go buy a nightshirt. So we went to Walmart—without a chaperone! At the store, we ran into several people from her church. The word was out that we were courting. A few of Rebecca's girl friends were there and had formed a posse. They swept Rebecca up and I went to the men's clothing department by myself. I managed to find the night shirts and started browsing through them when the posse swirled by. Becky rejoined me long enough to help me pick out my new nightwear. Her friends checked me out and I heard the word, “bundle,” several times. With three night shirts selected, Becky told me I should shop around for a bit and she rejoined the posse. I thought about a gift for Becky, but I didn't know what would be proper. A necklace or bracelet might be OK.

Nothing at the jewelry counter caught my eye, but the adjacent counter featured sunglasses. In the truck, I wore sunglasses, but Becky didn't have any. I checked and the posse seemed to be over in housewares so, while out of sight, I bought her a pair of classic black framed Ray Ban Wayfarers.

The posse delivered my girl back to me while I picked out new wiper blades. I asked her if she needed anything and she said no. Back at my truck, I opened the passenger door for her and she got in. No one was near so I gave her the package with the sunglasses. "These are for you."

I was in the driver's seat and had my seat belt buckled, while she examined the glasses. "These are too fancy." She tried them on and scooted over next to me to use the rear-view mirror.

I told her, "They look good on you." and they did. The classic Ray Ban Wayfarers complemented her.

"They're too fancy."

"Becky, sweetheart, I like them on you." She relented, and after looking around, gave me a quick kiss on my cheek. Then she scooted back to her side, flipped down her visor and studied her reflection for a few minutes. We held hands on the way back to her house.

Back at the farmhouse we checked in with her parents and Rebecca gave them a full report on our activities. She even told them that I bought her a pair of sunglasses to wear in my truck. The parents asked about who we met and how people reacted to us. I started to wonder if there was some increased status for the Schmidts as their daughter caught a well employed man working on a college degree.

After dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt went to watch the news and Becky and I went out to the porch. We cuddled together on the glider. I will admit that I was anxious. Rebecca was as cool as a cucumber.

"Becky, what happens now?"

"Probably not what you're thinking."

"What do you think I'm thinking?"

"You think that you are going to get lucky."

"I'm already lucky to have you, you mean, get luckier."

"Well, *that* isn't going to happen. I promised Momma we wouldn't."

-----

My brain was going crazy, but there wasn't anything to do but wait. Well, I did have my girlfriend here, all alone, in the dark, and on this quiet glider. I proceeded to give *her* something to think about.

The living room chairs creaked and Mr. Schmidt's heavy tread on the stairs indicated that he was going to bed. That gave us just enough time to sit up and straighten out our mussed hair. My Rebecca was an enthusiastic kisser and I was glad that I didn't have to stand up.

The screen door squeaked open and Mrs. Schmidt came over to us. "Mr. Butcher, do you understand that bundling is just to give the two of you more time to talk?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Your bedroom door will stay open."

"Yes, Ma'am."

She turned to Rebecca, "Well, daughter, if you're ready."

"Yes, Momma." Rebecca stood up, and smoothed her skirt. When she stood next to her mother, for a few seconds, in the dim moon light, I could see how much they resembled each other.

"Mr. Butcher, you can get ready for bed, I will bring Rebecca to you in a bit."

-----

I laid in bed, my teeth brushed, my hands and face washed and I wore a very unfamiliar night shirt. The only light in the room was the lamp on the night table. I was reading when Mrs. Schmidt brought her daughter to my room. Rebecca wore her terry cloth bathrobe and slippers.

Mrs. Schmidt told both of us, "I'm going to get ready for bed. You two settle in and I'll be back to check on you." Then she hugged and kissed her daughter, smiled, and left the room. I noticed that she had not closed the door.

Becky's eyes reflected the dim moonlight as she slipped out of her bathrobe. Underneath the robe, she wore a light blue cotton nightgown that hung down past her knees.

I sat up, "What side of the bed do you want?"

"Could I have the side closest to the bathroom?"

"Sure." I moved over to give her room.

Rebecca hung her robe over the back of the desk chair and sat on her side of the bed. With her facing away from me, I could see her blonde hair hung down in a loose braid. She shut off the lamp and slipped under the covers next to me.

It was quiet. From the other side of the house came the faint sounds of water running.

Keeping her voice soft, Rebecca said, "This is so strange. I've been thinking about this for a week and now we're here."

I kept my voice soft as well. "A week? You've been planning this for a week?"

"Mom and I talked about it last week. She and daddy did it when they were about the same ages as us.

"And everyone thinks you Mennonite girls are goody-goody."

"You English do, anyway."

The sounds of distant water running cut off.

Her voice still soft, Rebecca asked, "When do you want to get married?"

Tonight, was just full of surprises.

Before I could answer, Mrs. Schmidt tapped on the door frame and came in. "Are you two talking? I couldn't hear you in the hallway."

"Yes Momma, we were talking about when we were going to get married."

"Well, you can give me the details after you have it all worked out." Mrs. Schmidt continued, "I'm going to bed. Please remember to keep it down. The bedroom doors are open. Mr. Schmidt might be a deep sleeper, but I am not." She kissed Rebecca on the forehead, said goodnight and left the room.

As I rolled to face my girlfriend, my arms filled with warm lithe girl. Her light wildflower scent combined with the scent of toothpaste and what I can only describe as excited Rebecca. Female pheromones must be a thing because as her mouth found mine my nose filled with the most indescribable and arousing scent. Our free hands wouldn't stay still. She was running one hand over my chest, her other hand grasped my right bicep and slid from there to my waist and below. My left arm held her to me, but my right was free to explore. Her thin cotton nightgown did little to conceal the warm body it covered. My free hand roved from her shoulders to the back of her thighs. Except for a pair of hipster style panties, there was nothing but Rebecca under that nightgown. She kept her left leg in motion sliding her knee up my leg until it touched my burgeoning erection.

"Please be careful with that knee."

She giggled and kissed my neck while she used her knee to tease me.

Rebecca cuddled up to me, her head on my left shoulder. I asked her, "After we get married, sweetheart, what happens on our honeymoon?"

"What do you mean? We'll be on our honeymoon."

"Well, I'm worried. I've heard stories about you Mennonite girls."

Now she was just a little concerned. She stayed cuddled up to me, but her voice had a little rise to it.

"What stories?"

"You know the stories. The ones about your insatiable sexual appetites." As I said this, I started to run the back of my hand along her ribs. I made sure that the outside of my fingers grazed her breasts.

"Oh, *those* stories." Her free hand started to play with my nightshirt's collar.

I extended my thumb and ran it around and across her nipples. "Yes, I want to know what kind of crazy stuff," her free hand started sliding back down my side, "you are going to make me do." My thumb continued to tease her erect nipples.

Her breathing was picking up. "I don't know any crazy stuff."

"I heard, that sometimes, you wicked Mennonite girls will force your men to kiss and lick you everywhere."

"Everywhere?"

“Oh yes, everywhere. You goody-goody girls are demanding.” I slid my free hand down her side to her waist and then to her buttocks. “Back here is an especially sensitive spot.” My fingertips slid between her buttocks and I squeezed while moving my hand down. She stiffened, when I got too far down, and I backed off.

“You’ll kiss my butt?”

“More bites than kisses,” I demonstrated with broad nipping pinches, “but you girls have your needs and you are demanding.” I punctuated this with a kiss. “Here, lay back for me.” She rolled onto her back and I put a pillow under her head. We shared another deep kiss that left both of us gasping. I moved my hand onto her nightgown covered right thigh. She stilled when my hand touched her thigh.

“Becky, you know that I love you.” She nodded. “I’m not going to hurt you, but I am going to tease you.” She relaxed, a little.

I added a touch of authority to my voice, “You might as well get used to the feel of my hands on your body. After we’re married, every part of you will know my touch.” I slid my hand a little further up her thigh.

“Any time I feel the need, I will take you.” She turned her head exposing a sensitive spot on her neck and my mouth was on her. My fingers caressed her inner thighs until I sensed her heat through the two layers of fabric.

“The real reason you wear a dress is to give me easier access to your body.” My hand slid down, under her night gown and onto her knee. the skin on her legs soft and smooth. I moved my hand up her thigh, and she parted her legs to give me unfettered access. I stopped when my right hand lightly brushed the soft cotton fabric of her panties.

“You feel my touch now?” She nodded. “This is the least of my touches that your body will know.” I slid my knuckles across the light crease in the soft fabric and she moved to try and increase the pressure. I allowed her to push harder against my hand. She sucked in a breath as the friction increased. Her head turned back to me and she kissed me hard. Her tongue found mine and she groaned when I focused my pressure against her need.

Later, Becky lay pressed against my side, her left leg wrapped over mine. The late summer night air felt cool and refreshing to our heated bodies. Wisps of Rebecca’s hair stuck to the perspiration drying on her forehead. Her left hand played with the hair on my chest, just under the neck of my nightshirt. I felt emotionally fulfilled, as if I had climbed an impossible mountain. But the dull ache in my groin underscored my lack of physical fulfillment.

Rebecca sighed, “I can’t believe I let you do that.”

“Sweetheart, I was just being a good boyfriend.”

“A good boyfriend? I guess you want me to be a good girlfriend?” Rebecca put her hand on me, I had softened a little, but as she stroked me, I hardened back up.

“Becky, if you keep that up, we’re going to have a mess to clean.”

“Check your pillow case. I hid a hand towel in there this afternoon.”

I found the towel and passed it to her.

Becky took the towel and sat up. In the dim light, I saw her studying my erection “Is my hand going to be enough, or do I need to use my mouth?”

“Oooh, you’d better get the towel ready.”

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The next morning after breakfast, Mr. Schmidt and Tommy had left for the first milking. Mrs. Schmidt, Rebecca, and I sat at the table drinking coffee.

“Mr. Butcher, I trust you two behaved yourselves last night?”

“Yes ma’am, your daughter is a good girlfr— Ow!” Something hard, maybe Becky’s shoe, hit my ankle.

Rebecca had her head down, but the tips of her ears were pink.

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Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Kitchen

“Rebecca, I’m going to throw in a load of towels. Do you have anything to throw in?”

Her cheeks burning, Rebecca answered. “I have to wash our sheets, Momma; I can wash it then.”

“I thought you might need the towel. Tell me daughter, did he ask nicely?”

Rebecca’s ears were burning now and she couldn’t make eye contact with her mother. “He didn’t, Momma, I asked him.”

“Oh?”

“We were in bed and he started asking me about the crazy things I would make him do on our wedding night. He said that I would make him kiss me all over. Then he told me what he would do to me and I became caught up in it. Then he put his hands on me, and I couldn’t think about anything else. It went on for a while and, when it was over; I would have done anything he wanted. But all he did was hold me and tell me how wonderful I am and how much he loves me. I knew that he hadn’t, um, finished and I heard how that would hurt him. So, I put my hands on him, and I didn’t expect it to be so big. I couldn’t fit my hand all the way around it, are they all that big?”

## Chapter Three

Klaus Hanslein Junior: Berks County Fair

“Hey Klaus, ain’t that your girlfriend?” Grainger Thomas asked.

“What? Where?” Was he talking about Rebecca Schmidt?

“Dude, your eyes suck.” Ronnie Thomas, Grainger’s older brother, pointed. “Right there in line at the pistol shooting booth.”

I saw her standing there. She looked perfect. She was still everything I wanted and hated. I remember the first time I saw her, walking from the school bus and the wind pushed her skirt up tight against her ass. Her perfect little heart-shaped ass. She dated that little ninth grade faggot until I wrecked him in gym class. Then, the next year, when she was in ninth grade, I caught her in the library; just like I caught the other sluts. Good times in the library for sure. Not Rebecca though, no fun with her. I caught her back in the corner and got a handful of her tits. Her eyes changed from deep warm blue pools into icy fields of pain. Then the pain exploding from where she kneed me. Damn it, I still want her to love me, the bitch.

Ronnie asked. “Who’s that dude she’s with?”

What? Yeah, it was that asshole from the grocery store. I was trying to get her alone. If she listened long enough, she had to see how much I loved her. Then that coward sucker punched me and did that faggot hand holding thing.

“That’s Kevin Butcher, Dad told me he’s a contractor. He works over at that new computer building and rents a room from the Schmidts.”

Ronnie leered at me and snickered. "Dude, from the way she's hanging on to him, He's renting more than the room."

Rebecca looked at Butcher how I wanted her to look at me. What was wrong with her?

Grainger thumped my arm, "You see that, Junior, she's cheating on you with that asshole."

Without taking my eyes off Rebecca, I backhanded Grainger.

I watched as Butcher stepped up to the counter. He paid for a turn and the carnny laid down one of their beat up .22 caliber pistols. Butcher raised the pistol one handed and shot five times. With each shot, the bullet hit the bulls-eye with a clang. Five shots, five bull's-eyes, and he did it one handed, with a piece of shit carnival pistol!

"Holy shit," Grainger said. "He may be an asshole, but he can shoot."

The carnny gestured at the far wall of the booth and Rebecca pointed. The carnny handed Rebecca a huge teddy bear. Rebecca kissed Butcher on the cheek and the nearby people cheered her on.

Ronnie said, "Whoa, that dude is gonna get some pussy tonight for sure."

I said, "Huh, maybe. But if he does, it'll be sloppy seconds."

Ronnie glanced at me. He had always been the smarter brother. Smarter and more supportive. Ronnie liked to talk and get Grainger and me wound up, but he ended up hanging back and never joined in on the fun. He preferred to watch us fuck shit up.

Ronnie grinned, "What do you have in mind, Klaus?"

“Let’s just follow along behind the happy couple. When we get a chance, we’ll offer sweet little Rebecca a ride. If her boyfriend has a problem with it, we’ll fuck him up.”

“Klaus?” Grainger asked. “How tall do you got to be to ride Rebecca?”

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It was getting dark and the happy trio turned around and walked towards the dining pavilions. Rebecca held Kevin’s arm, and they never saw us behind them. Little Tommy acted like he and Kevin were best friends. They stopped at one of the bathroom buildings and entered their respective entrances.

I said, “Let’s get close, this might be our chance.” We closed the distance and stepped around to the shadowed side of the bathroom. This part of the building faced the carnival operator’s parking lot. The lot was full of campers and other tall vehicles.

Rebecca exited first, and she was alone. “Ronnie, Grainger, get ready to grab her arms and legs. I’ll pull her back here and then we’ll take her off through the parking lot.”

Sneaking up behind *my* little Rebecca, I covered her mouth with my hand and pulled her backwards.

“Hey, Rebecca.” She kicked as I yanked her around the corner and back into the shade and I tripped. I fell backwards onto my ass but Ronnie and Grainger each grabbed one of her arms. They pulled her against the bathroom’s wall and I got back up.

I grabbed the front of her dress and waved my fist. “If you scream, or try and kick me, I will knock you out.” She continued to struggle and one of her sleeves tore.

“Klaus Junior, you better let me go.” She kicked to the side and tagged Ronnie.

Ronnie yelped, “Whore!” and her sleeve tore again.

From behind me, gravel crunched as someone came around the corner. A deep voice growled, "Hey, let the girl go."

I turned, it was Rebecca's new boyfriend. "Butcher, I've been waiting for this. I'm gonna fuck you up." I gestured at Rebecca. "Then I'm gonna fuck your girlfriend."

The first time we met, Butcher sucker punched me from behind. This time, he wouldn't be sneaking. My father taught me to box and I've wrecked bigger chumps. I brought my hands up and pulled in my chin. Butcher took on one of those bullshit kung-fu poses. I will pummel this bastard. I will leave him bloody. Then I'll make Rebecca pay. She'll wish she stayed with me. When I was ready, just like my Daddy taught me, I unloaded a hay-maker on him.

Jesus Christ! Butcher is fast! His head moved like an inch and I missed. What? Fuck me, my arm— OUCH. My shoulder "popped" and the pain just blossomed. I couldn't move my arm and then he punched me in the kidney and my knees let go for a second. He punched me a second time and my legs just collapsed. I turned my head and focused on Butcher. He stared at me like he was scraping a bug off his windshield. Then he let go of my wrist, and my face hit the gravel.

More gravel crunched and Butcher talked to someone but I hurt too much to care. Any second now, Ronnie and Grainger would deal with Butcher. Then someone, Butcher? kicked me in the side. My friends did nothing!

Ronnie and Grainger helped me get to my feet. As we stumbled towards the parked cars, Ronnie told Butcher, "This ain't over." It was over for me.

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The drive to my house took forever. They helped me onto the porch and Ronnie opened the door. Dad was in the kitchen; he must have heard the door. "Junior? Get in here now!"

I shook off Grainger's help and limped my way into the kitchen. Dad sat at the table with his lawyer. Glasses of dark brown whiskey sat on the table in front of them. They both stared at me, but Dad could see right through me.

Dad's lawyer, Joseph Waters, spoke, but Dad shushed him with a gesture. Dad said "You look like shit, what happened."

I shrugged, it hurt to shrug. "We ran into Rebecca Schmidt and her new boyfriend at the fair."

Dad gestured for me to shut up. He turned to Grainger, "You, Grainger, come here."

Grainger stopped in front of Dad. "Grainger, tell me what happened." Grainger looked at his brother, but Dad used his hands to turn Grainger's head back to him. Dad said, "Look at me." Grainger, pale faced, stared at Dad like a rabbit stared at oncoming headlights. Dad let go of Grainger's face and took a sip of his whiskey. "Good, now tell me what happened and," poking Grainger in the chest, "leave nothing out."

It took almost twenty minutes, but Grainger told him everything. When Dad and his lawyer finished questioning Grainger, they had the entire story.

Dad looked over at me. I could see him thinking, but I couldn't tell what he thought, no one could.

"Stupid boy, I told you to stay away from the Schmidt girl."

"Fuck Da..."

Dad was out of his seat and he slapped me across my face before I could finish. He pulled me over to the sink and turned on the overhead light. "Take off your shirt and pants, I want to see what kind of marks you have."

"What? Fu..." Another slap across my face.

"Do it now!"

I took my clothes off. My side hurt just moving my arms.

Dad stepped over to Ronnie, "Little Ronnie Thomas, you manipulative little weasel. You talked my son into doing stupid shit again."

"No Mr. Hanslein, it wasn't like that."

"You lying little shit, take your worthless brother and go home."

Ronnie and Grainger just about ran out of the house; the front door slammed shut as I hung my pants over the sink. Dad took me by the shoulders and turned me around. His touch was gentle, almost like he cared. I stood facing the sink, and he ran his hands over my right side and back.

Dad's lawyer Mr. Waters spoke, "He's marked up for sure."

Dad said, "Yeah, shit. What happens if we send him to the hospital?"

"If the police are looking for him, they'll arrest him. We'll have a hard time keeping him out of jail for this. Assault, Aggravated Assault, Kidnapping, Stalking, hell, they'll throw the book at him."

"Can you beat it in court?"

"Doubtful, I can see getting some of the charges dismissed. But with his history, he will do time."

“Shit, put your clothes on, boy, and go pack a bag. You are going away.”

I complained that I hurt too bad to do anything, but he didn't care. He kept yelling at me to hurry.

Upstairs, I took a handful of Tylenol to help with the pain. When I got downstairs with my bag, he hustled me out the door. One of Dad's crew had a car waiting, and we headed out.

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Kevin Butcher:

The Friday before the Labor Day weekend, the Schmidts and I discussed plans for the upcoming holiday weekend. I volunteered to smoke a Boston butt. Both Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt liked the idea. Mr. Schmidt mentioned that he hadn't had real pulled pork in years. Mrs. Schmidt turned to her husband and said, "My slow oven roasted pork tenderloin isn't 'Real Pulled Pork?'"

Mr. Schmidt, blissfully unaware of the minefield he created, lectured us on the virtues of slow cooking with charcoal briquettes. With the parents distracted, I suggested that Rebecca and I drive to my house and return with my grill.

The parents stopped talking, their heads swiveled in unison, and their eyes locked on me. Mrs. Schmidt had a smile that said, "I see right through your plan."

Mr. Schmidt looked thoughtful for a moment, then asked, "Is your grill something special?"

"No, sir, it's just a regular Weber kettle grill."

"Then why don't you use mine?"

"You have a grill?"

"Mr. Butcher, with the time you've spent in my barn with my daughter, you should have seen my grill by now."

With that one question, my dream of a naked Rebecca in my hot tub evaporated. I've seen a few things out in the barn, the view up Rebecca's skirt was one I remembered often. But, I've never seen a grill. I couldn't tell Mr. Schmidt what Rebecca and I did out in his barn, but I had to tell him something.

Rebecca's father watched me with a stern expression. I knew exactly what to say. "Um..."

The corners of his mouth twitched, then he chuckled. "Young man, I wish you could see yourself." Mr. Schmidt looked across the table to his wife. "Rachel, I thought only Rebecca blushed like that." He turned back to me, "When we're done eating, I'll show you the grill."

While Rebecca and her mother cleaned up after dinner, Mr. Schmidt and I walked to the barn. Mr. Schmidt glanced at me twice before he stopped walking. I stopped with him. Mr. Schmidt turned. "Mr. Butcher, a moment please."

"Sure, is there a problem? Something I can do?"

"Yes, Mr. Butcher, Kevin, there is. It is important that you resist your desire to protect Rebecca with violence. Our religious beliefs are firm; we do not resist violence. Please remember this while you are courting my daughter and while you live under my roof."

"Mr. Schmidt, I don't know what else I could do. I don't have the ability to stand by."

"Kevin, the ability you think you lack is strength and perhaps conviction. You have both in abundance."

"I'll try. That's all I can do."

"Kevin, we are all human. We try and sometimes succeed. Life is not meant to be easy. Now let's go find the grill that has, somehow, escaped your notice."

Mr. Schmidt had his grill back in a corner and covered with a canvas tarpaulin. We carried it out to the yard and Mr. Schmidt took the tarp off. The grill looked like a flattened Weber kettle, but it was old. Under a layer of dust, it was bare unpainted metal. I stepped back and examined it. The oddly flattened kettle sat in a red painted three-legged frame. Mr. Schmidt watched me with a curious expression, "Do you recognize this, Mr. Butcher?"

I've seen pictures of these before. "Is this an original Weber Kettle?"

"You do know something besides computers and cables. Yes, this dates back to 1952. I bought it at auction for \$20.00."

"Wow, I'll clean it up and use it."

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## Klaus Hanslein Junior: Hanslein Hunting Camp

Dad loves his hunting camp. He won it in a card game years ago. I remember the original owner used to come over and try to buy it back. Dad ended up punching the guy a lot and he stopped coming around. One of the reasons Dad likes this place is that it's bordered on three sides by a state-owned hunting preserve. When I was a kid, Dad and I would walk out the back door, through the woods, and into one of Pennsylvania's State Game Lands.

Now, I hated the place. I was so fucking bored. I stood at one of the back windows. Pellet rifle in hand. When they first dumped me here, I would see an occasional squirrel. But I'd used this old pellet rifle to shoot them all. Now, there wasn't anything to kill.

In between shooting squirrels, I jerked off fantasizing about Rebecca. My favorite was fucking her while she cried. I jerked off so much that my dick had blisters. Yesterday morning, I looked through the medicine cabinet and found an old tube of analgesic ointment. If it worked for sore muscles, it had to be good for a sore dick. That had been a mistake. It felt good at first, kind of like thick hand lotion. It even warmed up, but it didn't stop there, it started to burn. That shit didn't scrub off easy and the only soap that dad had here was that gritty Lava soap. Now my dick burned and ached so much, it didn't even feel like a dick. I went back to looking for squirrels, pellet rifle ready to kill something, anything.

A car roll up outside. I peeked through the shutters, Dad and a guy named Joey the Mule got out. Joey works for my dad and is a mean looking bastard. I glanced around, shit, last week I trashed the cabin and never cleaned it up.

Dad studied the mess and fixed his eyes on me. "You have thirty minutes to clean this shit up." He and Joey stepped outside and sat on the porch.

One hour later, Dad worked me over for trashing his cabin. We left, and I sat in the back of Dad's Cadillac Escalade. Joey drove, and Dad had shotgun.

Dad told me his lawyer called, the police weren't looking for me and it was OK for me to come home. Now dad gave me the new rules: Stay on the property and keep away from Ronnie and Grainger. No going out to start shit, and no calling Rebecca. If I did anything stupid ever again, he would cut me off. Dad turned to Joey, said, "Tell him what happens to stupid people." Joey looked at me in the mirror, "Stupid people get dead, kid, I'd hate to do it to ya." I did my best to look scared, but dad wouldn't do that.

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The next morning, I called Ronnie and invited him and Grainger over. They brought a case of an off-brand energy drink. The drink tasted horrible, but the caffeine and sugar buzz rocked. Grainger swore when he drank enough, it made him see colors and shapes. I don't know about, "colors and shapes" but it made me feel angry. Ronnie wanted to head out, but I told him that dad grounded me. He thought it sucked because he had an awesome idea. He wanted us to shadow Butcher and wait for a good time to pick a fight with him.

"Ronnie, maybe I haven't drunk enough of this horse piss. But how is that a good idea?"

"Dude, sorry, you don't know what we found out. Rebecca's dad has been meeting with his pastor."

Ronnie turned to Grainger, "Get that journal out of my glove box."

While Grainger fetched the journal, Ronnie told me what happened. On Sunday mornings if he and Grainger are up early enough, they'll go to church parking lots during the services and look for unlocked

cars. Sometimes they find a wallet stuffed between a seat and the center console. Sometimes purses. Last weekend, they got into the Schmidt's van and found Mr. Schmidt's journal.

Ronnie snatched the book out of Grainger's hand and said, "Hang on while I find it." He flipped through the book muttering. "Yeah, here. Listen to this: 'This morning, Tommy described how Kevin defended Rebecca at the fair. Tommy said, "Kevin moved like a ninja and demolished Klaus Junior and it was awesome.'" I reminded Tommy that God commanded us through Jesus to "... not set yourself against the one who is evil." Tommy accepted this, but I remain concerned.'"

I asked, "How much of this shit do I have to listen to?" Grainger making karate chop and kicking motions didn't help.

Ronnie held up his hand and said, "It gets better. He continued, "Here is another: 'I have spoken with Pastor Luke again about Kevin. Pastor Luke is adamant that I dissolve Kevin and Rebecca's courtship and evict Kevin. I am loath to do this as my daughter and Kevin truly love each other. It amuses Rachel and I to see them together and it reminds us of our courtship. I will talk with Kevin and express my concerns.'"

I shook my head, "So? How does this help me?"

"Dude, if Butcher starts another fight, if we get it on video, him giving someone a beat-down, Mr. Schmidt will break him and your girlfriend up and kick Butcher out of his house."

I saw it, holy shit! Ronnie's plan was perfect! Without Butcher telling Rebecca his lies, she'd have to come back to me. We'd be together again! "We'll do it! My dad can go fuck himself."

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Kevin Butcher:

Labor Day weekend and Rebecca and I lounged on the glider. Rebecca sat sideways on my left, with her bare feet resting on my lap. We both had books, she read an old-school paperback and I read an e-book, displayed on my phone. I split my attention between reading my book and rubbing her feet. From time to time, my free hand found its way under her dress and up her legs. I could get away with it if I didn't linger too long or go past her knees. If I lingered, or moved too far, she would swat my hand with her paperback. My protestations of just being a "Good Boyfriend," fell on unappreciative ears.

My knuckles stinging from my most recent failed exploration, I consoled myself by massaging her feet. I looked down, "Sweetheart, I'm not into feet, but I would make an exception for yours."

She looked up from her book, "What are you talking about?"

I sat my phone down and picked her left foot up with both hands. "There are guys who prefer a woman's feet over anything else."

Interested, she marked the page and closed her book. "I've never heard about that."

"Doesn't your posse know everything?" Since we started bundling, Rebecca had displayed a surprising amount of theoretical sexual knowledge. I teased her about it and she admitted her girlfriends were the source. Apparently, there are limits to the collective knowledge of her posse.

I continued, "Some guys are only interested in a woman's feet. Those guys will focus all their affection on feet."

Rebecca wiggled her toes, "What part of me are you focused on?"

"Sweetheart, I'm more of a generalist. I love each part of you."

“You don’t have a favorite part?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I haven’t seen everything—yet. After I’ve had the time to make a detailed study, I’ll let you know.” I started to lift the hem of her dress and bent down for a peek.

Rebecca readied her paperback, and the screen door from the kitchen squeaked open. My fingers released the hem of her dress as her book connected with my battered knuckles.

Mrs. Schmidt stepped out onto the porch and her eyes took in the tableau. Rebecca sitting with her bare feet on my lap. The hem of her dress lifted to just above her knees. Me rubbing my battered knuckles and Rebecca holding her paperback as if it were a weapon. All Mrs. Schmidt said was, “Don’t you both look comfortable.”

Rebecca started to sit up but Mrs. Schmidt stopped her. “Don’t be silly, there isn’t anything wrong with what you’re doing. Although,” she paused, “you might not want to let your father catch you like this.”

Rebecca and I agreed. My knuckles stung! She hit me hard that time.

“I was wondering if you two might run to the ice cream shop. You could surprise your father with a milkshake.”

Thinking aloud, “Maybe I can get something cold for my knuckles?”

Mrs. Schmidt asked me, “Did you hurt your hand?”

Rebecca snickered.

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Interlude: Schmidt Farm Back Porch

Mrs. Schmidt sat on the glider while Rebecca put her sneakers on. "I overheard Kevin telling you how some men prefer women's feet."

"He was trying to be funny, Momma."

"He was also telling you the truth, and it's not just feet. Your Uncle Frank? Well, your Aunt Ruth caught him being overly familiar with one of her shoes."

"No!" Rebecca paused while tying her sneakers. "What did she do?"

"Well, it's a rather harmless fixation. She told him to keep those shoes out in the barn and that he needed to stay away from the rest of her footwear."

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Kevin Butcher:

I remember reading about an ancient Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." After we arrived at the ice cream store things became interesting.

The local ice cream and sandwich shop's building started out as a Dairy Queen. Now it is a classic Mom and Pop business. Their menu listed eight different themed burgers. One burger had egg salad piled on top. Rebecca held my arm while we waited. We were the fourth customers in line and, before long, two families queued up behind us. As I looked around, I noticed two scruffy looking guys standing on this side of the parking lot. They looked familiar, and I stiffened as I recognized them. These are the two guys that held Rebecca's arms at the fair. As I watched them, it became clear they also watched us. Rebecca must have noticed my stillness, because she turned and asked, "What's wrong?"

I nodded at the two thugs, "Recognize those two?"

"Oh!" Rebecca stiffened. "The Thomas brothers, Klaus's friends."

"What the fu... Sorry sweetheart. What are they doing here?"

"They could be here to buy ice cream? Just ignore them."

The Thomas brothers kept their distance, and I kept my eye on them. Mr. Schmidt's admonishment against violence conflicted with my desire to hurt these two men. How dare they show themselves!

The three cute Mennonite girls behind the counter were members of Rebecca's posse. While they and Rebecca exchanged greetings, one of them, whose name tag read, "Rebecca2," eyed me speculatively. She said, "How do you like bundling with Rebecca?" I grinned as Rebecca pulled me away from the counter.

I said, "Rebecca?"

"It's an old joke, when we met at school, we said that her parents named her Rebecca too. It stuck."

While we stood off to the side waiting for our order. I noticed the Thomas brothers walking towards us. I placed myself between them and Rebecca. The taller one hung back, but the shorter one stopped just out of my reach. We studied each other, but he wouldn't meet my eyes. He spoke past me, "Hey, Rebecca, you're looking fine today."

Rebecca stepped to my side and replied, "Grainger Thomas, you should be ashamed."

Grainger sidestepped maintaining his distance from me and put himself in front of Rebecca. I turned with him. "Rebecca Schmidt, I don't have anything to be ashamed of; I'm not the one whoring around."

Time seemed to slow. Rebecca gasped, Grainger leered, and I moved. My left hand locked around his throat and I brought my right hand up for an open palm strike to his face. Grainger's facial expression changed from a leer to terror. I allowed myself a moment to savor his fear. Grainger squeezed his eyes shut, his hands raised as if in supplication. I focused my energy for this one perfect strike and Rebecca grabbed my arm.

"NO!" She yelled. "Don't hit him!"

I felt stunned, all the hot anger and excess energy drained from my body. My left hand lost its strength, and my grip on his neck relaxed. Grainger fell backwards gasping for air. I saw the faint livid marks my fingers left on his throat. In a rush, time sped back up.

Grainger completed his backward fall to the ground. Rebecca locked my hands in both of hers. I think everyone watched us. Grainger's brother Ronnie looked frightened, but he held his ground, ten feet away.

Rebecca dragged me away, and I moved with her. "What? He deserved a beating."

"Remember what daddy told you? You can't hit him. We'll talk about it on the way home." She pulled me with her into the crowd. While we waited, Rebecca kept herself between me and the two brothers. My tightly clenched fists relaxed and her fingers meshed with mine.

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Klaus Hanslein Junior:

I shut the camera off after Rebecca dragged her boyfriend away. Shit, it hurt to even think she had a boyfriend.

Ronnie stepped over to Grainger and helped him to his feet. They talked briefly and Ronnie shook his head. Grainger shrugged off Ronnie's help and staggered back to the truck. Grainger, his shirt and hair soaked with sweat, crawled into the back. Ronnie got in behind the wheel and I asked him, "What happened?"

Ronnie started his Bronco and replied, "I don't know. Rebecca might have screwed it up."

I looked in the back at Grainger, his frizzy hair matted to his head. "What happened? He almost punched you, did you do what we told you?"

"Fuck both of you, I ain't doing any more of this shit." Grainger opened one of the shitty energy drinks and slugged it down.

Ronnie pulled out onto the road and accelerated. "Grainger, you almost had him hit you, one punch was all we needed. I think you chickened out."

"Fuck you, Ronnie. That fucker Butcher is scary fast and he ain't got a soul, man. I stared into his eyes and there ain't nothing in there. When he had me by my throat, he looked at me like he was going to scrape shit off a boot."

"Whatever, dude." Ronnie trapped the steering wheel with his knee and picked up his cell phone. Before dialing, he noticed something unpleasant. "Grainger, you stink. Did you piss yourself?"

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Kevin Butcher:

“Daddy thinks that you may be too violent.” Rebecca kept at least one of my hands in hers since she stopped me from punching Grainger. Did she think I would run back and finish the beating? Getting into my truck had been a little awkward, but she made it work.

Mennonites do not interpret the bible. They never ask, “What does this verse really mean?” For example, Mathew 5:39, “But I tell you, do not set yourself against the one who is evil. But whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” To a Mennonite, this is a literal command from god.

Those times I defended Rebecca with physical force, I “... set [myself] against the one who is evil.” That is the crux of the problem. While I courted his daughter and while I lived under his roof, I had to refrain from violence.

Rebecca continued, “If you had punched Grainger today, it would have upset Daddy, He can almost overlook it when you protect me from violence, but Grainger was only talking.”

“I can see that now sweetheart, but what he called you!” I got angry again.

“What? He called me a whore. Am I a whore?”

“No, but...”

“But nothing Kevin. Why do you care what Grainger thinks?”

“You’re right. But I don’t think I could stand by and allow someone to hurt you.”

“One step at a time, Kev.”

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Rebecca's parents and Tommy sat on the back porch when we arrived with the ice cream. I carried the ice cream in my left hand and Rebecca still held my right. The Schmidts noted that their daughter held my hand but said nothing. When we stepped on the porch, Rebecca told me to sit on the glider. She passed out the ice cream while I sat.

Nothing slipped past Mr. Schmidt. He took a break from his milkshake, a vanilla malt, and asked if the trip to get ice cream went well. I spoke, but Rebecca interrupted me and told her father what happened. Rebecca's version differed a little from what I remembered. She spelled out W.H.O.R.I.N.G. rather than pronounce the word.

Mr. Schmidt asked, "Would you have struck Grainger if Rebecca hadn't stopped you?"

Rebecca squeezed my hand tight, and I answered. "Yes."

"But you didn't, you allowed my daughter to pull you back from the abyss." He glanced at Mrs. Schmidt and she nodded. "That is progress, Mr. Butcher."

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I had a few girlfriends before meeting Rebecca, and those few girlfriends had mothers. Most of the mothers were nice, but none of them compared to Mrs. Schmidt. From the beginning, as Rebecca and I grew to like each other, her mother watched over us. I can see now that rather than to keep us under control she did it to make sure we didn't screw up. I think she knew Rebecca and I would be good together. That brings me to the oddest thing, Mrs. Schmidt trusts us to be smart. She knows Rebecca and I will fool around, but she trusts us to not go too far. Too far being Rebecca getting pregnant. Since abstinence is the only 100% sure way to prevent that, we do not go that far.

When we finally marry, Rebecca and I will set world records for conjugal relations.

One night after Rebecca and I relieved our tensions, we lay facing each other sharing kisses and gentle fondles. She surprised me with this question, "Do you ever think about 'doing it' with me?"

"Only when I breathe."

She thumped my arm, "I'm being serious."

"Me too. Becks, I'm a man with a smoking hot girlfriend, I think about it all the time."

"So, why don't we?"

I hope you can appreciate the irony. I'm in bed with my girlfriend, and my girlfriend is still frisky and wants to, "do it," and I felt obligated to talk her out of it.

"A bunch of reasons, but the biggest is we haven't worked up to it yet."

Now I had her interest. "What else is there?"

I glanced up at the ceiling to check the time. Yeah, I'm geeky enough to have a clock that projects the time onto the ceiling. It was only 10:30PM, plenty of time to wear Becky out.

"Roll over onto your back, I think you're ready for stage two of the Kevin Butcher Experience."

She rolled over, "What's stage two?"

"First, we have to hike up your night gown." Rebecca helped pull her night gown up to her breasts. In the dim light, her flat stomach and panties are barely visible. "Now you need to lose those panties." I reached to pull her panties down, but she wasn't helping. "Sweetheart, stage two?"

"What are you going to do?"

I bent down and rested my right hand on her mons. I whispered in her ear, "You know that thing you do with your mouth?" She nodded, "I'm going to do it to you." This time she lifted her butt and helped me pull her panties down. I crawled into position and, not for the first time, wished for more light. The gates of paradise were open before me, and I couldn't see anything. Fortunately for me, I had a nose, and as I nestled into position, the complex bouquet of her arousal filled my head.

For all her eagerness, Becky needed coaxing before she allowed me to lift her thighs and gain the access I wanted. "Becky, sweetheart, relax and let me lift your legs."

She complied, and while I lifted her thighs, she voiced her concern, "I'm just so nerv... ooh!"

When she started to talk, I started to lick from her perineum to her clitoris. She stopped talking before I was halfway through.

We all know about the alphabet trick, writing out each letter with your tongue. I think it is a good place to start, but it is not necessarily the best finishing move. The real trick is paying attention to your lover's responses. If she likes something, do it a lot. But, you must pay attention and be ready to find the next thing she'll like.

I traced the alphabet, and while Becky liked consonants, she clearly preferred vowels. The letter "i," being her early favorite. When I reached, "O," the muscles in her thighs twitched, I suggested that she get a pillow ready.

"A pillow?"

"Just in case you get loud, sweetheart."

I resumed tracing the letter, "O." A minute later, she almost crushed my head between her thighs, and she needed the pillow. After she caught her breath, I restarted the alphabet from the beginning. I worked on the alphabet three times before Becky pushed me away.

Panting, she rolled over onto her side. I told her I'd be right back. In the bathroom, I washed my face and after a brief thought, brushed my teeth. Rebecca was sleeping when I returned to our bed. After spooning up behind her, I pulled the sheet over us and fell asleep.

I woke when her mother came to our door. Rebecca and I lay wrapped tight around each other.

Mrs. Schmidt muttered, "My, my, isn't that something." Then she called for her daughter to get up and to help with breakfast.

Rebecca sat up and said, "OK, momma."

Mrs. Schmidt left to start breakfast.

Becky ran her hand over my chest and kissed me. "Good morning Mr. Butcher." Then she must have noticed her lack of underwear. "Where are my panties?"

We looked around, but without turning on a light, we couldn't find them.

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I sat at the table with a cup of coffee while we waited for Mr. Schmidt. Mrs. Schmidt remarked that Rebecca slept well because she had a 'well-rested glow.' Rebecca's cheeks got a little rosy. I drank my coffee and avoided eye contact with anyone.

-----

Rebecca called my cell phone a few minutes after my morning break started. "Hey sweetheart, what's up?"

Whispering, "I found *them*."

"What?"

"*Them*, I was missing *them* this morning."

"Oh, *those*." I should have told her I found them shortly after I rose from our bed. Her crumpled panties lay under my side of the bed. Fragile cotton defenders of my girlfriend's virtue. Well, those and my willpower. And my willpower was crumbling. Last night had been close. If she had stayed awake, I would have made love to her. Instead of me working today, we would be out to get a marriage license. Not that getting a marriage license was a bad idea.

"Sweetheart, when are we getting married?"

No longer whispering, "I don't know? We haven't talked about it."

"How soon can we do it?"

"I'll have to talk to Momma. If we announce it this Sunday, we could marry two weeks later."

"Last night, well, if you hadn't fallen asleep, I ah, I wouldn't have stopped."

Whispering, "Me either."

"We'll talk more tonight, love you, Becky!"

"I love you, too!"

Interlude: Schmidt's Farm, Kitchen

"Momma, Kevin asked how soon we could get married."

"That's awful sudden, what did you do last night?"

Cheeks pink, Rebecca replied, "Not *that*, Momma, we haven't done *that*."

Mrs. Schmidt examined her daughter with care; they may not have done *that*, but they did something.

Rebecca positively glowed this morning. There had been some changes since they started bundling, all for the better. Rebecca and Kevin might be losing sleep, but they've been a lot calmer and relaxed. They were like a long-established couple.

"Rebecca, if we tell your father that you want to marry in two weeks, he will assume that you *need* to get married. Convincing him otherwise will not be easy."

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Posse Interlude: Schmidt's Farm

Rebecca and her girlfriends moved the chairs so they sat huddled together.

Brenda started the conversation, "Rebecca, we want to know about you bundling with Kevin."

"Yeah, give it up, Rebecca," said Becky.

"She probably already has, to Kevin," said Mary

Four sets of eyes fixed on Rebecca. Susan asked, "Yeah, Rebecca, did you give it up to Kevin?"

Rebecca looked at each friend but settled on Susan, "No, not yet."

Brenda, Mary, and Becky expressed their disbelief, but Susan looked thoughtful. "What have you been up to, then?"

In a small quiet voice, "Almost everything else."

The posse quieted while this sunk in. Brenda said, "Start at the beginning, what's the first thing you did?"

All four heads leaned in as they listened to Rebecca.

They took a break when Mrs. Schmidt brought them iced tea.

Mrs. Schmidt asked, "Rebecca, did you tell Kevin your posse was here?"

Susan smiled, "Posse?"

Rebecca replied, "That's what Kevin calls us, The Posse."

After Mrs. Smith went back inside. Becky said, "Finish telling us about last night."

Rebecca's cheeks turned pink. Brenda said, "This must be good, she's turning red."

Rebecca leaned in close and in a hushed tone asked, "You know that thing guys like us to do with our mouths?" They all nodded. "Last night, after I did it to him, he did, um, put his mouth on me."

They all turned pink. Mary asked, "What was it like?"

Rebecca's cheeks were on fire, "It was the best thing ever and he wouldn't stop. He did it three times in a row. I had to scream into a pillow each time."

"Three times?"

"He wouldn't stop, I had to push him away."

Susan said, "I think what we all want to know is: does he have brothers?"

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Kevin Butcher:

We didn't have any crisis at work so I got home at a normal time. Rebecca and her posse met me at my truck. I met Susan, Brenda, and Mary. I already met Rebecca2. Rebecca2 asked me to call her Becky.

We walked around to the back of the house. With her friends present, I didn't think Rebecca would want to stop for our usual kiss. As soon as we turned the corner, the posse stopped and Susan said Rebecca and I should stop for our normal kiss. Surprised, I expected a peck, but Rebecca attacked me. She pushed me up against her house, stood on her toes and kissed me. Within moments I forgot about the posse. Rebecca pressed against me and I responded. My hands slipped from her waist to her buttocks and I pulled her to me. She had to feel me harden. Rebecca's lips pulled away, and I followed her. Her hands pushed against my chest and I pulled back, my eyes opened and I brought my hands back to her waist. My head cleared, and I noticed four sets of eyes. Rebecca wouldn't look at me. "What was that all about?"

Brenda answered, "We made Rebecca show us how you kissed when you came home from work."

I told Rebecca, "If you have a sleepover, we can play show and tell." Four sets of eyes looked thoughtful. "I need a cold shower." I took Rebecca's hand and walked towards the back of the house. "Sweetheart? Are you going to wash my back?"

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Klaus Hanslein Junior:

This morning, after Dad left with his crew, I called Rebecca. I had to hang up twice because her mom answered, but the third time, Rebecca answered. Everything changed with the sound of her voice. My face felt hot and my skin itched from sweat. Rebecca had to say hello twice before I could answer.

“Rebecca, don’t hang up.”

“Klaus Hanslein Junior, why are you calling me?”

“I’m sorry about what happened at the fair. It just got crazy. I love you, Rebecca. Don’t be mad.”

“Klaus, I’m sorry, but I love someone else, and I will marry him. Please leave us alone.”

“No, I saw you first! You’re mine!”

“Klaus, please try to find peace with God.”

“You’re mine, Rebecca. I’ll kill him and take you back.”

“I’m hanging up, please don’t call back.”

“Click.”

I threw the worthless phone down and stormed outside. This was the worst day. That fucking Butcher had turned Rebecca against me. I’ll kill him and Rebecca will be mine again.

-----

Early in the afternoon, the gravel on the lane crunched. I watched Ronnie’s old Bronco come into the yard. Ronnie saw me sitting on the porch steps and pulled up in front of me.

Ronnie called out, “Sup dude? You look like shit.” They got out carrying another case of that cheap energy drink.

“Where do you get this shitty energy drink?”

Ronnie snickered and nodded at Grainger. “Grainger steals it from the beer distributor.”

Grainger said, “Yeah, I always check by the drive thru entrance. Sometimes they have beer there and if no one is looking, I’ll take a case. Lately it’s been empties and this energy drink.”

We sat around bullshitting and I was whining about Rebecca. Grainger needled me.

“You think Butcher is tapping that ass yet?”

I glared at Grainger, usually he’d back down, but not today.

“I’ve always wondered what she’d look like naked. Butcher might send me a picture.”

“Grainger, you son of a bitch. I’m gonna kick your ass.” I stood up with every intention of breaking his neck.

Ronnie spoke up, “Klaus, Grainger is just being a dick. Kevin Butcher is your real problem.”

I turned to Ronnie, “If you don’t shut your brother up, I’ll shut him up.” Ronnie was right, Butcher poisoned Rebecca against me. “Ronnie, you’ve been keeping track of Butcher. He’s at work, right?”

Ronnie got out his cell phone. He had one of those big fucking phones. He tapped the screen and read his notes. “Yeah, he’s at work, and this is one of the days he usually works late.”

“Good, let’s pay him a visit after work.”

Ronnie grinned.

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Kevin Butcher:

I spent all morning on my belly, installing a cable bundle. My smart watch beeped, reminding me to break for lunch. I stood up and stretched, my back and shoulders stiff. Hmm, I could ask Rebecca for a massage tonight. I had biblical knowledge of her strong fingers, and I could only imagine those fingers on my back.

I found a good seat in the break room and opened my lunch bag. Inside were two paper wrapped items, an apple, and a sealed envelope. Inside the envelope was a simple note.

"I hope you enjoy your lunch. If you miss me too much, check the pictures on your phone. All my love, Becky."

Several weeks ago, Rebecca expressed an interest in my phone. I had one of those big screen android smartphones. I showed her how to unlock it and let her play with it. It hadn't taken long for her to find the camera app and she took several selfies of us cuddled up on the glider.

Thinking she referred to those pictures, I unwrapped the rest of my lunch. A meatloaf sandwich, with lettuce, tomato, and mayonnaise and a slice of carrot cake. I ate the apple, a Fuji! Then I unlocked my phone and navigated to the pictures.

Rebecca must have borrowed my phone this morning. There were three new pictures, all full-length mirror reflection selfies.

For the first picture, Rebecca wore the muted amethyst nightgown from last night. In the second, she wore only her panties, her left arm covered her breasts. The third picture was of Rebecca biting her lip, without panties, her breasts uncovered.

I stopped breathing with the third picture. My eyes followed her curves. I thought about punching out, going home early and dragging her out to the barn.

My cell phone rang while I ate the carrot cake. "Hello?"

It was Rebecca, "Hey, Kev, how was your lunch?"

"Memorable, I've never had a lunch this good."

"Did you read my note?"

"Yes, and I've been enjoying your pictures."

Whispering, "Are they OK? You don't think I'm too... *slutty*?"

"No, sweetheart, we will marry in a few weeks, nothing we do together is bad."

"OK, um, I was wondering—do you have a favorite part now?"

Her mom must have come into the room because our conversation changed to "proper." We chatted for a few more minutes, and I warned her I may have to work late.

"Love you, Kev, bye."

"Love you, Becky, bye."

An hour before quitting time, the two engineers I worked for checked on my progress.

"Any idea how much longer you'll be with this?"

"Hours more. I wish we could have done this before installing the floor."

On the way to the supply room, I took a short break and called Rebecca. "Hey, I'm working late."

"You always work late."

"I'll call when I'm on my way home."

Two hours later, the new cable bundle passed the test, and I headed to the lockers to strip out of my work clothes.

-----

My truck sat alone in the parking lot. A few vehicles remained, all clustered closer to the entrance. In the shadow, alongside of my truck, lay something. I felt a sudden concern, what if Junior, or his psycho friends, messed with my truck? As I closed the distance, it looked more like a body. I picked up my pace and closed the distance. It was a body, and it lay on its side facing my truck.

The body was alive; I could hear its raspy wet breaths and throat clearing coughs. I called 911 while I circled my truck. The operator answered, and I gave him the details. He assured me that an ambulance would arrive soon. I approached the figure from the other side and realized two things: it was Grainger Thomas and someone had beaten him severely. I knelt next to him and said. "Grainger, can you hear me?"

One of his eyes opened, and he looked at me. "Butcher."

"Man, what happened?"

He said nothing, but he was breathing. "Grainger, I called 911, they're sending an ambulance." He nodded. "You're lying on your side, and that's good, it'll help you breathe. Just stay still." I heard sirens,

they were getting close. "You hear the sirens?" He nodded again. I stood up and alternated between watching Grainger and the parking lot entrance.

A patrol car rolled in first, followed by an ambulance. I stepped clear of my truck and waved my arms. The patrol car stopped behind my truck and the ambulance stopped just past Grainger. The EMS technicians jumped out and worked on Grainger. I kept out of their way. The police officer approached me carrying a note pad and asked if I had called this in. I told him I had. He asked for my name and what happened.

The police officer's name tag read "Smith." I gave Officer Smith my name and told him how I came out of work and found Grainger lying next to my truck. The officer asked how I knew the victim and I paused a second to consider my reply.

"My girlfriend has a stalker. Grainger here, is one of the stalker's best friends."

"Who is the stalker?"

"Klaus Hanslein, Junior." Officer Smith's eyes opened when I said Hanslein, so he recognized the name.

The police officer nodded as he wrote this down, then asked me to stick around. He walked over to Grainger and questioned him while the paramedics worked.

I got my phone and called the Schmidts' house. Mr. Schmidt answered the phone. I told him about finding Grainger and asked him to tell Rebecca that I would be even later than expected. Mr. Schmidt asked what happened to Grainger and why was he lying next to my truck. I told him I hadn't a clue, but the police and the paramedics were here and they would sort it all out. Mr. Schmidt seemed distracted when he said goodbye.

Grainger, now wearing a cervical collar, talked with the police officer. The EMS guys were getting a back board into position. Grainger looked over at me and pointed, "Him, Butcher, he beat me up for writing on his truck."

I heard the officer ask Grainger, "Are you sure?"

Grainger nodded and in his raspy wet voice said, "Yeah, Butcher did it."

The cop stood up and used his flashlight to examine my truck. He glanced over at me, walked to his patrol car and got on the radio. He kept his eyes on me.

I changed position to get a better look at my truck. A thin layer of dust covered the dark green metallic paint. At the correct angle, letters, hand drawn in the dust, became visible. The letters formed the word, "Asshole". I used my phone to take pictures.

Officer Smith walked over. "Mr. Butcher, step over to my car, please."

You know that slippery sliding sensation when you realize that you are no longer in control? That horrible awful sensation of impending doom?

Officer Smith arrested me. The probable charge: Aggravated Assault. In Pennsylvania, aggravated assault is a class 2 felony. It carries a maximum sentence of ten years.