



## Chapter 1

A pleasant June breeze wafted the scent of drying hay through the open windows of the Martinsville Mennonite Church. John Shenk shifted his position on the back bench, trying to avoid the sun's glare on the page of the *Church Hymnal* he held in his hand. It was not uncomfortably warm, yet it was such a lovely day he wished he did not have to waste it all sitting in church. But the all-day meeting was a big annual affair and his parents expected him to attend all the sessions. The noon fellowship meal would be a welcome break.

John slipped the hymnbook back into place in the rack as the song ended. Although he had blended his voice with the congregation in singing all four verses of the hymn, he had barely been aware of the words. Even now he could not have named the just-finished hymn if he had been required to do it. He slouched slightly on the bench in order to be more comfortable during the morning's sermon. He hastily pulled himself erect again and politely made room for David Lehman to sit down. David was late, as usual.

John nodded a greeting as David sat down. David took this as his cue to begin the morning's visit while the sermon was in progress.

"Staying for dinner?" David inquired in a low undertone.

John nodded.

"Man! I'm starved already," David groaned. "The dinner is the best part of the day. I could use a bowl of that chili about

now, and I just ate breakfast. Mom calls this a bottomless pit.” He grinned as he rolled his eyes and rubbed his stomach.

“Strange,” John whispered. “My mom says the same about me.”

“Say!” David changed the subject. “Did you hear anything from Uncle Sam yet?”

John shook his head.

“That’s a wonder! You were twenty a couple days before I was. My number came up already. Got my draft notice this week.”

“Really?”

“Yup. Got to report by the fourteenth of July.”

John forgot all pretense of worship. He knew he could be drafted any time, and the subject was of great personal interest to him. It was sort of like death, though not as frightening. He knew it could happen any time, but so far it had always been someone else. Yet, he knew his time had to be close if fellows a little younger than he were being called. It truly was a wonder his notice had not yet arrived.

“Where are you going to go?” John asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” David replied carelessly. “I’d kind of like to get away from here for awhile. I thought of going to Colorado.”

“Colorado! Why there?”

“One of my cousins went there. I’d like to travel a little and see more of the world. The way my cousin talks they have a good time out there, and he is sure I could get in at the hospital where he works.”

“You would be pretty far from home,” John pointed out.

“You catch on quick.” David winked. “I’m tired of this stuffy place. I want to get away and make my own decisions for a

change without having to answer for it all the time. I figure Colorado is far enough to give me some breathing room. The draft board doesn't tell us where to go—just when. This is my chance to get away, and I'm going to take advantage of it.”

John was not interested in going so far away when his time came. The main reason for his wanting to be closer to home sat across the aisle and two benches forward.

John glanced over at Miriam. She was not exactly gorgeous, but her character made her beautiful. She had a gentle nature and a compassionate heart. She was just the kind of girl who would make a solid, comfortable wife for some happy man. Lately, John had sort of gotten used to the idea that the man might be himself. He had dated several girls before, but none suited him quite like Miriam Horst. He could not be absolutely certain, of course, in the six months they had dated. But the more they were together, the more he liked her company. She gave every indication of enjoying his company just as much. At this point, John thought the idea of spending life with Miriam was rather pleasant.

Miriam looked over just then and saw John's eyes upon her. Her smile revealed that fetching dimple he so admired. He thought her smiles changed her pretty face to a lovely one. It did strange things to his heart. He was beginning to allow himself to admit he was in love with her. It was not an unwelcome development. She was a lot like his mother.

His gaze drifted from Miriam to his mother, sitting on the fourth to front bench with his two little sisters, one on each side of her. Ida Shenk was not perfect, to be sure. She sometimes got impatient and annoyed at little things. She was so firmly settled on her beliefs and the rightness and wrongness of certain things that John sometimes thought she was just

being stubborn. But he had to admit she had a heart of gold. The joy of her life was serving her family and, through them, serving the Lord. Her homemaking skills extended beyond her own family and home to serve others in need as well. John knew that Miriam, like his mother, could be a woman with her heart in a Mary-sphere even while her feet walked in a Martha-world.

Norman Shenk had chosen well when he married Ida, though John too often took his parents and Christian home for granted. Norman provided well for the large family of four boys and three girls. He was not as quick to speak as his wife, though he seldom differed in opinion with her. Yet, he was the undisputed head of his home. She looked to him to make the major decisions, and he was a competent leader for the family. His talents were recognized as well by the church, who gave him responsibility on various committees and offices in the church. He was a busy man with the combination of family, church, and farm work.

Norman and Ida taught and showed their seven children how to live and work. In the process, the children hopefully were acquiring qualities that would enable them to have happy homes of their own someday. That day was fast approaching for the oldest daughter. In less than six months Becky would leave the family to establish a new home with Ken Weaver. She had learned from her mother the homemaking skills that could make her a good wife and mother.

John was the oldest in the line of four boys who came between Becky and the two little girls. Marlin was a little more than three years John's junior. Jimmy and Carl were twelve and nine years of age. The coming of Marilyn and Carolyn three years ago had been a double surprise and joy.

Though the visiting minister was a capable speaker, John had heard little of the message. To him, the sermon dragged on and was merely a formality to be endured until the allotted time for the message expired. It was not that he disliked attending church. It was an accepted part of life, and he never would have chosen to stay home on a Sunday morning. Church was a good place to meet girls and visit with friends. Probably more than anything else he enjoyed the social hour after church.

John looked over the congregation as the minister closed his message. *Maybe David is right*, he thought as the closing hymn was announced. *Maybe it would be good to go away for awhile and see how the rest of the world lives. The way I've been raised isn't the only way to live.*

But no, he knew Miriam would not want him to go so far away. She would want him to come home often during the two years he would be required to serve. And he did not want to be so far from her, either. When his time came, he would find a place closer to home.

*Oh, well! I'll cross that bridge when I get there.* He dismissed the subject as he stood for the benediction with the rest of the congregation. *What I want now is a good dinner.*