



Getting There

"This is ridiculous, our family spending a week at Amish Park!" Pete shouted.

"Why do you have to yell everything?" his wife asked. She stood in front of a large mirror surrounded by lights, putting on eyeliner. Pete stopped packing his suitcase and looked at Lisa. She had straightened her long black hair; her skin was dark from the tanning beds she often visited. Her wrists, neck, and ears sparkled with jewelry. For a split second, his mind flashed back to how she looked during high school. Back then, Lisa, a softball pitcher, always wore her hair in a ponytail and never wore makeup. She didn't seem to be the same person anymore.

"I'm not yelling!" he shouted. "And why don't you ever look at me when we are having a conversation?"

"We don't have conversations; we fight," Lisa said, without looking away from her mirror.

"I'm trying to have a conversation with you right now!"

"Maybe when you stop yelling, I will look at you," she answered very quietly. Pete knew she did it to prove a point. Whenever they argued, he raised his voice, and Lisa would mutter something quietly. He sat on the edge of the bed and ran his fingers through his hair and inhaled deeply several times as his therapist had instructed.

Pete looked at Lisa and tried to speak without yelling. "Listen,

marriage counseling failed, and our divorce papers are filed. Why are we taking our daughters on a family vacation?"

Lisa stopped putting on makeup for a moment and looked at her husband with disgust, the only expression he ever saw on her face. Lisa looked back into the mirror and said in her quiet, annoying way. "Just put up with your family for one more week. When we get back home, you can tell our daughters about the divorce. Then you can go to your high-powered executive office and bury yourself in your work that you love so much. We will leave you alone."

"Oh, so this is all my fault!" he yelled.

"Dad, please pack your suitcase; we need to get going." The sweet voice of his youngest daughter contrasted his wife's bitter tone and his angry shouts. Pete looked at Natalie, who was standing at the bedroom doorway, and wondered if she heard what they had been talking about.

Pete walked toward Natalie. "Are you all packed and ready?" he asked.

She nodded. "Dad, Carrie is just lying on her bed looking at her phone. Can you make her get ready?" Natalie looked at her dad with pleading eyes.

Pete followed his younger daughter through their large suburban Chicago home, toward his older daughter's room. He watched Natalie's ten-year-old form as they went. He felt sad that his little girl was so excited about this trip and couldn't get her family going. Taking hold of her small shoulders, he stopped her for a moment.

"Natalie, I'm really proud of you for planning this family vacation all by yourself."

She looked into his eyes and nodded.

Her sweet face made Pete smile, as always. "I'll get Carrie out the door. Did you print off the directions to this Amish Park?"

"Yes, Dad. Can we please get going?"

Pete stepped into his oldest daughter's room. Sixteen-year-

old Carrie was lying on her bed, earbuds in, listening to music and tapping on her phone screen. Pete flicked her bedroom light on and off to get her attention. "We are leaving here in fifteen minutes. If you aren't packed, I will carry you out the door and whatever you have in that suitcase."

"Dad, there's nothing in my suitcase, yet."

"Fine, I'll take it empty. We are going to leave in fifteen minutes!"

"Stop yelling at me." Carrie looked at him. She had his blue eyes and light-brown hair, but the same disgusted look on her face her mother always had. He flashed five fingers three times to emphasize his point and walked out.

An hour later, they were in Pete's Escalade, gliding over rolling hills on the interstate. Everyone in the vehicle was scowling except little Natalie, whose face was beaming.

"Natalie, can you give me the paperwork from Amish Park? I want to look it over," Pete asked.

Natalie pulled an envelope from her handbag and passed it to her dad. He looked at a self-addressed envelope with Natalie's handwriting on it. "They sent you information in an envelope you sent them? What kind of place is this?"

"Don't yell," Lisa scolded.

"I'm just saying, I took the time to look at the website; couldn't you have looked at the letter they sent us?" he asked his wife.

"I thought you looked at it." She flashed a look of disgust. Pete pulled out a handwritten letter from the envelope. He tried to read it while driving, but Lisa snatched it from his hand. "I'll read; you drive."

*Dear Natalie,
Greetings in the blessed name of our Lord Jesus
Christ. "All things work together for good to them
that love God."*

We would be very pleased to have you and your family come and stay on our farm for a week. June 15th through 20th would be as good a week as any, even though we should be done planting corn by then. Don't worry, though; there will be plenty of work still to be done. We may be making hay or butchering early chickens while you are here. There is always gardening to be done and other odd jobs. Some folks have a hard time finding our place, so we are sending a map and directions.

We look forward to meeting your family and spending some time together.

In Christ's name, Mrs. Jonas Yoder

Lisa held out a hand-drawn map. "Natalie, how did you find out about this place?"

"My friend Elaine and her family went to Amish Park last summer. She said that it was the best time their family ever had!" Natalie's face glowed in Pete's rearview mirror.

Lisa whispered to Pete. "Didn't you say you looked at this place on the Internet?"

"Yes, I spent about an hour looking at the website. It's a tourist trap in Indiana that set up a farm in the middle of an Amish community. They try to make everything as close to the Amish way of living as possible for their guests. Guests stay in a farmhouse, dress like the Amish, and they give hayrides and serve family-style meals. It actually looked fun, but it didn't say anything about helping with farm work on the website."

"Oh great, Dad," Carrie moaned from her seat. "You didn't tell me I was going to have to dress Amish! Why did I have to pack all of my clothes if we are going to a place like that?"

"Carrie, don't be silly," Pete said. "We aren't going to spend all day on the farm. There will be some other attractions nearby, I'm sure." He looked in his rearview mirror at his oldest daughter. She didn't return his stare but made a disgusted face

for his benefit.

Lisa whispered to her husband, "Didn't you get a confirmation number from this website? They should have sent us a brochure or something."

"Don't worry; I checked the availability online. I gave them my credit card numbers, and everything went through. Natalie said she had a letter from Amish Park, so I assumed it was a packet of information and directions."

Lisa laughed, and Pete glanced at her to see if she was making fun of him. She held up the hand-drawn map again and said, "Well, I guess they went to extremes to be as authentic as possible."

"Natalie, how did it happen that you sent them a self-addressed envelope?" Pete asked. "That's the part I don't understand." He looked at his little girl in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were sparkling.

"Before you signed us up for a week, I looked over the website for a while. They had a place on the web page asking for information about our family so they would know us better; to help them decide which house family to assign us to stay with. I couldn't figure out how to download it, so I sent a letter telling them about us, and they sent back this." She pointed at the letter her mother held.

Pete looked at his wife and whispered, "I remember her asking me for help; I told her to figure it out herself."

Lisa gave her husband another disgusted look.

Pete defended himself. "It's good for her to learn how to navigate the Internet; I was busy!"

"Is there any chance that while we are on this Amish farm, you will be able to make it a whole week without yelling?" Lisa asked in her annoying quiet voice.

"Do you think you can go a week without pouring over the details about your patients? These Amish folks don't want to hear sad stories about sick children. Our family needs a week off from all of that as well."

"I'll make a deal with you," Lisa said. "If you promise to keep your temper under control, I'll do my best not to bring up my patients or the Children's Hospital."

"It's a deal," Pete said.

He turned his Escalade off the interstate. In a short time, a buggy came into view. They looked closely as the buggy passed by and could see an Amish family riding along in old-fashioned clothes.

"Are those the costumes we have to wear?" Carrie asked.

"It'll be fun," Lisa said. "Before we go out for the evening we will shower, put our makeup on and forget about all that."

"C'mon you guys," Natalie begged. "Let's try to have fun as a family this last time."

Pete and Lisa met eyes nervously. Carrie didn't flinch; either she knew her parents were thinking about a divorce, or she didn't care.

Pete drove his Escalade through a touristy area with large hotels and restaurants. Huge billboards touted slogans about Amish food. Pictures of Amish buggies were on every sign. Pete entered the Yoders' address in his GPS while Lisa fumbled with the hand-drawn map.

"There should be some signs around here about Amish Park," Pete said. "Natalie, you watch for a billboard, and I will keep an eye on my GPS."

The GPS kept them heading straight on, right through town and out the other side. The road narrowed as they headed farther out into the boondocks. They all stared out the windows at white Amish farmhouses with matching barns and beautiful gardens full of flowers and growing vegetables.

"Turn right here," Lisa said.

"Turn left on G-38," The GPS voice spoke at the same instant.

Pete swung his SUV to the right and pulled over. "Now, which is it? Our GPS says turn left, and you said turn right."

"Don't yell. I meant to say turn left, right here."

Pete whipped his Escalade into a drive of an Amish farm

to turn around. Little girls in Amish dresses were working in a garden; they waved in a friendly way. A young boy with a straw hat was riding a pony in a nearby field, and he waved as well. Pete's family stared at them as if they were watching a science fiction movie. Pete backed his Escalade onto the road, threw the gear shift into drive, punched the accelerator, and they roared on down the blacktop road. They wound around curves for a few miles, watching Amish farms pass by. There were horses pulling buggies, cows grazing in fields and more barns than they had ever seen.

Suddenly, the GPS said, "Your destination is on the right."

Pete stopped and looked at a dirt drive which was heading up a hill. "This can't be the place!"

"Oh yes, it can." Lisa laughed and pointed at a mailbox marked with the same address and *Jonas Yoder* handwritten above. "It says here to 'take the dirt drive up over the hill. Where the drive splits, take the one that veers to the left. That's our lane. Go on through those trees, and you'll see our house.'"

Pete drove uphill and turned left as instructed. They passed through a row of trees, and a spectacular view appeared. A perfectly manicured Amish farm stood before them, lit up by the golden rays of a sunset. White barns and outbuildings surrounded two houses, one huge and one tiny, situated in a valley with white fences bordering everything. Brightly colored Amish dresses flapped on a clothesline, indicating a gentle breeze was blowing. Black-and-white Holstein cows grazed peacefully as the Escalade drove past. Massive work horses stood in harness near the house. A black and purple quilt hung over a porch railing and beyond that was the biggest garden they had ever seen.

Pete climbed down stiffly from his SUV as an elderly Amish man strolled out to meet them. The old man was difficult to see because of a red setting sun behind him. The Heller family squinted into the light as the older man reached out his hand to shake Pete's and spoke. "Hello, I'm Jonas Yoder."

"I'm Peter Heller; people just call me Pete. Pleased to meet you. This is my wife, Lisa, and our daughters, Carrie and Natalie."

The elderly man smiled at them all; then he turned his attention to the littlest. "Natalie, thank you for telling us about your family. I hope this week turns out to be good for all of us."

Natalie reached up and shook the older man's hand, her face beaming. In only a few moments, a group of Amish people gathered around in a large circle, all looking at the Heller family as if they were the first non-Amish people they had ever seen.

An older woman stepped forward. "We were beginning to wonder if you were still coming. Nice to meet you in person, Natalie. Your letter was very nice, and we hoped and prayed that your family would all come and spend time with us on the farm. It's getting late. 'Early to bed and early to rise'... as the saying goes, 'makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.' I'm Jonas' wife, Mattie. Come inside, and we'll show you where you will sleep."

Carrie gave her dad another grouchy look as they followed a large group of Amish people into an immaculately clean home. Gas lanterns swayed as they walked past, causing shadows to swirl. Mattie spoke in Dutch to a middle-sized girl. The girl spoke English with a thick accent. "You girls will sleep with us sisters. Bring your things upstairs with me."

She headed through a stairway door and up the stairs, and Natalie quickly followed. Carrie stood still, looking at her dad as if hoping he would tell her she didn't have to follow.

Pete pointed to the steps. "You'd better hurry, or you'll get lost in this big house." Everyone laughed.

Mattie spoke to Pete and Lisa. "This is our son's wife, Doreen; we call her Dory." They each shook hands with a very pleasant looking Amish woman, and she smiled at them. An Amish man with a dark black beard came walking in. "And

this is our son Cephas; you two will have a lot in common," she said. Pete looked at the Amish man, who seemed to be about his age. He couldn't imagine having even one thing in common with this Cephas. They shook hands politely.

"We'll let you and your wife take our bedroom over there," Cephas said

"Oh, we couldn't do that," Lisa answered.

"No, it's fine, really," Dory explained. "We have another spare room upstairs. We usually give up our bedroom to guests. It is closer to the water closet."

"Water closet?" Lisa questioned.

"Bathroom," Dory explained.