

Prologue

The large room was illuminated by the glow of two propane-powered lights. The main piece of furniture was the large oak table near an inside wall thus providing ample space in the rest of the room. The table could easily sit twelve but there were only eight chairs at it now, each of them occupied. The chairs, like the table, were oak and were substantial, some might say massive, but they were meant to last and had been carefully and expertly crafted. The room was obviously multipurpose because along the wall opposite the table was a gas stove. The only adornments on the walls were nails and hooks from which pots and pans hung. There were windows at either end of the room although not much could be seen other than the blackness of the night. At the front end of the room, easily noted by the porch light just outside the window, was a roll top desk that showed signs of wear having come from the house of the family of the wife. Sitting next to it was a comfortable chair that could be used for reading but the light that was usually there had been moved near the table. To the right of the desk was the living room of the house, unoccupied and unlit since the woman of the house had excused herself and gone to the bedroom at the far end of the house.

Sitting around the table were eight men, distinguishable by size and age but by not much else. All of them wore black or dark blue jackets with no lapels. Under them were white shirts. Each man wore trousers of much the same material as the jacket with suspenders instead of belts. The suspenders were of the same material as the pants in most of the cases. In all cases the clothing worn was homemade by each man's wife using a pedal-operated sewing machine like the one sitting against the room's rear wall away from the table. Between the sewing machine and the stove was a door leading into what in many houses would be a garage but in this case it was a large mudroom housing

among other things a wringer style washing machine that was powered by a small gasoline engine. There was room to hang laundry during inclement weather although usually laundry was hung from lines on the front porch.

Each man wore heavy shoes or boots of either black or brown color. The shoes were store bought. Except for the man of the house, each man had arrived wearing a black hat with a wide brim and each man had arrived in a horse-drawn carriage with two or three men per carriage. When the men had taken off their hats, it was easily seen that their black hair was cut in the same manner. Most people would call it a bowl-style haircut, meaning that it looked like a bowl had been put on the top of the man's head and that hair that protruded below was snipped off. Also each man had a beard but none of them had a mustache.

The head of the house they were in was Samuel Lengacher, a big man standing about six feet and weighing about two hundred fifty pounds, thirty of that gained in the past twenty years as he had aged. His beard was tinged with gray more from age than from the burdens of his position for he was bishop of the Hibbard Pond Amish Parish, a position he had held for seventeen years. The problem that this council was discussing this evening was the most weighty one with which he had been faced in his tenure.

Best to put it into proper perspective. The Hibbard Pond Amish Parish was historical old school to put it simply. All Amish communities could be said to be old school but this community had long resisted any modern conveniences. They adhered to the standard of only twelve volt electricity for lighting, etc. which explains the propane lights which provided more illumination. However, they eschewed such things as bicycles and had only after much deliberation and prayer permitted the children to have

scooters. But Amish scooters are not as one might think. Front and back were like bicycles but between was a scooter base. It was just such a scooter that was the igniting spark in the current controversy.

The past spring an Amish family arrived from Ohio, invited by the Hibbard Pond Amish Parish because they wanted someone to breed the horses they needed for their carriages, farm wagons and plows. They had searched other Amish communities and settled on Abram Beiler who had arrived with his wife Hannah, son Joshua and daughter Miriam. They had purchased, again with the help of the Hibbard Pond Amish Parish a farm that had belonged to a German family. The house had been in good repair but the barn was a disaster. So one of the first things that had been done was to tear down the old barn and build a new one. While preparations were being made for this, young Joshua Beiler went exploring his new neighborhood on his scooter. The road was dirt and had drainage ditches on both sides. A large logging truck (basically a cab and two trailers loaded with logs) came speeding down the road. Joshua was unprepared for the blast of air created by the fast moving truck and was blown into a drainage ditch. He landed on some broken glass that cut one of the arteries in his leg. He would have quickly bled to death except for the arrival and quick actions of Chris “Muddy” Waters who applied a tourniquet using his tee shirt and then had called 911 using his cellphone.

This action had brought the two boys together in a budding friendship they wanted to continue. However the public notice of the incident, though mild, was not to the liking of some of the die-hard isolationists in the Hibbard Pond Amish Parish. They requested that any friendship be continued away from either of the two homesteads and out of public view. In particular it was to involve no modern technology. The boys did

try, although secretly they were looking for a cougar the signs of whose presence Muddy had already found. It should be noted that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had for years denied the existence of cougars in Michigan. However recently there had been photographic evidence of a cougar in the Upper Peninsula (UP). The boys had broken the ban and gone to the library in Hibbard Corners to use the computers there to find out more about cougars. This was, in Muddy's opinion, a "no harm, no foul" event.

However, in their search for the cougar, they had encountered two poachers who had just killed a farmer who had threatened to expose them. The boys had fled from the scene and separated after the poachers had shot their crossbows at them. Separating, Muddy had run wildly through the woods and fallen into an old earthen well. That fall had broken a leg and an arm. In his flight Joshua had tried to leap a log and fallen and hit his head. In his dazed state he had thought that he had seen a mother cougar with two young. After recovering from the fall, Joshua had emerged from the woods and been found by the sheriff whose department had been notified that the boys were missing by Muddy's father after being informed of the missing duo by Joshua's father. Using a Michigan State Trooper canine to aid in the search, Muddy had been found and pulled from the well with the help of Joshua who held Muddy as a rope pulled them up because Muddy's injuries required help. That adventure had sealed the boys' friendship and brought much public notice to the small Amish community. It was this invasion of their privacy that was the topic of the discussion this evening.

"This outside interference cannot be tolerated," Mark Schrock, brother-in-law of Samuel Lengacher said.

“But isn’t that behind us now?” Samuel Lengacher asked

“It wasn’t the boys’ fault,” Jacob Wittmer stated. “They were just doing things that young people do.”

“But they broke the rule,” Mark Schrock countered. “They used a computer.”

“As if you’ve never broken a rule,” Peter Wittmer, brother of Jacob, said with a laugh. “Remember us sneaking...”

“That didn’t involve a computer,” Mark Schrock snarled.

Bam! Samuel Lengacher slammed his hand on the table.

“Let’s not bring our own past into this discussion,” he said authoritatively. “I was part of that incident that Peter mentioned, and you – truthfully we – did break a rule. And as you have pointed out the boys did bend a rule but it was not made that clear to them. They were told that they could not go to the Waters’ boy’s house and use his computer. They went to the library in Hibbard Corners and used it there. It is the way that much library research is done now and we have not denied anyone the use of a library just as we have not denied anyone the use of someone else’s automobile to be taken to the store or the use of doctor and modern medicine.”

“True,” Mark said, “but they brought television people around with their cameras.”

“And that didn’t hurt anyone,” Eli Troyer answered. “They’ve been around before asking how we lived, worked ... all the natural things. I see no harm in what the boys did.”

There was a general murmur of agreement although Mark Schrock and Vernon Hershberger looked at each other and shook their heads.

“I take that as a sign of agreement,” Samuel Lengacher said. “We will keep the peace and accept the Beilers fully into our community.”

This completed the meeting for that day so the men got up from the table, and left the house without talking. As Mark Schrock neared the front door, Samuel called to him. Mark waited until the others had left and then turned to Samuel

“I know you don’t agree, Mark,” Samuel said, “but you will abide with the decision, won’t you.”

Mark looked at Samuel for a minute and then said, “It is the decision of the community and I will abide.”

“Thank you,” Samuel said.

Mark passed through the door and walked down the porch and down the steps where Peter Wittmer stood by his horse, his carriage lights already burning.

“I don’t agree with the decision,” he said to Mark.

“Neither do I, but we have no choice,” Mark said as he started lighting the four carriage lights, two in front and two in the rear. “We do what we have to do.”

Peter got into his carriage and angrily flicked the reins and his horse moved off, pulling the carriage slowly gaining speed until he was at a good trot. The carriage turned onto the road and in a moment was gone.



When Mark reached home, his wife Esther was waiting for him as she always did when there was a meeting. She knew by his look what the decision had been.

“So you couldn’t convince them,” she said taking his arm as they walked toward their bedroom.

“No,” Mark said. “They wouldn’t listen.”

“What will you do?” she asked.

“We do what we have to do,” he answered.



Peter Wittmer slammed the door angrily behind him, scaring his wife Ruth who was mending a pair of pants. She folded the pants and got up, hurrying to her husband and grabbed his arm.

“It didn’t go well?” she said, knowing the answer.

“No! That fool Mark Schrock gave in to the pressure of his brother-in-law. We were outvoted anyway but he could have made a better stand than he did.”

“Is he going to obey the decision,” Ruth asked quietly.

“I asked him that and all he said was ‘We do what we have to do’.”

“What about you?”

Peter looked at his wife, smiled and said, “We do what we have to do.”