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CINDY WOODSMALL & ERIN WOODSMALL



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The Englisch Daughter

A Novel

The Englisch Daughter

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One

nuggled under her great-grandmother's quilt, Jemima woke to the sound of slow, easy movement in the room. She opened her eyes and saw silhouettes of the furniture despite the darkness of a winter night. Her husband was up. Without shifting her position to confirm that, she knew it was true.

Familiar warring emotions tugged at her. She wanted to get up with him, fix a pot of coffee, and talk the way they used to. At the same time, she wanted to hide from him, so she lay still as if she were asleep.

Shouldn't today be a great celebration for them? Exactly a year ago her husband and their oldest daughter, Laura, had been headed toward town in a horse and buggy when a car topped the hill behind them and hit them. They were grateful that God had spared Roy's and Laura's lives, but navigating that time and coming back together as a family had been difficult. In those early months of healing, she constantly gave thanks to the Almighty that Roy had survived, and when Roy and she were able to be in the same home at night, she'd held him close, whispering her gratefulness aloud. But with each

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passing day, he seemed to become more distant. What happened to him while she was staying with her family?

The news of the accident had reached Jemima within the hour, but her husband and daughter had already been airlifted to a hospital. By the time she arrived—thanks to the help of an *Englisch* neighbor—both were in surgery. When she finally saw her husband and daughter, they were unconscious and connected to tubes and monitors. Roy woke within forty-eight hours and Laura a day later.

His steps were quiet as he approached the bed, and she closed her eyes. The aroma of her husband, freshly showered for the day, filled her senses, and she longed to reach through the darkness for his hand. He seemed to wait at the side of the bed. Was he thinking of waking her? Was he praying for her?

It wasn't likely. Not these days.

Why was he up this early? It had to be at least two hours before sunup, although she couldn't see the clock to know for sure. He owned a horse farm but also had horses boarded elsewhere, and tending to those horses required long hours and often pulled him from home.

"What?" His whisper sounded angry. She hadn't heard his cell phone ring, but apparently he'd taken a call.

When she opened her eyes, he was going toward the bedroom door, holding the cell phone to his ear. She missed the days when Amish men had cell phones only for business and were required to turn them off before entering the house.

He paused in the doorway and turned, seeming to look straight

at her. He was bathed in moonlight, but her face was hidden by a shadow, and she knew he couldn't see that her eyes were open. What was on his mind as he paused, looking into the bedroom? A moment later he closed the door behind him.

She moved her hand to his side of the bed, hoping to feel the warmth from where he'd been. It was as cold as it was empty, and her heart thudded with loneliness. What had happened to them?

The baby cried out from his crib behind her, and Jemima rose. She pulled a blanket over eight-month-old Simeon and patted his back until he fell asleep again. Her white nightgown was no match for winter in an old farmhouse, so she grabbed the knit shawl from the rocker, put it around her shoulders, and went to the window. Roy held a lit barn lantern by the metal handle as he walked toward the stables.

What were they doing? He was right there, just outside the home they'd shared for ten years, yet they seemed isolated in separate worlds.

A desire to be who they'd once been washed over her, and she knocked on the window. He continued onward. She knocked harder and then jolted back, fearing she'd woken Simeon. The baby didn't stir, but Roy stopped walking and turned around. As she hurried toward the bedroom door, the moonlight reflected off something on her pillow. He'd written her a note.

Most of their communication of late was through notes. Nothing of marital value was ever said. They were only memos of where they were going and when they'd return. Is this who they were now?

She flew down the creaking wooden steps and opened the back door. A blast of cold air rushed inside, and her husband was there, so close she gasped.

“Jem, is something wrong?” The light from the lantern revealed his green eyes and the compassion she used to see in them.

She wanted to cry out the words *everything* and *nothing* and then fall into his embrace. But his phone buzzed. He pulled it from his coat pocket, texted a quick response, and slid it back into his pocket. He needed to go, and here she stood, wordless. And thankless and spoiled as well, she supposed.

He walked back into the house, shutting the door behind him, and she retreated a few steps. His lantern was the only source of light, but it was plenty. She wanted an honest conversation. She longed for him to love her as he once had, but she couldn't voice those feelings. Following the accident, he'd given his all, and maybe he had nothing left to give. Maybe he was like a field that needed to rest before it could yield another harvest.

A small smile tugged at his lips. Did he feel obligated to respond with kindness to the delay she was causing? That's how he treated her these days—as if she were another duty on his long to-do list. But in her presence, he never stepped outside of being respectful. However, he seemed to go out of his way to be sure he was rarely in her presence.

“Did you get my note?” His voice was as quiet as the house itself.

She hadn't read it, but it was in her hands, so she nodded. “*Ya*. Can I fix you some breakfast?”

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“Denki, but I need to go.”

Did he even remember? “Today is the anniversary.”

His brows knit, and he barely shook his head before she saw realization come to him. Then they both seemed lost in the memory of it.

Even after he and Laura had regained consciousness in the hospital, Jemima’s hands had trembled constantly for days. She was five months pregnant with Simeon at the time, and she began having horrible headaches, blurry vision, and shortness of breath. Roy had insisted she be seen by a doctor. Her blood pressure had gone from normal to high. Her doctor said the new condition put her in the high-risk category, and he’d ordered eighteen to twenty hours of bed rest daily. How was she, a pregnant mom with an injured husband and a child in the hospital, even supposed to go home for a good night’s rest, let alone take care of her other two healthy children while resting that much?

The man standing in front of her, the one she hardly recognized these days, had come up with the answer. He had ignored his doctor’s orders and his own pain and stayed with Laura every night so Jemima could go home and sleep. When Jemima arrived at the hospital the next day, he returned to the farm and worked. He asked their families to set aside their usual work schedules and responsibilities to take shifts at the hospital each afternoon until he arrived for the night shift.

He made no move to hug her or sit at the table with her for even a few minutes. She wanted to hit him . . . or embrace him. Above all else, she wanted to demand that he return to her. But she refused to ask one more thing of him.

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His eyes held her. “It’ll get better, Jem. I promise,” he whispered.

She bit back tears and forced a smile and a nod. His statement meant he felt the barrier between them too, didn’t it? Yet despite her asking him what was wrong several times, he’d offered no insight and no explanation. If she asked again, he’d tell her the same as always: *Nothing. Just work.*

He drew a breath. “I’ve made arrangements with Chris, that farmhand I’ve talked to several times. He should be here early next week.”

She was glad to hear that Roy was putting effort into getting some relief from the workload, but why hadn’t he told her this before now? “Does Abigail know?”

Roy’s younger sister was an odd, beautiful creature who was their sanity most days. She had more energy than she knew what to do with, and she purposefully kept life busy in order to cope with it. She taught at a local Amish school, worked with special-needs children outside of that, and volunteered regularly at several places within the community. But for the last year, she’d given as much time as possible to the horse farm.

“I mentioned it was a possibility. She *really* wants to get back to her volunteer work and scheduled off days, so I didn’t want to get her hopes up until I knew for sure he was coming.”

“You just told me he was coming, didn’t you?” Had she misunderstood?

“I’ve tried to get him here a few times over the last several years, but it’s never quite worked out. Still, I think he’s coming this time.”

“But you don’t actually know, despite what you said just a min-

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ute ago.” The disbelief in her voice said it all, and his eyes moved from her face to the floor. Why had he talked as if it was a sure thing, but when she asked one question, he wavered? It seemed that she was no longer important enough for him to take the time to explain the situation unless she pressed him.

“I said he *should* be here next week, which means *maybe*, Jem. He doesn’t intend to move to our area or live on our farm, but I believe we’ve struck a deal where he’ll work part time and it’ll give us some decent relief from the workload. That’s all I know. You think I’m not being honest with you about a farmhand?”

She should’ve stayed in bed. It hurt less to lie there in loneliness than to be chided by a man who was clearly trying to keep the farm going—the buying, training, and selling of horses. “I didn’t mean . . .” She drew a weary breath. “I’m sorry.”

His phone buzzed again, and he glanced at the screen. “I need to go. I doubt I’ll see you again until tomorrow afternoon.”

“What?”

He pointed at the note in her hand. “You didn’t read it, did you?”

Embarrassment singed her cheeks as she shook her head.

He pursed his lips and gave a nod. “There’s a horse auction tonight in Virginia.” His words were slow and soft, seemingly filled with patience. “My sources say it’s a good one with good stock. If it is, this may be the break I’ve been looking for. But it’s five hours by car, and it won’t end until late, too late to return tonight.” His phone vibrated, and his face grew taut with frustration. He drew a deep breath. “I need to go.”

“I forgot the horse auction was this weekend. There’s a food-truck

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auction in town. It'll have a few trucks, and one of them will be the Smiths' truck."

He stared at her as his breathing grew shallow. "The Smiths are selling now? I thought they'd decided to keep the food truck for a few more years."

She'd had her eye on that truck for a long time. It currently sat in the perfect spot, so if they could get the truck and the license for the same spot, that would be perfect. "I guess they changed their minds, and we always said when that truck came up for auction, we'd be first in line. The auction is tomorrow at one."

"Our little ones are so young. Starting a new business now would be a lot to take on."

They'd talked about this for years, and he'd been on board, hadn't he? His sister Abigail would give up her teaching position, and she and Jemima would divvy up the work hours. The plan was to operate seven hours a day, six days a week during tourist season—May through August—and only on Saturdays in the fall and spring. They wouldn't open at all during winter.

"Really?" Jemima asked.

He grimaced. "Ya, okay." He sighed. "Whatever else happens, I *will* meet you tomorrow afternoon on the town square with money in hand for the auction."

He remained in place, studying her.

Why did he sound so reluctant? Was it simply the timing—that he needed to be in Virginia tonight for the horse auction and back here tomorrow for the food-truck auction? They'd been saving for

her dream since before they'd married, and Abigail had been saving along with them for the last nine years.

Jemima's dream of having a food truck, which she'd had since she was a young teen, was unusual for an Amish woman but not forbidden. She wanted to serve authentic Amish foods. When Roy had asked Jemima to marry him, he had promised that her dream wouldn't be lost because of becoming his wife and the mother of his children. He would make sure of it.

But maybe she should offer to give up that dream if it would help them even a little. She would celebrate giving it up if somehow that would tear down the walls between them and bring Roy back to her. But even now as he stood in front of her, making promises, she felt powerless in their relationship. The idea of owning a business brought more than hope. It gave her a much-needed sense of being in charge of one thing in her life.

His phone buzzed multiple times in quick succession. He looked at the screen, and without saying anything else he left, taking the lantern with him.

She stood there, barefoot on the cold floor, darkness surrounding her. How had they gotten to this place? And who would they become as the years went by?

Two

Roy burned with frustration as he rode his horse bareback across the west field. Jemima was too inquisitive for her own good. If she knew half of what he held back from her, it would break her heart. She would grow to hate him, and there would be no getting free of him since divorce was forbidden.

As impossible as it seemed, he had to continue down the path he'd chosen.

He dug the horse with his heels and clicked his tongue. She picked up her speed, and soon the gray cottage came into view. *Her* cottage. Actually his *Daed* owned this cottage and had rented it to Tiffany. He glanced at her white sedan as he rode past. It looked as if it was stuffed with her belongings. Was she planning to leave? A surge of hope was met with fear, snatching his breath.

He slid off his horse and looped the reins around a shrub. Roy walked up the few cement steps. Blue paint was peeling off the door. Before he knocked, he heard a soul-piercing wail. An infant.

His infant.

The moment he'd heard his firstborn's cry, it had aroused primal

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feelings. Protect. Soothe. Fix. The same had been true when his daughter Carolyn and her brothers, Nevin and Simeon, were born. Protect. Soothe. Fix.

When this infant had first cried, Roy was overwhelmed with nausea and a desire to flee. What was he supposed to do in this situation?

He knocked and tried the door handle, but it was locked. Tiffany had called him less than an hour ago and then about every ten minutes since. She wanted an equal partner in the care and feeding of the baby, but he had a family. She'd known that from the start. He pounded louder, hoping she would hear him over Heidi's screams.

The door jerked open. She stood in front of him, dark smudges under her eyes and her dyed-platinum hair sticking out everywhere. "Took you long enough."

He stepped inside and closed the door. The small living room lacked any decorations and was furnished with only a well-used couch, a recliner, and a television that was at least a decade old. This house needed a lot more than just a paint job, which was partly why his Daed had offered it to her for such a pittance of rent—an amount Roy had been paying for almost a year. But it had electricity and water and was structurally sound.

"I got here as quickly as I could. What's wrong?"

Heidi continued to wail. Should he pick her up?

Tiffany laughed but without mirth. "I've been up all night. And the night before. I can't do this." She pointed to the portable bassinet in the corner of the living room. "*You* need to take it. It's yours."

It? How could a parent refer to a child so heartlessly?

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He strode across the room and looked in the small crib. Heidi was red faced but looked unharmed. She'd kicked off her swaddle blanket, and it was bunched around her legs. He scooped her up and looked her over, touching her soft light-colored hair. Her footed sleeper looked clean. "Is she hungry?"

Tiffany made a dismissive sound. "I'm not a moron, Roy. I know how to feed a baby. I just gave her an entire bottle twenty minutes ago. And I changed her outfit and diaper. She won't stop crying, and I can't take one more minute of it."

Maybe it was just the lack of sleep talking. Tiffany wasn't usually this bad. If she were, he wouldn't be able to leave Heidi with her. He lifted the baby girl into the crook of his arm and looked around the room until he spotted a burp cloth. He put the cloth over his shoulder and eased the six-week-old onto it. Laura had liked this position as a baby. Carolyn had liked to be burped belly down, lying across his knees while he sat in a chair, and Nevin and Simeon did best when propped upright on his forearm. He patted up and down Heidi's back. She'd seemed to be constantly fussy the past week. Perhaps this fussy phase was due to a touch of colic. None of his other kids had been like this, but they had Jemima for a mother.

Roy patted Heidi's back while he paced the living room, the baby wailing in his ear. But her cries weren't enough to drown out his thoughts of meeting Jemima at the food-truck auction tomorrow. That had him rattled. To participate in the auction, he would have to take proof that money was set aside in an account to back any bids Jemima made. But the money was no longer there. So the new plan, the one he'd been negotiating with the bank for nearly a month, was

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to get a loan so he could put money back into the savings account before she realized it was missing. Yesterday the banker said they had everything they needed to conclude the process. As long as Roy went there today and signed the papers, the money would be available first thing tomorrow.

Obviously not a day too soon.

If for some reason he couldn't get the money, how would he explain the missing savings to Jemima? The knot in his stomach tightened.

Heidi continued to cry.

Come on, little one. After what felt like forever, Heidi at last let out a big burp, and her crying quieted. He walked back to the bassinet and swaddled her tightly in the blanket she'd kicked off earlier. There was a good chance he could get her to go to sleep and stay asleep now that her tummy seemed to feel better. Maybe then Tiffany could get some sleep too and wake up feeling more like herself.

After he paced about ten more circles around the nearly bare living room, Heidi was asleep in his arms. He laid her on her back in the bassinet, taking care not to jostle her. She shifted in her swaddle blanket but didn't wake. *Phew.*

Tiffany sat in the worn recliner, staring out the window into the dark, her knees pulled to her chest and her arms wrapped around her legs. It had been six weeks since Heidi was born, and Tiffany seemed to struggle more each week. She *had* to pull herself together. They'd made a mess of things, and all they could do now was muddle through.

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“Look.” His voice startled the baby, and she poked out her bottom lip. He waited, anxiety nipping at him.

He motioned for Tiffany to get up and then pointed to the narrow hall that led to the house’s two bedrooms. They needed to talk, but he didn’t want to wake Heidi.

Tiffany rolled her eyes but stood and followed him.

Her bedroom came into view, and he froze in his tracks. He didn’t want to talk in there.

Ten months ago he’d come over to fix the plumbing. Jemima had been on full bed rest, so she and their children were staying with her *Mamm*, who lived an hour away. Because of the injuries he’d sustained in the accident and his need to keep working with the horses, he was taking three pain medications to help him cope. But he recalled Tiffany holding out an icy glass of Coke. He took it, and they talked for a minute.

She’d moved in closer, and they had kissed. He’d backed away, saying he needed to go. What little he remembered after that was murky, but this much he knew: he’d stayed.

Why? Dear God, why?

He’d never understand it, and he cringed because of how betrayed Jemima would feel if she knew. She’d *never* believe she was the only woman who mattered to him. But she was.

Three weeks later Tiffany sent a text saying she was pregnant.

Between the trauma of the accident and the haziness caused by the drugs, he had times he could barely remember. But everything about the day he received her text was burned into his brain. He’d been in the round pen, training horses, when he read the text.

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Horried, he'd stood there, staring at the text, feeling as if everyone in the world could see the news even though he was on the farm alone.

Shame had filled him. His lungs burned when he tried to breathe. He longed to crawl into a hole, but there was no hiding from this or from the shame he had to carry with him night and day.

Tiffany's next text hit a minute later. She needed money to terminate the pregnancy. The temptation to fork over the cash had been powerful, but it lasted only a moment.

He went to see her and talked her into keeping the baby, assuring her that he wouldn't abandon her and the baby. Now he was chained to this woman forever.

Making it even harder to tell Jemima the truth, Roy and Tiffany had dated a few times back when he was in his *rumschpringe*, a fact about his past that had bothered Jemima when she began dating Roy. What troubled her was his seeing someone who was not Amish, as if he was more attracted to Englisch girls. But the truth was he'd felt bad for Tiffany, who had grown up with an alcoholic for a dad, while his own Daed was a pillar of his Amish community. Hadn't the Word commanded him to be kind to the less fortunate? He remembered thinking that if he befriended her, he could help steer her life to something better than what her parents had. But he'd soon realized that her issues were too deep for him to really help and that going out wasn't ministry. It was a date, intended to be fun for two people attracted to each other.

"Hello?" Tiffany's voice brought him back from his thoughts.

He shook off the weight of the past and stepped into the other

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bedroom. Tiffany followed him. This room was supposed to be the nursery, although there was only a wooden crib that Heidi didn't like to sleep in and a windup swing that she wouldn't stay in for more than a few moments. Bits and pieces of baby clothing were strewn about.

Tiffany leaned against the doorframe. "Are you going to lecture me about the baby? Of course *you* can get her to calm down. She'd be better off staying with you. Take her and give me some cash to start my life over. Then everyone would be happier."

Was this Tiffany's plan? Was this the reason for the packed car?

Roy shook his head. "Heidi needs her mother, and besides that, I don't have any money to give you." With the exception of the seed money to purchase horses at the auction, his accounts were drained. Tiffany didn't have health insurance, so he'd paid out of his own pocket for all the prenatal care and hospital bills and her living expenses for the last nine months.

Tiffany scraped dried formula off her shirt. "You have money. You're going to that stupid auction to buy horses, and I know that means you have cash, lots of it."

He hated having to reason with her about his life and farming business. Why couldn't she take his word for anything? "Look, Tiff, I don't mean to minimize how tough this is for you, but we both know that every baby needs its mother. We agreed to that months ago, remember? Just because it's a rough phase with Heidi, don't do something today that you'll regret later."

Tiffany folded her arms, looking childish and stubborn. "You can't decide that for me. I want out, and I need cash to do it."

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“The money I have is seed money. I could give every penny of it to Jemima or you or spend it on myself, but all of us will need more money in a few months, and without fresh, retrained horses to sell, I have no income to meet anyone’s needs. I’m buying more horses than usual because life is costing more than usual. The horse farm is a small business, and horses are the only product I provide to buyers. The good news is I have a buyer lined up who wants a dozen retrained horses come mid-May, so in three months I’ll have at least double, hopefully closer to triple, the money I’m spending today to acquire the horses. Understand?”

She unfolded her arms, seeming interested in his words. “Triple the amount of money in three months?”

“It’s not all profit, because of the cost of feed and vet bills and hired help, but ya.”

She nodded, seeming to mull over his words. Perhaps now was a good time to mention how busy he’d be once the horses arrived. “I’ll be focusing all my time and energy on training the horses while the hired help tends to everything else. The only way for small businesses to stay on their feet is to buy fresh products to sell at a profit. But it takes time and commitment.”

Tiffany rolled her eyes. “Yeah, I get it. You’re gonna be too busy to help. But I told you that I didn’t want to be a mother back when something could’ve been done about it. You wanted me to keep it, so I did. But it’s not at all working out as you said.”

Roy’s chest was so tight he could barely get a breath. What would happen if she disappeared, leaving the baby behind? “We talked about this. We talked about the hormone changes and the mood

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swings. You just need to ride it out, okay? I believe you'll bond with her yet. She's only six weeks old."

Tiffany hadn't wanted to name the baby girl when she was born. The hospital staff kept returning to their room, asking if the baby had a name yet to put on the birth certificate. Roy had pulled up a website of names on his cell phone while they sat in the hospital, and he read one after another until Tiffany heard one she was willing to use.

Tiffany's pregnancy had been a wake-up call. He now realized it was impossible for him to be alert to all that life required while strung out on pain medicine. It'd been a miserable battle, but he got off the painkillers and went back to praying daily for his family. As much as he wished he could undo that night with Tiffany, he couldn't regret Heidi's life. That would be wrong. But he'd helped create a beautiful, innocent person who would grow up in an unstable home. And all he could do was pray for her and try to make her life have as little chaos as possible.

His phone buzzed in his pocket, and he pulled it out to check who was calling. The call came from the Kurtzes' phone shanty. John would leave a message, but Roy knew the call meant he was needed there.

He put the phone away, but he had to get back to horse business. Whatever was going on, he'd already stayed here too long.

"Go rest while she's sleeping, and maybe take a shower. You'll feel more human and hopeful."

"A nap and a shower can't fix this."

"I know they can't. We'll talk again soon, but I have to go. I

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promise I'll come back later today and . . ." He racked his brain to think of anything that could help her feel better about the situation. "I'll hire a nanny to come in for several hours every day to help until you feel like you can handle the baby alone."

How was he going to afford that? But he couldn't deal with that worry now. He'd just have to find a way.

Tiffany looked at the floor. "Yeah, okay. Maybe I could make it with some good help. I can't continue living here. I just know that your dad will drop by one day to get rent money like he used to do, and he'll have questions about the baby once he sees her. Regardless of what I say, he's not likely to accept my word on the matter. Besides that, what happens if he sees you coming or going at odd hours?"

Roy couldn't imagine what it'd do to his Daed to know the truth. It'd been awkward trying to convince him to stop coming in person to get the rent, but he'd managed it. "I can't afford another place for you right now, but, ya, it's probably a good idea to look into that a little later down the road. But if we make sure he has the money by the due date each month, he won't come by."

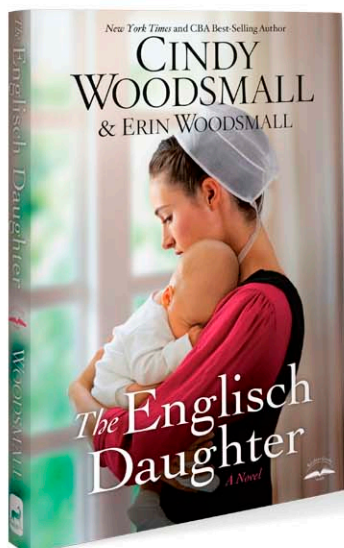
"You hope," Tiffany mumbled.

Anxiety pressed in again, and his chest ached. "Get some rest."

She walked toward her bedroom, and Roy hurried out of the house. What a mess.

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