

*A Cousin's*  
CHALLENGE



WANDA &  
BRUNSTETTER

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CHALLENGE

INDIANA COUSINS | BOOK 3



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*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go:  
I will guide thee with mine eye.*

PSALM 32:8

## CHAPTER 1

Quiet darkness met Jolene Yoder as she stepped into Aunt Dorcas's kitchen. After losing her hearing two years ago in a van accident, she'd become used to the quiet. There were even times when she saw it as a blessing rather than a hindrance. Oh, she missed some things—twittering birds, rain splattering on the roof, the soft *mew* of a kitten, and her mother's gentle voice. What she didn't miss were blaring car horns, squeaking doors, roaring thunder, and the shrill voices of people shouting.

She flipped on the light switch and glanced around. Aunt Dorcas was obviously not at home. If she were, she'd be in the kitchen, starting supper. Maybe she was still at the sewing circle, where she and several women from her Mennonite church were making quilts and other items for the Mennonite Relief Sale that would take place later this fall.

Someone touched Jolene's shoulder, and she whirled around.

*"Sorry if I startled you,"* Uncle Charlie signed.

"It's okay," Jolene spoke as she signed. She understood that tapping her shoulder was sometimes the best way to get her attention. "I thought Aunt Dorcas would be home by now. Do you know why she's so late?"

"When she left this morning, she said she planned to make a few stops on her way home from church this afternoon." Uncle Charlie spoke rather than signed, and Jolene interpreted by reading his lips.

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“Guess I’d better start supper so we can eat as soon as she gets home.”

“Would you consider making chicken potpie?”

She nodded and grinned. Uncle Charlie might not have a Pennsylvania Dutch background, but he sure liked Pennsylvania Dutch food.

“If you don’t need me for anything, I think I’ll go back to the living room and finish reading the newspaper,” Uncle Charlie said.

“I can manage, so go right ahead.”

“We’ve sure enjoyed having you here.” He patted her arm and ambled from the room.

She quirked an eyebrow. What had Uncle Charlie meant when he’d said “enjoyed”? It sounded as if he thought she had plans to leave.

Jolene shrugged and turned toward the stove. He probably hadn’t meant anything.

She had just started the broth for the potpie when Aunt Dorcas got home. “Sorry I’m late,” she both said and signed. “It took me much longer to do my errands than I expected, and traffic was terrible between here and Lancaster.”

“No problem. I’ve already started supper.” Jolene motioned to the bubbling broth on the stove, filling the room with a savory fragrance. “It shouldn’t take too long.”

Aunt Dorcas pulled out two chairs at the table. “Would you sit a minute? I’d like to talk to you about something.” Her expression was solemn.

“Is something wrong?”

“While you were at the dentist’s this morning, I talked to your mother on the phone.”

“How is she? Are things going well at home?”

Aunt Dorcas nodded. “She had a message for you.”

“What was it?”

“The school board met yesterday, and they asked if you’d come home.”

Jolene’s eyebrows rose. “How come? They know I can’t teach anymore.”

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“Two deaf children have moved with their family from Millersburg, Ohio, to your hometown of Topeka, Indiana. Their parents have the Rh factor, and the children haven’t been able to hear since they were born. They’ve each had a year of schooling, but they need someone who can sign and read lips to continue their education.”

Jolene shook her head. “Huh-uh; I’m not ready for that.”

“You’ve been with us two years now and have become proficient at signing and reading lips,” Aunt Dorcas said. “I think you’re more than ready to go home and teach those special children.”

“Why don’t their parents send them somewhere else to learn? There are lots of good schools for the deaf, like the one here in Pennsylvania where you’ve taught.”

“They did take the children somewhere to learn how to sign, but they want the family to be together at home now.” Aunt Dorcas placed her hand gently on Jolene’s arm. “They want you to provide their basic schooling and teach them how to read lips.”

A gentle breeze floated through the open window and fluttered the curtains. Jolene shivered. She felt comfortable and confident here in Pennsylvania. She’d made friends with some of the deaf students Aunt Dorcas taught. The thought of going home sent a ripple of apprehension up her spine.

“You’ve missed teaching school; you’ve mentioned it so many times,” Aunt Dorcas said.

“I know, but this would be different. I’d be teaching children who can’t hear.”

“That’s right. And since *you* can’t hear, who better to teach them?”

Aunt Dorcas’s innocent question pried through Jolene’s numbness, and she turned to stare out the window. She tried to envision what each person in her family was doing right now, for she truly did miss them. She tried to picture herself back home again, teaching two deaf children how to read and write. She thought about her cousins and how nice it would be to spend time with them again. She even thought about her buggy horse, Belle, and wondered if the easygoing mare missed her.

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After several minutes of contemplation, Jolene turned to Aunt Dorcas and said, “Call Mom, and tell her to let the school board know that I’ll be home by the end of the week.”

## CHAPTER 2

The clean scent of freshly laundered sheets on Jolene's bed brought a smile to her lips. She'd arrived home last night and had been greeted enthusiastically by her family. Her brother Andrew had even given Jolene one of his balloon creations made to look like a flower. She was grateful that she knew how to read lips, since no one in her immediate family knew how to sign. She wanted to begin working on that right away and hoped that once Mom, Dad, and Andrew learned, one of them might be willing to sign during their church services.

Jolene slipped out of bed and stretched her arms over her head. She padded across the cold hardwood floor in her bare feet and stared out the window. The morning sun cast a golden haze over their cornfield. Her nose twitched as the smell of burning leaves, a sure sign of fall, drifted through the open window. Dad must be working in the yard already. He'd always gotten up early to do his chores so he could be in his buggy shop by eight o'clock.

Jolene turned away from the window, and her gaze came to rest on the hope chest sitting at the foot of her bed. She'd received it as a birthday present when she'd turned sixteen and had started filling it right away with a variety of things she might need when she got married. *I guess that may never happen, since I don't have a boyfriend*, she thought. *Even if I did have one, would any man want to marry a woman who can't hear?*

Knowing she couldn't give in to self-pity and needed to get

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downstairs to help with breakfast, Jolene moved over to her dresser. She picked up her hairbrush and began brushing her long hair, which hung below her waist.

Sometime this morning, she wanted to see her cousins Loraine, Ella, and Katie. Then this evening, she planned to meet with the school board and talk about teaching the two deaf children who'd moved to the area.

Uneasiness tightened her chest. Was she really ready to begin teaching again? What if the children were difficult to teach? What if she didn't have all the skills she needed? Maybe she'd made a mistake in agreeing to take this position.

A vibration she felt told Jolene someone must be knocking on her door, so she turned from the window and yelled, "Come in!" At least she thought she'd yelled the words. Since Jolene could no longer hear her own voice, she couldn't be sure how loud she'd spoken.

When the door opened, her brother Andrew stepped into the room. "Mom said to tell you that breakfast is almost ready."

Jolene was glad Andrew had spoken slowly while looking directly at her. Otherwise, she couldn't have read his lips. She smiled and said, "Tell her I'll be down as soon as I get dressed and have my hair put up in place."

Andrew hesitated a minute as though he might want to say something more, but then he gave a quick nod and hurried out the door.

Jolene sighed. Did Andrew feel uncomfortable talking to her? Would he be willing to learn sign language so they could communicate better? She certainly hoped so.



"Is Jolene up?" Mom asked when Andrew entered the kitchen.

"*Jab.* Said she'd be right down." Andrew poured himself a cup of coffee and took a seat at the table. "It's hard to think of her being *daab.* I mean, she seemed to understand every word I said to her. It made me feel like she's not really deaf."

"Remember what she told us last night? She was reading your

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lips, the way your *daed's* sister taught her to do while she was living in Pennsylvania." Mom set a plate of toast on the table.

"It just seems strange to me, that's all." Andrew blew on his coffee and took a tentative sip. "Do you think she'll be able to teach those daab *kinner*?"

Mom's forehead wrinkled. "Of course she can teach the deaf children. Jolene was a good teacher before she lost her hearing, and I'm sure she'll be a good teacher to the daab *kinner*, too."

He drummed his fingers along the edge of the table. "You think she'll expect us to learn how to talk with our hands?"

"Uh-huh. Before Jolene went to bed last night, she told me and your daed that she hoped we would all be willing to learn signing." Mom took a jug of Dad's homemade apple cider from their propane-operated refrigerator. "Jolene's right, Andrew. If we're going to communicate with her and tell her what others are saying, we need to learn sign language."

"But if she can read our lips, why do we have to learn how to sign?"

Mom set the cider on the table and took a seat across from him. "We need to understand the signs Jolene uses when she talks, and we need to learn to sign. It will help us all if we can communicate that way. And when others are speaking, like the ministers during church, hopefully one of us will be able to sign so Jolene will know what they're saying."

"Maybe those two daab *kinner*, too?"

"Jah. It would help them as well."

"Sorry I'm late," Jolene said when she entered the room. "It felt so good to sleep in my own bed that I slept longer than I thought I would."

Mom smiled. "That's okay. Your daed's still outside, so we won't be ready to eat until he comes in."

"Dad went back to bed?" Jolene asked with a look of surprise.

Mom's eyebrows shot up. "I think you *missverschtch* what I said."

"Didn't you say that Dad's in bed?"

Mom shook her head and then glanced over at Andrew with

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a strange expression. He was beginning to realize that just because Jolene could read lips it didn't mean she understood every word they said.

Jolene moved closer to Mom. "Would you please repeat yourself? It would help, too, if you spoke a little slower this time."

"Your daed is still outside doing his chores," Mom said slowly. "We'll eat when he comes in."

Holding her right hand in front of her body, Jolene then brought it up and rested her thumb on her chest. "I. . ." She flicked her index finger off her thumb in front of her forehead. "Understand. I understand."

Mom looked over at Andrew. "We should both try that."

He grunted. "It looks too hard."

"Would you show us again?" Mom asked Jolene.

Jolene repeated the sentence, as well as the action with her hand, while Mom and Andrew tried to follow along.

"Don't think I'll ever catch on," Andrew mumbled as he tried to flick his thumb the way Jolene had done.

"Sure you will. It just takes practice," Jolene said. "There's a lot I can teach you if you're willing to learn."

"We'll all learn." Mom smiled. "You can start by giving us a lesson this evening after supper."



As Lonnie Hershberger stepped into the barn, he was greeted by the unmistakable sound of grunting pigs awaiting their breakfast.

He groaned. Slopping hogs was not his favorite thing to do. But as much as he disliked it, he'd follow through on the promise he'd made to Pop to help out whenever he could.

Lonnie and his family had moved from Arthur, Illinois, to Middlebury, Indiana, a few months ago. Soon after their arrival, Lonnie had begun working for Rueben Yoder, tuning wind chimes. Lonnie had been playing the harmonica since he was a boy, and he had a good ear for music. Learning to tune the chimes had come easily to him, and he enjoyed his new job more than any other he'd held. Certainly more than working with pigs.

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When Lonnie and his folks had first moved to Indiana, he'd thought he would miss Illinois. But the only thing he missed was his girlfriend, Carolyn, whom he'd been writing to at least once a week. In Lonnie's last letter, he'd invited Carolyn to visit Indiana. He hoped he'd receive a letter from her soon and that she'd be willing to come.

He dumped the food into the trough and watched as the mother hogs rustled their snouts into the slop, while their babies nudged the sows' udders for milk. The greedy little piglets bit each other and carried on as though they were starving to death.

"Knock it off!" Lonnie reached over the stall and nudged one of the piglets with a stick, hoping to break up the fight. The mother pig let out a high-pitched squeal, jerked her head around, and bit Lonnie's hand.

"Ow!" Fiery pain shot up his arm. "Let go, you stupid *saw*!"

The sow hung on, tearing into Lonnie's flesh. He ground his teeth together as sweat beaded up on his forehead and trickled onto his cheeks. "Let go!"

He swatted the sow's rump with the stick. When she finally let go, he breathed a sigh of relief but winced when he saw blood oozing from the wound in his hand.

A wave of anger swept over him. "Oh, great! Now I'll probably need stitches!" He kicked the stall door as another burst of pain shot up his arm.