

Amish Girl

The Bird-in-Hand Farmer's Market is busiest on Saturdays, Anna Lapp's day to help her mother at Lapp's Canned Goods. Their stall is in the far right corner, one of about forty surrounding the perimeter of the former warehouse. Anna and her mother walk by stands selling fresh vegetables, roasted nuts, dried flowers, hot pretzels, leather goods, and ten-cent candy before they reach their own.

The sign for Lapp's is old, painted on a thick strip of oak by Anna's Great Uncle Samuel. The jars are already lined up like stout, round soldiers on the wooden planks. Pickles: Sweet-and-sour, Zesty Dill, Bread-and-butter. Salsas: Black Bean, Corn, Lapp's Special Spicy Hot. Preserves: Blackberry, Raspberry, Blueberry, Strawberry, Mixed Berry, and just as many in jellies and jams. Apple butter, pumpkin butter, preserved beets and pickled eggs. Anna helped to prepare and can each of these during last winter's long nights.

Anna and her mother prepare for the day's business. Anna puts out baskets of crackers and corn chips, then opens the tasting jars and sticks a tiny plastic spoon in each. She chooses a sample of each jam, jelly, preserve and butter for a spoon, except for pumpkin butter. Anna shudders, remembering all of the hours spent scraping out the sickly sweet-smelling pumpkins last winter. She knows it is wrong to hide the pumpkin butter sample jar each week, but despite her efforts, people keep buying it. She will be laboring over the pumpkins again next winter.

Her jobs done, Anna sits on her wooden stool and watches her mother take out the cash box. The strings of Sara Lapp's white prayer cap sway, untied, as she hurries about. Sara's hair is neatly knotted with only two wire pins. Anna, with her twin braids, always marvels at her mother's ability to secure her hair so simply. Anna has seen her mother's hair down only once. It reached past her waist, thicker than horse-hair and almost as coarse. Sara is wearing a dark

purple dress under her plain black apron today. Anna's dress is purple too, cut from the same bolt of cloth at Cousin Isaiah Lapp's store. A few days ago, her mother taught her to pin the dress with straight pins. Only children use safety pins, her mother had said. Now that you are growing, you will use straight pins like me and your big sisters. Anna does not like the straight pins. They stick her arms and sides when she is not careful, and she is always afraid that they will come undone.

The farm stand next door is owned by the McGarrity family. The McGarritys are Englishers who own a large modern farm north of Bird-in-Hand. Here at the market, they sell fruits and vegetables. Anna likes looking at the pretty bunches of asparagus and beets, the rows of colorful peaches, blueberries and tomatoes in their little wooden boxes. Sometimes Anna's mother buys fresh peaches from the McGarritys to go with their lunchtime bread and butter. Anna hopes that today will be a peach day.

Anna's mother is saying hello to Martha McGarrity. Martha's father, Ed McGarrity, has come today for the first time in many weeks. He sits down on the canvas chair with many creaks and groans. His hair is completely white and textured like the underside of a cow's tail, and his eyes are a watery blue. Anna watches the deep creases in his hands pull and stretch as he peels a banana.

Anna suspects Ed has come today to keep Martha company. Last week, Anna overheard her mother tell her aunt that Martha's daughter Natalie had been in a car crash. She was driving late one night with some friends and they were hit by a drunk driver. Natalie is still in the hospital. She can't walk and when she speaks, her words don't make sense. No one knows when she will be better. Anna feels sorry for Martha and Ed. She can see that under Martha's lumpy sweatshirt, her shoulders are tight. Her dark brown hair looks oily, and the skin under her eyes is

thin and gray. Looking at Martha, Anna is grateful that her older brothers and sisters drive horses and buggies and are almost always home before dark.

It is eight-thirty and the Farmer's Market opens. Tourists start making the rounds about the stalls, stopping extra long at the bakery stands and putting their noses right up to the cinnamon-scented packages of sticky buns and pecan rolls. A family with a mother, father and a boy about Anna's age stop to sample some of the Lapp jams. While the mother buys a jar of pumpkin butter from Sara (Anna glares resentfully at the orange paste) the boy eyes Anna. She does not meet his gaze, but looks down at her black shoes, too tight after a year's growth. The boy has spiky hair and a bright yellow shirt that says "LIVESTRONG" in bold letters. Anna wonders what it would be like to look down at herself and see such a bright color against her skin. She wishes he would stop staring at her. All the tourists come here to buy Amish canned goods, Amish quilts and Amish pies, but they also come to stare at the Amish women and girls. Anna knows this, but it still makes her uncomfortable. When the boy leaves, she checks to make sure her dress is still pinned on the side.

Over at McGarrity's, Martha is waiting on one of the town locals, Amber Flanders. Anna hears Amber questioning Martha about Natalie, in tones of overdone concern. Martha's answering voice is flat, lifeless. Natalie is no better. The doctors don't know when her condition will change. Yes, Martha regrets letting Natalie go out with her friends that night, of course she regrets it. No, Natalie and her friends were not drunk, it was the driver of the other car who caused the accident. They were on their way to a rock concert in Bethlehem.

Having reaped all the information she desired, Amber trills goodbye, waves a loose hand, moves on to the next stall. Anna sees Martha's fists clench and unclench as Amber walks away.

She spits out a word that Anna doesn't know, but she thinks it must be a bad word, from the way Martha says it. Ed clucks his tongue and pats Martha's hand soothingly, but she pulls away.

Soon a steady stream of customers are keeping Anna and Sara too busy to observe the McGarritys. At lunchtime, Sara does buy peaches, and Anna lets the juice drip down her chin. She licks her fingers when her mother isn't looking.

In the late afternoon, the crowd thins, and Sara decides to walk over to Stoltzfus's Cheese and Cured Meats stall to talk to her friend, Mary Stoltzfus. Anna sits on her stool, taking money and wrapping jars in brown paper, saying as little as possible to the customers, and never making eye contact.

At five-thirty, the Farmer's Market closes. Sara is still talking to Mary, probably about Mary's sister's engagement to a distant cousin from Ohio. Anna is putting away the tasting jars when she hears music coming from the McGarritys' stall. They are playing the radio. They play it sometimes as they pack up the stall, but Anna has never heard this type of music before. Ed McGarrity is humming along. Anna keeps her hands busy but she shallows her breath so as not to interfere with the sound. She can almost feel her ears turning toward the music like her cats' ears do when she calls their names.

Most of the time, the music Martha plays is loud and a little scary. Anna tries not to listen when that music plays. It makes her feel rough inside. This music is different. She can hear so many different instruments, she can't separate the sounds from each other. There are a high, sweet sound and a low, dark sound opposing each other, almost like a conversation. Quiet and calm turns to growing intensity and suddenly all the instruments are playing as one. Anna feels pricks up and down her arms, but they aren't coming from the pins in her dress this time. She

feels like she does when she sets quilts with her mother, that particular thrill that comes the moment she sees how all the different fabrics will fit together to make one picture.

Anna knows she must have paused in her work because Ed looks over at her and says, “Pretty, isn’t it?”

Anna shakes her head as if she has been underwater. “What is it?” she asks.

Ed smiles. “It’s a symphony. Brahms’ fourth.” He pauses. “A symphony is a long piece of music. A lot of different instruments play it together, in an orchestra.”

The music stops and a man’s voice comes through the radio, saying the name of the piece again. Brahms, Anna thinks. Orchestra. Then more music begins, and it is the same blend of instruments, but this time the music is more energetic, pointed and spiky.

“This is one of my favorites,” Ed says. He is looking at Anna with calm, thoughtful eyes. “It’s by Stravinsky. *The Rite of Spring*.”

It does remind her of spring, Anna thinks. It sounds like the world waking up, the snow melting, the birth of foals and calves, time to plant. But it also sounds like something frightening, like a storm coming, or an evil presence.

“It’s about a pagan ritual,” Ed says. It seems like he wants to say more, but he stops and presses his lips together. Anna does not know what “pagan” means.

And then, Sara is there. She looks from Ed, watching her daughter over the side of the stall, to Anna, holding a stack of five-dollar bills, paused in the middle of counting. Sara frowns. “Time to go, Anna,” she says. Anna startles and drops a few of the bills on the floor. When she stands up, her face feels hot. She turns away from her mother and puts the bills back into the cash box. She hears Sara say goodbye to Ed and Martha. Anna gathers up her things and follows her mother into the wet August heat.

Anna is washing dishes with her mother. She scrubs each plate with lye soap, dunks it in the pan of water, and then scrubs again. It is Sara's turn to dry, and Anna envies her a little. She does not like the smell of the soap or how her fingers look like corn husks after spending time in the water. Choosing another plate out of the dirty pile, Anna clears her throat and asks, "Mother, what happened to Martha's daughter?" She knows some of the answer, but wants to hear it again.

Sara sighs. "That is a sad story, my Anna." She tells Anna all of the details she already knew: the car, Natalie and her three friends, the drunk driver, the hospital. "Why were they out at night?" Anna asks. The thought of being out in the dark without her parents both terrifies and thrills her.

"They were driving to a city far away, to hear a music concert." Sara keeps wiping the plate in her hand, even though it is already dry. "They were so young. Too young to be doing such things."

Anna pictures it in her mind, borrowing details from other sightings of English cars, as well as the occasional crash between buggies: the speed of the car, the music on the radio turned up loud, the four girls laughing, their hair blowing out the window. And then the other car coming so fast, not where it should be, the squeals of the girls and the car mixing together, and then the sudden quiet, when it's all over, but really only just begun.

The next Saturday, Anna and her mother arrive just before the market opens. She can see when they walk in that Ed has come with Martha again. He is already sitting in the canvas chair

behind the blackberries and ears of corn. He smiles at Anna as she walks by. Anna keeps walking, but looks back when they are settled inside the Lapp stall. Ed is sipping a paper cup of coffee while Martha hurries about. Anna has not heard anything new about Natalie this week, but she can tell by the way Martha looks that nothing has changed. Her face is blotchy and her hair is hanging lank again. She looks like she hasn't eaten or slept in many weeks.

At lunchtime, Sara buys a pecan roll from the bakery. She cuts it in half with a plastic knife and lets Anna have the bigger piece. Anna wants to lick the paper plate when she's finished but sees her mother watching her and throws it away instead.

As five-thirty approaches, Anna prays that Sara will visit Mary Stoltzfus again. She knows that Sara has brought a new quilting pattern for Mary, and she is pinning her hopes on the delivery of that pattern.

The last customer leaves, and Sara pushes back her stool, rubbing the back of her neck and flexing her left foot, then her right. Anna watches her from the corner of her eye.

“Anna, I'm just going over to the Stoltzfus's. I'll be right back.”

Anna watches her mother go and catches Ed doing the same. He turns and looks at her, and she looks back this time. He smiles again, his eyes crinkling at the corners. The radio is already on, very quiet, and Ed reaches over to turn a knob. The sounds of the orchestra wash over Anna. It sounds like water this time, waves and waves of sound, crashing and receding and then crashing again. Anna has never been to the ocean, but once she put her ear to a big seashell, and it sounded like this. She closes her eyes. Shades of blue and green and crests of white dance behind her eyelids.

“This is Debussy. It's called *La Mer*. That means, *The Sea*.”

Eyes still closed, Anna smiles and feels a coal of warmth drop inside her. She understood the music, she got it right. “I can hear it. I can hear the ocean.”

Ed claps his hands together once. His hands sound dry and chalky. “Good job, Anna!” He glances quickly across the market and sees Sara still chatting with Mary. “Here, I brought this today too.” He flicks a switch on the radio and the ocean stops. Something whirrs inside the black box. Ed presses a little button with a red triangle. This time, one instrument plays over the rest. “It’s a violin concerto. That means the violin is the main instrument, and the orchestra accompanies it. This one is by Felix Mendelssohn.”

Anna thinks that if a symphony is like all the fabrics of a quilt fitting to make one picture, a concerto is like biting into a shoo fly pie and tasting only molasses at first, then discovering all the other flavors and textures surrounding and supporting it. She savors the sounds.

“Con-chair-toe.” Anna rolls the syllables on her tongue. “Men-dell-son.”

Ed’s hands stir the air in time with the music. He keeps one eye on Sara across the market. He doesn’t notice his daughter coming toward him, her arms crossed, eyes dark like bitter coffee.

“Dad. What do you think you’re doing?”

Ed stops conducting. “Anna and I are just listening to some Mendelssohn. That all right with you?”

Martha’s mouth turns down. Anna can see that she has a tomato stain on her T-shirt. “I sure as hell don’t care, but what about her mother?” She leans closer to Ed and whispers, but Anna can still hear her. “You know their kind aren’t supposed to listen to music.”

Ed frowns. “What are you talking about?” He turns to Anna. “Aren’t you and the other Amish kids in a singing group or something?” He nods to himself, answering his own question. “And I hear you singing at church services too when I drive by.”

Anna swallows. “We sing. We don’t play instruments though. Not like those.” She points. “And we don’t have radios.”

Martha and Ed are both looking at her. Ed’s eyes are like the sky. She feels him looking right inside her, but he will not find anything. The warm coal and the ocean and the taste of shoo fly pie have left her, and all that remains is a picture of her mother’s frown and the sound of her father’s deep, stern voice if they knew what she had been doing.

Anna is milking the cows. The milk streams into the bucket between her knees. She tries to squeeze the teats in rhythm with the music inside her head. She leans her forehead against Daisy’s soft brown belly and whispers, “SIM-phony. ORRkestra. Brahhhms. Con-CHAIR-toe. Day-BEW-see. Vi-oh-LIN. MEN-dell-son.” She repeats them over and over until the words themselves make music.

It is the last Saturday in August. Soon the Farmer’s Market hours will be decreased, and Anna won’t be needed anymore. It is a very hot day, over ninety-five degrees. Anna keeps her bonnet on and secures her braids against the sweat on her neck. When the market opens, Martha alone is working at McGarrity’s, but at lunchtime, Ed comes to sit with her. Anna’s heart beats a little faster, hoping.

The heat is driving the customers away from the unventilated market and toward the air-conditioned shops in town. Around five o'clock, some of the vendors even start to pack up their stalls early. Mary beckons Sara over to her stall. Sara pulls out a new recipe for cornbread to show her. Anna watches Sara walk away.

"Anna." Ed calls to her immediately. "Come here. Come close."

Ed leans over the partition as Anna approaches. Martha is sorting used crates, but Anna can tell she is watching. Ed's eyes are light, friendly, encouraging. "We have something to show you," he says. At "we," Martha rolls her eyes.

Ed checks quickly to see if Sara is looking, and then slips something small and hard into Anna's hand. She opens her palm and sees a thin white rectangle, no bigger than a frog, with a circle imprinted on top.

"It's called an iPod," Ed tells her. "It has music in it. Classical music. Everything we listened to, and a lot more. The names of the pieces will come up on the screen when you turn it on, so you'll know what they are."

Ed's hands are trembling a little ("Arthritis," he says) so Martha comes over and takes the rectangle from her hand, shows her how to turn it on and uses her thumb to move the circle around. Words flash on the screen. Anna is fascinated but also a little frightened. She can't understand how this eye-pod is music.

Then Martha shows her the things that will make Anna hear the music. With Ed keeping watch for Sara, Martha helps Anna put little foam disks right inside her ears, with wires running down and connecting to a hole in the eye-pod. Martha presses the triangle, which looks just like the button Ed pressed on the radio to hear the Men-dell-son.

Suddenly, Anna's whole head bursts with music, and she nearly loses her balance, she's so shocked. She can hear the violin again, and something like it but lower, dark and rich like honey. She can hear deep thrums like heartbeats and high, clean ribbons of air like the trill of a bird. It's all happening right in her head, filling her body and changing the pulse of her blood. She can feel the music in her feet, her fingers, her teeth. It pours over every inch of her skin like melting butter.

Across the market, Anna sees Sara turn and start walking back towards them. She yanks the wires out of her ears and slips the eye-pod into her apron pocket. Ed and Martha turn, busying themselves with packing up the stall. Anna's heart is beating so fast. Pictures gallop through her head: Ed's reassuring eyes, the blue-green ocean, milk streaming in rhythm, her mother's frown, peach juice on her fingers, Natalie's hair blowing out a car window, Martha saying "their kind." The eye-pod seems to glow under her hand, like a tiny burning sun in her pocket.