



"I CAN THINK OF FEW THINGS MORE SATISFYING TO ME
AS AN AUTHOR THAN TO LEARN THAT OTHER AUTHORS WANT
TO WRITE STORIES IN A WORLD I CREATED."

—MICHAEL BUNKER

TALES FROM PENNSYLVANIA

FEATURING STORIES BY

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Tales from Pennsylvania

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*For the fans of PENNSYLVANIA
in whatever space or time they happen to exist*

Story Synopses

Gelassenheit (*Chris Pourteau*)

Transport asks Abram Brenneman to “improve” his farming methods and technology. More efficient farming will produce more food, and that benefits everyone—doesn’t it? For the Authority, it’s a simple request, a no-brainer. For the Brenneman family, changing how they raise crops requires changing who they are as Plain People. When Abram strives to maintain his cultural traditions, dissension within his own family—and conflict with local money-Amishman Matthew Yoder and his Transport friends—is the result. Abram soon faces a decision that will alter the course of his family’s lives forever. Sometimes, there are no good choices.

Trail of Tears (*Nina Tozzi*)

Centuries have passed since fourteen-year-old Rebecca’s ancestors were marched hundreds of miles from the dead of winter, forcibly relocated to the Oklahoma Indian Zone. Since then, her people have lived in relative peace, going largely unnoticed by Transport, TRACE, and the white man. Until now. Because now, the Transport Authority has discovered okcillium in the Indian Zone, and Rebecca and her people may be doomed to repeat their painful history.

The Book of Ruth (*Kevin G. Summers*)

Ruth Yordy is a sixteen-year-old Amish girl who leaves the safety of her farm in search of a missing hog. As she wanders through the big woods beyond the Amish Zone, she encounters a strange race of savages—with a secret that could change the world.

The Barn That Hanna Built (*Lesley Smith*)

In the City, Transport is circling and TRACE is fighting a losing battle. Hanna Strauss is a technical whiz on the front line known by the handle Gordian. She’s a foot soldier in the war, a hacker who cracks the hardest computer codes for fun. Hanna dreams of crossing the Uncanny Valley and creating a virtual environment so perfect it fools the human mind. When Transport comes looking for Gordian for her research and her brain, Hanna finds herself in the AZ, face to face with the Farm Bureau, and offered the ultimate in assignments: to bring down Transport from the inside by rebuilding the Internet from the ground up. This will be the barn that Hanna built—and all those trapped inside will one day know freedom...

Wild Eagles (*Michael Bunker*)

Eagles is a “Wild One.” A salvager who lives in the wilderness and survives by his wits and the strength in his hands. The Second Transport War has gone on for nearly a generation, but only on rare occasions has Eagles entered the fight against Transport; for the most part, he has tried to live a life of peace.

Now Eagles must decide if he will break his neutrality and fire on a Transport drone in order to save a unit of TRACE fighters. That decision leads to a chance meeting that will force Eagles to consider his life and what he really wants out of it.

The Bomb in the President’s Bathroom (*Timothy C. Ward*)

Josh Carrick may be the only one left in the City who knows the bomb is going off. But he goes to his last job anyway, photographing a ceremony for soldiers returning from Oklahoma. What he sees will force him to fight for purpose before his life is over.

Castoffs (*Edward W. Robertson*)

Fors makes a living scavenging what the citizens of Transport fling into the woods below the Shelter. When he finds a body, he thinks the contents of its pockets will finally make his fortune.

But the woman isn't dead. Days earlier, her brother fled the cities into the forest. Knowing it could mean her exile, she's come to track her brother down—and she'll need Fors to guide her through the vast wilderness that lies beyond Transport's reach.

Protection (*Tim Grahl*)

In *Pennsylvania*, we saw Amos leading the resistance against Transport. Yet he was born into the same Amish family as his brother Jedediah. What changed? What caused him to go against his religion and become the man we see fighting and killing in the name of TRACE? In "Protection," you'll learn what it took to change a peace-loving boy from an Amish community into the warring giant known as the SOMA.

Resistance (*Jennifer Ellis*)

Robin Miller, a former stripper, and her husband, Isaac, a strip-club owner, eke out a decent existence in New Pennsylvania—until the morning when Isaac announces that, for their own safety, they must leave the City with their two young sons and return to his Amish roots in New Canada. Although Robin and Isaac couldn't be more unlikely candidates to become Plain People, they work hard to gain acceptance into the Amish community. Yet even as her family settles in, Robin fears that Isaac hasn't told her everything about why they're really there ...

Sisters of Solomon (*Kim Wells*)

A young Amish bride settled in the AZ comes to terms with a very personal tragedy after the Transport Authority destroys the City, along with everything she thought she would be. Her grief consumes her until she finds a more powerful reason for living.

I Am Still Here (*Nick Cole*)

A tale of toe-to-toe air combat over the skies of New Pennsylvania. Follow the Jackal from green gunfighter as he becomes TRACE's top ace. But there's a price for surviving death at Mach 1 time after time. In the fields below his streaking jet, the Jackal might just become whole again.

Table of Contents

[Story Synopses](#)

[Foreword by Eric Tozzi](#)

[Gelassenheit by Chris Pourteau](#)

[Trail of Tears by Nina Tozzi](#)

[The Book of Ruth by Kevin G. Summers](#)

[The Barn That Hanna Built by Lesley Smith](#)

[Wild Eagles by Michael Bunker](#)

[The Bomb in the President's Bathroom by Timothy C. Ward](#)

[Castoffs by Edward W. Robertson](#)

[Protection by Tim Grahl](#)

[Resistance by Jennifer Ellis](#)

[Sisters of Solomon by Kim Wells](#)

[I Am Still Here by Nick Cole](#)

[A Word to Our Readers](#)

Foreword

by Eric Tozzi

Amish and Science Fiction. Two concepts that seem totally incongruent at first glance. The notion that they could intersect in any way seems unlikely, even absurd. Even to this day, when I pitch *Pennsylvania* to my reader friends, they all take a moment to process what they've heard—or what they think they've heard. Their reactions are predictable, but they always melt slowly, like warm ice cream, into a realization that there is something remarkable, something so completely unique about this marriage of two very different worlds. Inevitably the next response is always, “That sounds cool. Where do I buy the book?”

The world of New Pennsylvania is rich on numerous levels. It defies the conventional science fiction paradigm in an organic way, bringing a whole new experience to even the most faithful, hardcore fans of the genre. It's been said that if you can take a story that is familiar, but tell it from a wholly fresh perspective—flip it on its ear—you've really got something. *Pennsylvania* accomplishes that cleverly. It seamlessly braids a simple, humble existence—a life premised on faith and family—with a world boundless and supernatural, fashioned from our wildest imagination. Those two universes intersect and complement each other in rich harmony, much like the woodwinds, strings, and brass of a symphony orchestra.

Michael Bunker, the man behind *Pennsylvania*, is as remarkable as the world he's so masterfully created. He refers to himself as an “accidental Amish Sci-Fi writer” and has become, in just a few short years, a self-publishing phenomenon. The fact that other talented independent authors now choose to set down stories in the universe he created is a true testament to his skill and imagination in developing the world of New Pennsylvania.

I'll never forget the first time my wife and I met Michael. It was in San Antonio, Texas, at the 2013 Worldcon. We were attending as writers anxious to learn as much as we could about the world of sci-fi publishing, both the traditional and independent routes. I was also there for the film festival where I was representing *Kaleidoscope*, the Ray Bradbury sci-fi short film that I'd directed. We'd been kindly invited to attend a dinner hosted by author Hugh Howey, who is a remarkable human being in addition to being a spectacular writer. It was at this dinner that we met Michael Bunker and his wife Danielle.

In mere minutes, we were talking as if we'd known each other for many years—a testimony to Michael's and Danielle's gracious and warm spirits. We conversed seamlessly about everything—our homes, our families, the very different worlds we lived in, and those worlds we created as writers.

Since its release, Michael's book, *Pennsylvania*, has become a bestseller. And that wasn't due to the machinery of traditional publishing or egocentric social media marketing (though marketing does indeed play a role). Overwhelmingly, *Pennsylvania*'s success is attributable to the fact that it is, at its heart, a great story.

Enter now *Tales From Pennsylvania*. The stories contained in this book all flow like streams into the world of New Pennsylvania, their characters and plots pouring into and creating a much larger canvas. *Pennsylvania* is no longer one place, one story. It is a universe in motion that will no doubt continue to expand, not through toil and force, but organically, by its own will and power, as evidenced in the great fan fiction you'll find in this anthology.

Permit me to give you just a taste of what I mean.

Chris Pourteau's “Gelassenheit” will give you chills and will stick with you long after you've left its pages. “Magnificently tragic” is perhaps the best way I know to describe this first-person narrative centered on a family driven to the very brink. From a purely literary stance, it's a must-study in terms

of character development, tension, pace, and dialogue.

“Trail of Tears,” by Nina Tozzi, explores New Pennsylvania from the entirely new perspective of the Native Americans caught up in the bloody war between Transport and TRACE. Like the Amish, they long to live in peace on their own land, but Transport has other plans for them and their resources. A young Native American woman’s perilous journey to find a mysterious “singing river” sets the stage for a startling revelation about the lengths Transport will go to destroy and subjugate others.

Kevin G. Summers’s “The Book of Ruth” is, quite simply, a superb study in prejudice and how readily most people succumb to it. Follow one young Amish woman as she encounters a much-feared Wild One in the wilderness outside the boundary of her community. Are the Wild Ones she’s heard so much about really as terrible as they’ve been rumored? Or are they worse?

“The Barn that Hanna Built” is a fascinating techno-thriller that explores the nature of reality and virtual reality, and dares us to ask the question: Which of the two is, in fact, more real? Author Leslie Smith has crafted a very smart read here, following our young heroine, Hanna, a street-smart hacker known only as “Gordian.” Driven by her insatiable urge to break new ground, regardless of where that ground might take her, Hanna plunges deep into the world of New Pennsylvania, where her unique skill set is put to the ultimate test.

Michael Bunker himself has written a story in what will no doubt become a massively popular new subgenre. We’re all familiar with the “found footage” concept in movies and TV. Enter the literary equivalent: “found manuscript.” Aptly named, Michael uses this vehicle to take us into the soul of one of *Pennsylvania*’s most arcane and interesting characters, Eagles. Michael’s story, “Wild Eagles,” is rich in so many ways, it would be futile for me to try and explain them all. You simply have to read it for yourself.

Time is running out in “The Bomb in the President’s Bathroom,” by Timothy C. Ward. Race the clock with “Transport Live” photojournalist Josh Carrick as he attempts to save the life of a young armed transport soldier and her young son. Soul-crushing guilt and the implacable will to live battle out in this fast-paced thriller.

Fors, a “roamer,” and Lin, a nearly dead woman, form an unlikely partnership in “Castoffs,” by Edward W. Robertson. Determined to track down her missing brother in the wilderness, far from Transport’s grip, Lin proves herself to be sharp and analytical, much to Fors’s frustration. As the journey through the wild, Fors suspects there is more to his new companion than meets the eye, and the secrets that Lin keeps may lead to their demise.

Tim Grahl offers us his take on the astonishing backstory of one of the most central characters in the *Pennsylvania* universe: Amos Troyer, younger brother of Jedediah. “Protection” is the story of his transformation from humble, peace-loving Amish boy into the warring leader of the resistance against Transport. Everyone, no matter how peaceable and patient, has a breaking point. Witness firsthand the breaking point of Amos Troyer.

A former stripper named Robin and her club-owner husband, Isaac, become two of the most improbable characters to inhabit the extended landscape of New Pennsylvania. Author Jennifer Ellis gives us “Resistance,” a tale of this couple and their two young sons, determined to flee imminent danger in the city, ostensibly to start a whole new life as Plain People. But as is often the case, appearances can be deceiving, and danger can follow people no matter how far they run. A new appearance by Pook Rayburn ties “Resistance” closely to the original *Pennsylvania*.

In “Sisters of Solomon,” by Kim Wells, excerpts from a found diary give us a firsthand look inside the soul of a young Amish widow whose grief compels her to make a stand against tyranny, even if it sets her on the very edge of a moral, spiritual abyss, from the depths of which she may not return. “dark night of the soul” in diary form.

Nick Cole drops us into the cockpit of a fighter plane with ace pilot David Foster, call sign “Jackal.” Witness an incredible, personal conversion that begins in the air at supersonic speed and concludes in the most unlikely of places. Nick is one of those writers that continually fires on all twelve cylinders. Were he a car, think Bugatti Veyron. “I Am Still Here” is turbocharged with action while at the same time being utterly heartfelt and sincere. It’s a high-speed, transformative opus.

And now I’ll step aside to make room for your passage into these new regions penned by so many gifted writers. You’ll quickly realize each tale is an undiscovered facet of the diamond that is *Pennsylvania*. In the same way that those facets on the most valuable of stones reflect light, yet each in a slightly different way, so too do these stories reflect the characters, the conflicts, and the settings of this enigmatic universe of limitless possibilities.

In your travels within this collection, I’m certain you’ll find characters so rich you’d swear you’d met them before. Moreover, you may in fact find a part of yourself in this world. Welcome to *Tales from Pennsylvania*.

Gelassenheit

by Chris Pourteau

“He wants to take our farm, Poppa!”

The words echo in my head as I sit here, waiting to learn the fate of my child. Words pointing on the path of God’s will. A memory of an argument with Thomas, my son.

Thomas is sixteen years old. He questions everything, and this is as it should be. Never fear to question what is known. My father taught me that. But as with most young men his age, Thomas is slow to think and quick to anger.

Ah, I must apologize. I see by the look on your face that you have no idea what I’m talking about. I don’t wish to burden you with this, but since we’re both sitting here, awaiting the judgment of the Transport magistrate, perhaps you would listen to my story? It will help pass the time. Yes? I thank you for that. I’m alone here today, and though we’re strangers, your presence brings me comfort.

I see by your clothing that you are not Amish. Please, there is no judgment when I say this. I simply point it out so that you understand why I explain things about myself. Things that, to another Plain Person, would seem unnecessary. I want you to understand what has happened. To truly know the tragedy that has befallen my family.

My name is Abram Brenneman. My family and I arrived in New Pennsylvania ... is it three years ago already? As you might have guessed, we were part of Transport’s Emigration Incentive Program. We received the standard land grant—including livestock, seed, and building materials. In fact, we were one of the first twenty families granted land in the newest section of the AZ after Transport increased their recruitment efforts on Earth in 2090. We set up our homestead, planted our ground, and raised our animals.

When I was younger, I lived in your world. A world where everything moves quickly, as if trying to catch up to itself. But it never seems to, does it? You fall asleep planning the next day and sweeten your dreams. You’ll take a moment for yourself or your family. And the next night, you fall asleep reciting your recriminations for failing to do that. I remember the cycle well.

The life of the Amish is much slower. Our focus is on the task at hand. Milking the cow, sweeping the floor, enjoying a cold drink on a hot afternoon. We believe that God grants us the grace to experience these things. Some would call that lifestyle simple—and most of the time, they’d be right. But sometimes we Amish face complicated times. History has, on occasion, asked us to conform. Our way is to simply move on, away from that demand to compromise our values, until we find good soil again and can start over. We have learned to stay alert for such times. It’s still difficult for me to accept that one of our own, a Plain Person, would have once more invited history to our doorstep.

But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Matthew Yoder is an elder in our community. I assume you know next to nothing about us, so let me explain: elders are ministers. They lead our community. They conduct worship services, prescribe the scope of the *ordnung*, our community’s rules. They guide our spiritual development. It’s important to understand this. Matthew’s position made his proposition all the more shocking, and difficult to resist at the same time. Which brings me back to Thomas and our argument.

* * *

“He wants to take our farm, Poppa!”

We sit at the long table in our home, a simple wooden structure with three rooms: the common area (a dining room-kitchen-sitting room), a bedroom shared by the children, and the bedroom I share with

my wife. I glance at Anne as she washes the dinner dishes. I see reflected in her eyes the conversation we often have regarding Thomas these days. *He is young, Abram*, her reassuring smile reminds me. *Too old to be so young in his thinking*, my eyes sigh back to hers.

Our daughter, Mary, sits across the room, sewing a quilt in the flickering candlelight. She uses two candles, an extravagance we allow her. She's always determined never to miss a stitch, and we want to encourage her industriousness. Even now I see her there in my mind's eye, beautiful and focused. The image of that simpler time—when a drought was my greatest worry—makes me want to weep openly.

"You assume too much," I say to Thomas. "He cannot take our farm. The government granted it to us. He cannot simply take it."

Thomas rolls his eyes. "He speaks for the Transport Authority! Or were you not listening, Poppa?" His fear and frustration drive him to his feet. I remain seated in his shadow. Sometimes strength comes from not having to demonstrate you have it. My father also taught me that.

"Lower your voice when speaking to me," I say quietly.

Thomas clicks his teeth together. He's trying to remain calm but losing the battle with his glands. He's a young man. *Too old to be so young*. He stands in broiling silence, which grows uncomfortable.

"The proposal he offered is nothing our people haven't heard before," I say, to fill the empty air.

"He was not very pleasant about it," Anne says, wiping her hands dry. "That's a certainty."

I grant the point, saying, "I have found Matthew Yoder is rarely pleasant when it comes to a good opportunity to make money from Transport." I'm venting a bit of my own distaste for the man. Matthew Yoder is what we refer to as money-Amish—what we call someone who lives our lifestyle but is more concerned with making money than most.

Thomas puts his hands on his hips and looks down at me. "Why shouldn't we modernize? Horses, drawn plows and wooden troughs bringing water from the river ... we could make more with better equipment, spend less time tilling the soil and more"—he looks around for evidence for his argument—then gestures at Mary—"more time quilting!"

His sister notices our conversation for the first time. "I would like that," Mary says simply. I smile at her innocence. I want to keep her that way forever.

This debate is as old as the Plain People. The tug of tradition against the push of progress. But some see embracing innovation as tantamount to surrendering our way of life. Nearly a century and a half ago, during the Second World War, we resisted serving in the military. In response, the U.S. government put the I-W Program in place as a way of placating those who saw the Amish as cowards. The program asked us to serve in factories on the home front, supporting our country but without compromising our commitment to pacifism. Many elders despised the program. Moving to large cities—being exposed to the allure of the fast life—permanently fenced off many of our young people from their Amish roots.

So when someone suggests that modernizing how we farm is a simple advance in technology, they rarely consider it from our perspective. How we raise crops, maintain livestock—these are not mere questions of technique or technology. Rarely can one man and his family maintain a large farm. He needs his neighbors. Sowing seeds promises to feed you next winter, but planting with others besides you nurtures your community's roots.

Modern equipment allows one man to do the work of many. Efficiency improves. Communities dissolve.

"So now you endorse Matthew's suggestion?" I ask, incredulous. Then I remember he is angry, not just thinking. Anything he says now is meant to prove himself right, whether he be right or not.

"Better to modernize than lose the farm! Or maybe you just want us to run away ... like we always do!"

Ah, there it is. His glands again. My son is ready, quite literally, to beat plowshares into swords.

will not explain again that which you know so well,” I say. “I will only say this: we won’t resist them should they come for the farm. We will simply move on. We will continue.”

“Then we modernize!” My son slaps his hands on his thighs, a magistrate passing judgment.

I look at Anne, who sits down at the end of the table beside me. Her eyes are patient, always patient. It is, perhaps, the one quality I love most about her.

“No,” I say, turning to face Thomas directly. I do not stand.

His jaws clench. His fists stretch the tendons of his strong forearms, flex the muscles built beside me in the fields since he could walk.

“You’re not only an idiot, you’re a coward!” He yanks the front door open and flees.

Now, though I’m older than Thomas, I’m still a man. My son has just called me a coward. I rise on my own mind giving way to fury. But patience puts her calming hand on mine.

“Let him go, Abram.”

I turn furiously on Anne. She draws away, but her hand stays. Her patience is stronger than my anger. I sit back down.

“Is he right, Poppa? Will Elder Yoder take our farm?”

The quilt is set aside on Mary’s lap. She looks worried. She idolizes Thomas. I try to keep my explanations simple, honest, and nonthreatening for my daughter’s ears.

“He might,” I say. “But I don’t think it will come to that. There are others—Elder Noffsinger, the Benders—they’ll also resist what Elder Yoder proposes.”

Anne folds the dish towel neatly in squares and places it on the table. “Perhaps we should begin talking with them.” At my raised eyebrow, she clarifies quickly, “About forming a new community.”

I consider that. “We should certainly talk to the others, but honestly, if this is happening here—Transport’s behest—it’s likely happening across the entire AZ. Transport would almost certainly enforce their new requirements on any new zone we raise. We might be simply delaying the inevitable.”

Anne’s lips grow thin. Not with anger, with concern. I see the same furrowed brow, the same worry I’d seen in Mary’s face moments before. Anne is her daughter’s mother. “And what is the inevitable?” she asks quietly.

“The choice Thomas laid out before us. You know as well as I that no one homesteads without Transport’s approval. That’s what the AZ is for, they’ll say. We granted you land, handed you equipment and livestock, they’ll say. This is what history has shown us.”

“The Richmond Ruling?” Anne asks hopefully.

We won’t find help there, and I say as much by shaking my head. As you might be aware, the Richmond Ruling only protects the Plain People from having BICE and TRID devices installed. The ruling proscribes as much as it prescribes our rights under Transport. One notable caveat specifically requires that the Amish make their case for not conforming, whenever the Authority identifies a need it considers important enough to warrant suspending their rights under the Ruling. In these situations each case is then judged independently ... by a Transport magistrate. The most common result of such a proceeding is a judgment amounting to the application of eminent domain over the rights of the individual.

“Why don’t we fight?”

Mary’s question has the same innocence as before, when she said it would be nice if there were more time for quilting. She has an earnest look on her face, the same kind of focus she gets when stitching.

“You know the answer to that, child,” says Anne. “Violence is not our way. If God’s will is that we should move on from here to preserve who we are, then that is what we’ll do.”

“What if God wants us to fight?”

I sigh. "Christ taught us to turn the other cheek, Mary. You know this."

"I remember a story," she says.

"Yes?"

"Of Jesus and the moneychangers in the temple," she says.

"Yes."

"Didn't he destroy their tables and drive them from the temple? Wasn't that violence?"

I pause in my answer. I know by doing so I seem as if I don't have an answer. But I don't want to patronize my daughter. Children tend to think in such black-and-white terms, so I must answer her in a way that she can understand and accept. But my answer must also be honest.

"Jesus restored God's temple to its holy purpose," I say. "It became again a house of worship rather than a bazaar for profit."

"So ..." Again, the serious look. The furrowed brow. I can almost see her young brain carving a new path on its surface, learning to think. "So, violence is all right if its purpose is holy?"

"Violence is never all right," I say. I can hear the tension rising in my own voice. It's not meant for Mary, but it's directed at her. I've begun to fear that her assumption might be what Thomas is thinking too. Perhaps he considers himself a holy warrior. Perhaps he will do something stupid. But I should have known ... I should have known.

"Mary, that's enough for tonight," says the voice of patience.

"But Momma—"

"I said, that's enough. We have worship tomorrow, and Brother Lambright's farm is a long way from here. We'll need to get up earlier than usual."

"Yes, Momma." Mary stares down at the unfinished quilt in her lap. I remember being twelve and feeling responsible for upsetting my parents but unsure why it was my fault. Of course, it never was. She folds her quilting quietly and rises. "Good night, Momma. Good night, Poppa."

"Good night, Mary," I say. And then, because it's important she hears it right now: "I love you."

Halfway to her room, she stops and turns. "I love you too, Poppa. Will you ... will you look for Thomas? Is he okay?"

I feel tears catch in the back of my throat. While we've been debating theology, my son is out there, angry and alone. Perhaps I should have gone after him after all. My daughter has reminded me what being a good parent is.

"He'll be all right," Anne says. "He's just upset. He'll be back in time for worship."

Mary nods, but I see those arched eyebrows again. She wants to believe, but her worry overrules her. "Good night," she says again.

I watch her go into her room and slowly close the door. I consider the story of Jesus and the moneychangers and search for an answer to Mary's question: "Violence is okay if its purpose is holy?" I can come up with a half dozen rationalizations, but none that truly explain Our Lord's choice to physically overturn the tables and run the moneychangers out of the temple. These are not the actions of a meek man, I admit to myself. Perhaps His passion overruled His rational thought on that day, as Thomas's did tonight. As mine started to. Perhaps Mary is right, and there is an acceptable time for violence after all, if used for a holy purpose. But my faith cannot accept this. Then the iron hits me—the story of Jesus and the moneychangers comes to us from the Gospel according to Matthew.

* * *

The next day is Sunday. We're awake well before dawn to hitch up Maisy to the buggy for the long jaunt to Brother Lambright's farm. He is hosting worship services today. Every other Sunday

different family hosts. Thomas is beside me this morning, preparing for our journey. He jerks the girth of the harness roughly around Maisy's belly. She snorts her displeasure.

"Maisy is not trying to take our farm," I say quietly. He doesn't reply but pats her rump murmuring to her softly as he loosens her girth strap a bit.

The ride to Brother Lambright's farm is long and mostly silent. Anne talks with Mary about the hymns they will likely sing today. I don't force a conversation with Thomas.

When we arrive, the men congregate in the barn to decide who will preach today. As we mingle Matthew approaches me.

"Good morning, Abram," he says.

"Good morning."

He places his hand on my arm, grasping my right hand in his to shake it. I want to pull away from this man who has caused such dissension in my own family. Instead I grasp his hand in return. Firmly.

"I feel like I might've stepped over the line yesterday," he says. "I wish to apologize if so. It was not my intent to threaten. That is not our way."

He is right, I think. It is not *our* way. However, I've had more than one occasion to question what Matthew Yoder's way is. I literally turn my head so my right eye focuses on him.

"Passions get the best of us sometimes," I say.

He nods, placated. "I was wondering—might I come over for dinner tonight? Let's start the conversation anew. I'll bring an apple pie and cider, if that's agreeable."

I consider it. Perhaps this is an opportunity to smooth everyone's feathers. To show Thomas what talking openly can do. And best of all, it was Matthew who offered it. I cannot say no and call myself a good father, or a good Amishman.

"Of course. I'll speak to Anne. Sundown?"

He smiles. "Sounds perfect."

Soon the sweet sound of singing from the *Ausbund*, our hymnbook, begins the formal worship service, and we men sit opposite the women on benches placed in Brother Lambright's front yard. Thomas sits beside me, straight backed and proud, and Mary sits next to her mother opposite us, a half-pint reflection of Anne's beauty.

Despite the various ministers who sermonized on several topics, I remember little else about the nearly three-hour service, save for one word: *gelassenheit*. It describes one of the core precepts of Amish society. In a way, it encapsulates all that we are. I have grown to hate it.

Elder Noffsinger is the speaker. "*Gelassenheit* is the glue that holds our community together," he says. He looks meaningfully across the open faces of the boys and girls on the benches and continues. "It's a 'death' or 'dying' of self. A willingness to subjugate the worldly desires of the individual to the needs of our community. An acknowledgment that for the community to succeed—to move forward and continue despite obstacles placed in its path—the individual must die to themselves and become something greater."

For most, this sermon is nothing new. I glance at my own children and see them fully engaged. Often, as it is with any religious service, ministers can drone on; worshippers can doze off. Some of that now as Noffsinger speaks. But not Thomas. Not Mary. I'm blessed with children able to see the relevance of a sermon in their own lives. Or, perhaps, *cursed* is a better word for it as I think back yesterday. Even listening there on that bench, it caused me worry. How would Thomas hear this? Only if I'd known then what would happen, I might have been able to stop it.

The rest of the service is a hazy cloud of hymns and homilies. Fellowship around bountiful tables of food afterward. A long ride home, though less silent this time.

"Poppa, did you hear what Elder Noffsinger said?" asks Thomas. "About sacrificing oneself for the benefit of the community?"

“I heard,” I say.

“~~Did it mean anything to you after our ... after our conversation last night?~~” I can hear in his voice that he’s working to stay calm, rational, and I’m proud of him for that. He knows this will win his point faster than would calling me a coward again. I haven’t raised an imbecile.

“Of course it did.”

Anne and Mary sit behind us in the buggy. The road thumps beneath the wheels, rattling all of us. I feel Anne’s hand on my back, perhaps to steady herself as the buggy clatters. Perhaps to steady me as I speak to my son.

“It meant that we must, each of us, do what is right for all of us,” I say. “Not what we’d *wish* to do to satisfy our own desires. That includes the need to feel strong by conducting violence against those we perceive as having wronged us.” Anne’s hand squeezes my shoulder before releasing again. Maisie neighs, happy in the cool breeze.

Thomas looks away, muttering.

“If you would speak out loud, speak so we all might hear,” I say.

He turns back to me, disgust on his face. “How our people have lasted so long, I’ll never understand,” he enunciates clearly.

I fear that is true, I think. The rest of the ride home is passed in silence. This time, I’m grateful for the quiet.

* * *

At first, Thomas is angry when he learns that Matthew has invited himself to dinner. Of course he is. But Anne, as is her gift, calms him down, and I wonder if he begins to see it as an opportunity to prove himself right. To show us all what Matthew Yoder is really all about. I’m willing to settle for that. Mary, for her part, is happy to hear that Matthew will share our table. She offers to help her mother cook, something we usually have to coax her into doing. The entire family seems to embrace the opportunity to find a positive resolution to yesterday’s discord, even if Thomas’s motivations are less than peaceful.

There isn’t much to talk about as the day passes. Although it’s the Sabbath, Thomas and I spend the waning afternoon repairing a fence that had blown down earlier in the week. We Amish call this a “ox in the ditch” chore; while manual labor is generally frowned upon on worship days, sometimes it is necessary. Meanwhile, Anne prepares dinner, and Mary picks flowers behind the house for the table. Whatever I might think of him as money-Amish, Matthew is an elder in our community. We would be remiss if we did not host him with courtesy and share God’s bounty with him.

As evening draws near, Thomas is still silent, simmering like the sun, and we both need to clean up before dinner. He takes his hat off to wipe his brow and look over the day’s work. Together, we have finished repairing the fence.

“You did excellent work today, son,” I say. I like knowing we mended the fence together. I feel closer to him for having accomplished it as father and son.

He hesitates, then, “Thank you, Poppa.” He hesitates again. I know the feeling well from being married. Is the fight over? Am I coldly courteous or has my heart softened? Do I speak the minimum expected or show the other person I still love them? “*We did good work today*,” he says finally. “Together.”

I smile at him and clap him on the shoulder. “Come. Time to clean up.”

“We wouldn’t want Elder Yoder to be offended,” he says. There is sarcasm, but mostly his tone is playful. For my benefit, no doubt. He’s trying.

As we approach the house, heaven wafts on the air. Pot roast, mashed potatoes, green beans, corn

on the cob, biscuits made by rolling out the dough—not prefabricated from a can, like you might be used to—gravy for the roast. Mary has made Matthew a gift of muffins to take home with him, and she slaps her brother’s hand away as he tries to take one. If Matthew is true to his word, we’ll also have cider and apple pie for dessert. No doubt this will be a first test for Thomas to assess the elder’s veracity. Will he at least bring to dinner what he promised?

No sooner has dusk fallen than I see Matthew’s buggy, black against the sunset over the hill road. I let Anne know, and she and Mary rush to finish setting the table. I stand on the porch, puffing my pipe and watching his approach. Then I see that Matthew is not alone. It’s not his wife or one of his sons with him. It’s someone I don’t recognize, a man.

In that moment, I know Thomas is right. Absolutely right. My heart sinks into my stomach. I’m no longer hungry for heaven.

* * *

“This is Sebastian Green,” says Matthew by way of introduction.

I take the man’s hand. It’s obvious that he is with the Transport Authority. His imperious stance and his slightly condescending smile. Matthew has staged the man’s clothes for him. Though not Amish, they are simple by Transport standards. And he isn’t armed. Matthew was smart enough to see to that.

“I invited him to dinner,” Matthew is saying. “I hope you don’t mind. Here,” he says, handing me a still-warm apple pie.

“Mr. Brenneman,” says Green, hoisting a Mason jar full of cider in his free hand. He smiles. “I truly hope we can come to a mutual accommodation this evening.”

I return the smile. It is the only weapon I can wield to protect my family. Glancing at Matthew, I say, “I wasn’t aware tonight’s dinner was for discussing business.” I let it hang there until I’m satisfied they are both uncomfortable in the silence that follows. Then, “But, all things in their own time, no?”

I usher them into my home. Anne smiles and nods at Matthew as we enter. When she sees the stranger, her smile falters. Thomas looks bewildered; Mary, strangely distant and distracted. We sit at the long table as Anne recovers herself and gestures for Mary to help her add a sixth setting. I catch Thomas’s gaze as we arrange ourselves, and I know he sees in my eyes the hardness that has settled around my heart. Either we will modernize our farm, or Transport will take it from us.

The clinking of silverware, the silent chewing, the occasional observation on the weather and the sermons earlier in the day. This is how dinner passes. The stranger, Green, says little. Afterward, Anne and Mary clear the table. Matthew invites me to the front yard for a pipe, and Green follows him like a puppy.

“Poppa, can I come?” asks Thomas. Since there are two of them, having two of us will make me feel better, so I allow it. I realize in that moment that I’ve begun thinking like that: *us* and *them*.

Matthew gets right to the point as soon as our pipes are lit. “This is how it is, Abram. There have been two rebellions in the last one hundred years, and the current conflict has left Transport short of resources. Many hearts and minds have turned away from the Authority, despite its knowing what’s best for them. To regain the support of those citizens, we need to show them how much we really care for their welfare. And we need your help to do that. For Earth. For New Pennsylvania. For all of us, really.”

We? I think.

“But to do that, Mr. Brenneman, we need to feed people,” offers Green, as if I don’t know that people need to eat. “Both here and back on Earth.”

I puff my pipe. “I’m happy to help feed anyone I can.” This is true. This is Amish.

“That’s good to hear,” says Green. “The problem is, we need your farm—everyone’s farms—to yield more, and yield it faster. We want to show citizens the Authority can care for them, so we have to do just that. We have an opportunity to encourage peace for everyone’s sake. With your help, we can accomplish this.”

I let that sink in. The night has settled down now, and the sky is clear. I note the vastness of the stars I can see, and I wonder, as always, at God’s power, His generosity in placing them there, even at night, for me to see.

“But you demand that we change the way we farm,” says Thomas. “Don’t you understand, how we choose to raise our crops is part of who we are?” He looks at Matthew with disgust. “You’re not an Amishman to ask this of us.”

“Be careful how you speak to me, *junge*. I am an elder and not responsible to you.”

Thomas snorts. “Clearly not. You’re responsible to *him*.” He gestures at Green.

“Thomas.”

“Poppa ...” But then he reins himself in. He knows my position on the choice we have to make. He knows not to argue with me in front of others.

“Speak plainly, Matthew. You know my mind on this.” I decide to give voice to Anne’s suggestion. It never hurts to ask. “Is Transport at least willing to let us found another AZ with our traditions intact before they take back the land they gave us?” I say the last part, though they’re really just extra words. I want Thomas to hear that Transport is not only taking our farm, but renegeing on the promise it made. I want God’s stars to hear it.

“Unfortunately, no,” says Green. “All the Plain People in the AZ will be given the choice to modernize or move on. There are no current plans to form new zones.”

“Move on?” My son’s anger flares. This time I do nothing to squelch it. “Move on to where? The Wild Lands? We’ll be eaten by those people!”

I’m sure you’ve heard the same stories we have about the Wild Lands. Cannibals. Thieves. A complete lack of law and order.

Matthew shrugs, and that simple gesture fills me with hatred for him. For all money-Amish. My feelings shame me. They are not Christ-like, but they churn inside me nevertheless. I begin to better understand what drove Our Lord to scour the temple with violence. No Amishman would ask this of us; Thomas is right about that as well. At least the Authority seems willing to let us go our way, if not to form a new AZ.

So, they damn us with either choice. If we stay, we modernize. If we go, we do so on our own, with no promise of a community to share our traditions. And yet, only one of those options ensures that we must give up who we are as a people.

“Gentlemen,” I say the word with great effort, “thank you for coming to dinner. Your position is clear. And now, so is our choice.”

Green seems to relax. Our decision is obvious to him. He knows enough about us to know that turning us out from the AZ is like ripping our hearts from us. No doubt this is the leverage he hoped to use to influence us to modernize. What saddens me is that he fails to realize how loathsome that choice is to us.

“How much time do we have until we must vacate the land?” I ask.

Now Green is confused. Elder Yoder’s face crumbles inward in defeat. No doubt this wrinkle will not play well with his Authority puppet masters. Knowing we Amish have complicated Transport’s plans for a change gives me shameful pleasure.

“Two weeks,” says Green. Now he seems irate too, terse. All business. “Another ship arrives from Earth in two weeks. We’ll move a family in here at that time.”

I puff my pipe. “Very well.”

The two turn to go. Thomas is so angry now he can't speak at all, which is probably for the best. When we mount the porch, Anne and Mary are waiting. Anne's eyes search mine. I shake my head. She turns away, one hand covering her mouth. We have made our home here, raised our children. We have loved this land with seed and water and toil. And now we must leave it.

"What's happened, Poppa?" asks Mary. "What's going to happen?"

I cup her face in my rough right hand. "We will move on, Mary. We will continue." It's all I have to say. My heart is breaking for Anne, for all of us. I want to go to her, comfort her, be strengthened by her closeness.

Mary gets that distant look in her eyes again, then refocuses. "I almost forgot!" She runs into the house, then comes back out again with a bundle.

"Elder Yoder!" she calls. "Elder Yoder!"

Matthew has just released the brake on his buggy and resets it with a grimace. "Yes, child?"

Mary hands him up the bundle. "My muffins! You almost forgot them!"

Matthew is surprised as he reaches down to gather up the basket. Green's face is unreadable in the darkness.

"Why, thank you, child. Most kind," Matthew says. Mary returns his smile.

"She worked most of the morning on those," Anne sobs quietly behind me.

I wonder at my daughter's generosity under the present circumstances. I thank God for it. *One of us, at least, has remembered Our Savior's kind nature in the face of adversity*, I think.

The two men leave. By the time their silhouette has crested the hill road, Thomas storms past where we three stand quietly on the porch.

"Thomas! We have preparations to make! The decision is—"

"Damn your preparations, and damn your decision!" He strides off angrily, away from the house just like last night. I feel so defeated—with him, with our situation—I cannot even find the strength to follow him.

"He will walk it off," says Anne. "Like last night."

I nod.

* * *

My memory of the next morning is blurry chaos. It begins with the low whine, ever closer, of a Transport airbus. By the time it's throwing up dust in front of my barn, the three of us are standing on the porch, watching. Thomas has still not returned.

Our animals neigh and cluck and moo their fear as the airbus lands. My daughter stands up straight and immovable. Anne clutches my arm and I take her hand. The ship expels soldiers into my front yard led by Green. This time he's dressed less simply. There is a braid on his shoulder.

I step off the porch as the airbus winds down its engine. "You told us we would have two weeks."

He strides through the dust, motioning his escort to unsling their weapons. I make sure I'm between them and my family. Is this to be a summary execution? All because we refused to upgrade our farming equipment?

"I'm not here for that," Green says. "Matthew Yoder is dead."

Anne gasps behind me. I, too, am dumbstruck. Then I hear her pleading, "No, no, no," and I know then I should've pursued Thomas last night.

"Stand aside," Green orders. His soldiers surround the porch.

"I don't know where my son is. He's not here." It is all I can think to say.

"I'm not here for him either."

I spread my hands. I don't understand.

“I’m here for her,” he says.

Anne grabs the porch rail. I turn toward her, keeping myself between them.

“I didn’t kill Elder Yoder,” she says desperately.

Losing patience, Green says, “*Her.*” He points at Mary.

She sidles out from behind me, that defiant, distant look on her face.

“My daughter? Are you insane? She didn’t murder Matthew!”

“Oh, but she did,” says Green. “I found him dead on the floor of his home this morning. Vomited everywhere. And one half-eaten muffin in his hand. Poisoned.”

I look at Mary and her eyes focus again.

“Child?”

“Oleander, Poppa. I baked it into the muffins.”

She thinks I’m asking her how she did it. Anne collapses to the porch.

“My God, child.” My voice is hoarse. “What have you done?”

Mary looks at me, knowing I’m disappointed, but determined to explain why everything is a right. “It’s *gelassenheit*, Poppa.”

“What?”

“*Gelassenheit*. Now you and Momma and ... Thomas ...” Her voice hitches on her brother’s name. I see it in her eyes: she’s committed murder for Thomas. She idolizes him. She thinks she’s saved him from having to kill Matthew himself. She continues, “Now all the Plain People can grow crops how you want to. You can continue.”

Anne moans her anguish. Mary thinks that killing one man—one moneychanger—will save us all. The black-and-white thinking of a twelve-year-old child.

“Oh, Mary ...”

My heart shatters.

“Stand aside!” Green is out of patience. Chambered rounds punctuate his order.

I stand aside. Anne crawls toward Mary, wailing. I gather my wife into my arms, aware of the raised rifles around us. Even in my shock, I realize there is nothing we can do until we face the magistrate. I expect Mary to scream, to claw for her mother in return. Instead she walks silent toward Green, resolute and precise, as if doubling a stitch in her quilt. He grabs her by the arm and her *kapp*, its ties loose, falls into the dirt of the barnyard.

They take her aboard, and too soon the airbus is lifting off, its engines screaming. The echoing silence it leaves behind is broken only by a man yelling, “Mary! Mary!” Thomas runs across the field reaching up like he can snatch the ship from the sky with his bare hands. Then we’re all three on our knees together, sobbing on the porch.

And now I sit here with you on this bench, waiting to learn the fate of my child. She is being arraigned today. Anne is with Thomas, who is inconsolable. He blames himself for this, though I know I’m the only one to blame. I should have seen it coming. I should have stopped it.

I sit here thinking how, just two days ago, drought was my worst worry. Even yesterday, how small a problem it really was, in retrospect, to find a new home with good soil. But today, I am consumed by a single thought that keeps repeating, over and over in my mind.

Too young. Too young to be so old.

A Word from Chris Pourteau

“Gelassenheit” is set in 2095, about a generation before the events of Michael Bunker *Pennsylvania*. I wanted to explore some of the history behind the events, already in motion, that Joe wakes up to. I was particularly interested in what might have motivated Dawn, Amos, and other former Plain People to choose the inherently violent path of armed rebellion in direct opposition to their Amish upbringing, a cornerstone of which is a commitment to pacifism.

Unlike Amos in *Pennsylvania*, Abram decides “to move on, to continue,” based on what some might argue is a dogmatic adherence to tradition—a noble choice, but a choice that helps create the circumstances of the family’s tragedy. Would Mary have acted as she did if her father had followed Thomas’s advice to modernize? Even before Mary makes her own life-altering decision, Abram, by choosing to leave their community, sets the Brenneman family on a path that could destroy another fundamental aspect of who they are as a people. (In case it’s not obvious, I prefer stories without simple, black-and-white choices; the grays are much more interesting to explore.) Was there really a *right* call here for Abram to make?

Being unfamiliar with the Amish culture, I read Steven M. Nolt’s *A History of the Amish: Revised and Updated* to help me better understand the traditions of *Pennsylvania*’s Plain People. I also asked Michael Bunker some pointed questions about his own beliefs and experiences as a Plain Person, and he was very forthcoming, with great insights. I wanted to explore both our Englisher preconceptions about (and the actual, accepted role of) women in contemporary Amish society. And, again, I was fascinated by that question of whether or not it’s better to move on and preserve tradition (farming techniques), despite losing part of oneself (community) in the process; or to stay, modernize, and preserve ties to the community. During our exchange on how the individual relates to his or her community in Amish society, Michael introduced me to the concept of *gelassenheit*. (Eldon Noffsinger’s definition is, verbatim, how Michael explained it to me.) Not only did Michael hand me the perfect title for my story, but he also showed me a way that Mary’s actions could be absolutely consistent with Amish beliefs, albeit within the limited understanding of those beliefs by a twelve-year-old mind. Talk about exploring a gray area!

If you liked my take on Michael’s world, you might also like *Gettysburg: A Tale of the Second War for Pennsylvanian Independence* and its sequel *Susquehanna: A Second Tale of Bestimmung Company*, which I published earlier this fall. (Want to know what happens to Mary after the events in this story? Give *Gettysburg* and *Susquehanna* a look-see.) And if you enjoyed the Gothic twist near the end of “Gelassenheit” (Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” was my inspiration there, in case you’re wondering), consider checking out my novel *Shadows Burned In*. It’s a mostly contemporary Southern Gothic novel set in Texas, and it, too, explores the grays often found in complex family relationships.

As always, it’s you—the reader—who makes what we independent authors do possible. You are both our market and our marketing force. So if you have a moment, please consider telling folks who you think of this anthology with a review at the venue where you purchased it, as well as on Goodreads.

Finally, thank you for the gift of your time in reading my story. I hope you enjoyed it. If you’d like to keep in touch, email me at c.pourteau.author@gmail.com or follow me <http://chrispourteau.thirdscribe.com/>.

Trail of Tears

by Nina Tozzi

The smell of campfire smoke drifted through the air.

“Fredo, let’s head back up to camp!”

Rebecca shouted at her twelve-year-old little brother over the sound of the river. Her long black braid was coming undone. She pushed a few strands of hair out of her face and tucked them behind her ear.

They gathered their fishing poles—and the string that threaded through the mouths of five rainbow trout—and climbed up the riverbank to the trail. A short walk up a shallow, wooded slope brought them to the clearing that contained their camp.

“Catch any more fish?” asked Grandma, tending the fire.

“A few more,” answered Rebecca, in the same language her grandmother used.

Grandma didn’t like English, but that’s what pretty much everyone in their community spoke now. Only Grandma and a few of the elders still spoke their people’s native tongue, and though they tried to get the younger generation to keep it alive, that was proving to be a difficult task. Rebecca and Fredo could understand the Language fairly well, but learning to speak it was harder, and Grandma was always correcting them. Sometimes Rebecca got frustrated and just wanted to use English.

So Rebecca was delighted when Grandma nodded at her and smiled: she had spoken correctly.

Rebecca set to work cleaning the fish. The semi-permanent camp had a table set aside just for that purpose, as well as a lean-to to keep things under when it rained, a picnic table to eat at, and wooden chairs for sitting around the fire. The fire pit had a metal grate for grilling, and under the lean-to was a box with kitchen utensils, plates and cups, fireproof matches, and other necessities. Their family and others in the village had camped here for generations. It was a good spot to fish.

“Fredo, go get Grandma some more wood,” Rebecca ordered her little brother.

He obediently went into the woods and came back three times with armfuls of wood. Enough for tonight, plus some to leave for the next fishing party.

They ate a dinner of fish and wild greens, then Rebecca cleaned the dishes with water she brought up from the river while Grandma put a pot of tea on the fire. The sun had finally set and darkness covered them as they sat around the fire in the wooden chairs. There was a slight chill in the air, but they felt good after fishing all day in the warm sun. They sat in silence, content to listen to the sounds of nature, the wind rustling through the treetops above them, and the river below, rushing to the ocean hundreds of kilometers away.

“Grandma, where did we come from?” Rebecca asked, breaking the silence. She knew the answer but wanted to hear the story again. Fredo listened intently; he hadn’t heard this story since he was little.

Even though Grandma had told the story many times before, she took her time in telling it again, pausing at the appropriate places for effect. “Many hundreds of years ago, our people lived far away from here, to the east. A river ran through the land, and the water would sing.”

“Like our river here?” asked Fredo.

“No,” answered Grandma. “The river here sounds lovely, but this was different. The water would actually *sing*. It was the most beautiful sound anyone has ever heard.”

“What happened?” asked Fredo. “Why did our people leave?”

“Well,” answered Grandma, “when the white people came, at first they made a treaty, saying they would leave us alone if we gave them land. But then they found gold on the land, and it made them crazy. They wanted *all* the land. They told us we had to leave and go to Oklahoma, and we refused. S

they sent their army and forced us to leave, in the middle of winter with no supplies! We had to walk here, hundreds of miles. Many of our people got sick and died on the way.”

“Fredo said, “If I was there I would have fought them and made them leave us alone!”

“Well, some of the young men did try and fight—”

There was a sound from the woods behind them. Rebecca turned around and looked, but couldn't see anything.

“Probably an animal,” she said.

Grandma continued, “Anyways, the people had to walk through swamps and forests and cross a huge river. They had to cross mountains. They left landmarks, signs, as they went. To show the way back so our people would be able to return home.”

“What do the signs look like?” asked Fredo. “Can we go?”

“Well,” said Grandma, “they are only visible to our people. You will know them when you see them. But,” she added, “we can't go. There's a terrible war going on.”

“I know about it,” said Rebecca. “We're not allowed out of the Indian Zone without travel papers.”

Grandma nodded. “Private transportation is forbidden outside the Indian Zone. The Transportation Authority would never let us go there.” She paused, then added, “Anyways, the magic in the landmarks might have worn off by now, even if we could go and find them.”

Fredo frowned. Rebecca didn't. She had already heard this story and had resigned herself to life the way it was.

There was another noise behind them. An object darted between the trees.

Rebecca whispered, “Grandma, I think it's a drone.”

They stopped and listened, scanning the darkness.

Grandma stood up and shouted in English, “You're violating the Dawson Ruling! You're not allowed to trespass on our land or spy on us!”

Rebecca and Fredo grabbed stones off the ground and started pelting the area where they had last seen the drone.

“Get out of here!” yelled Rebecca.

She thought she saw something fly away into the darkness.

“I think it's gone,” she said.

Before any of them could sit down, Fredo casually tossed his remaining stones into the fire. A small explosion knocked them all down, hard. The fire roared.

Rebecca was stunned. “Grandma!” She crawled over to her grandmother and dragged her away from the fire. Fredo was crawling away too.

“Fredo, are you okay?” shouted Rebecca over the roaring inferno.

“Yeah, get Grandma!” he answered.

The elder woman groaned, rolled over, and crawled farther from the flames. The fire was burning so brightly, it looked like daytime in the clearing.

“What happened?” moaned Grandma, feeling her legs and arms to make sure nothing was broken. “Are you children all right?”

“I'm okay. Just a little burned,” said Rebecca.

Grandma checked both children and determined that neither of them had broken any bones, then she took them down to the river to rinse their burns, which were already starting to hurt. They didn't need to take a light—the campfire was illuminating the whole area now.

“Fredo, what did you throw in the fire?” asked Grandma.

“I'm sorry! It was just a stone. I didn't mean any harm,” said Fredo.

“It's okay,” said Grandma, reassuring him. “But, were any of them black?”

“I think one was,” said Fredo.

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