



THE *Sisters* OF
Sugarcreek

— a novel —

CATHY LIGGETT

THE *Sisters* OF
Sugarcreek

— • a novel • —

CATHY LIGGETT



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Cathy Liggett's website at www.cathyliggett.com.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

The Sisters of Sugarcreek

Copyright © 2017 by Cathy Liggett. All rights reserved.

Cover photographs of teacup and knitting copyright © Jacqui Miller/Stocksy. All rights reserved.

Cover Abraham Lincoln font copyright © by Frances MacLeod/Lost Type. All rights reserved.

Back cover photograph of paper and wood © Irochka/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Interior illustration of swirls copyright © Amili/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Author photograph copyright © 2009 by Doug Baker. All rights reserved.

Designed by Nicole Grimes

Edited by Sarah Mason Rische

Published in association with the literary agency of Spencerhill Associates, 1990 Main Street, Suite 750, Sarasota, Florida 34236.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Sisters of Sugarcreek is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com or call 800-323-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Liggett, Cathy, author.

Title: The sisters of Sugarcreek / Cathy Liggett.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., [2017]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016031405 | ISBN 9781496422354 (hc) | ISBN 9781496404893 (sc)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3612.I343 S57 2017 | DDC 813/.6—23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016031405>

Printed in the United States of America

23 22 21 20 19 18 17
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER ONE

BE STRONG.

Be strong in the Lord, Lydia.

Strong in the Lord . . .

With not a tear in her eye, Lydia's *maam* had whispered those parting words eight years earlier as she gave Lydia's teen-aged shoulders a hasty hug and sent her off in a buggy with Henry, the husband she barely knew.

Too shy and bewildered to have much to say to the far older Henry Gruber, Lydia had focused on her mother's words instead. She'd repeated them over and over, trying to ignore the home-sickness seeping into every part of her. Trying to be as brave as she could, she had kept her head raised and her eyes fixed on the black roads that wound all the way from Pennsylvania to Sugarcreek, Ohio.

Now, as Lydia sat in a chair at the farthest end of the white canopy tent set up on her and Henry's property, her mother's chant came back to her. Just as she'd needed to hear the words at the beginning of her life with Henry, she needed to hang on to them again as she watched *Englischers* traipse in the drizzling rain across her lawn to their cars, clutching her deceased husband's belongings.

She'd been trying so hard to contain the emotion welling up inside her, not wanting to do the unthinkable and break down, that she hadn't even noticed the auctioneer who approached her.

"Mrs. Gruber?"

She turned at the sound of Mr. Cohen's voice. He tilted his head in a kindly way toward her.

So it really was time, wasn't it? The auction she'd been dreading was over. Could it really be so?

Mr. Cohen stood holding a bulky, cream-colored envelope in his hand, and there was no denying it. The empty tent was full of empty chairs. The auction was finished. Complete. The last public rite of Henry's passing was done with. Nearly all his life's possessions carried away by others. Mostly strangers.

The finality of it all brought on another wave of dread, more weighty and numbing than the first. Although she was much too young for her legs to feel so weak, her limbs felt as unsteady as a newborn foal's as she strained to push off the folding chair to stand face-to-face with the stout-bellied auctioneer.

"Everything's here. In the envelope," Mr. Cohen said softly, slowly, his rapid-fire banter gone as if it never existed. "Mostly cash, but a few checks too."

Days ago, sitting across from Henry's empty chair with her Bible in her lap, the Scriptures all a blur, she'd imagined this moment and how it would unfold. But she'd never imagined how losing all of Henry's belongings would feel. Could've never known how it would feel.

The span of years had linked her to Henry more than the small confines of the buggy ever could in their first days together. Her heart wrenched sorrowfully and a sick taste rose in the back of her mouth. How was it possible? The measure of her husband's life on earth reduced to a small envelope of money?

She swallowed hard, wishing she could put off the moment forever. Even paused to smooth the wrinkles from her long black skirt, as if erasing the toll that hours of sitting had taken on the freshly ironed dress were so vitally important. And yet she knew she couldn't hesitate any longer. Long-held-in tears burned the back of her eyes as she forced herself to reach for the manila envelope the auctioneer held out to her.

Even in the damp stuffiness of the air beneath the canopy, the envelope felt noticeably cold in her hand. Lydia tightened the shawl around her shoulders and tried to find her voice. A *danke* stuck in her throat along with the lump of emotion lodged there. The best she could manage was to bow her head in silent thanks, her *kapp* shielding her face from his gaze.

"There aren't many items left. Just a few that didn't sell," Mr. Cohen went on to say. "Your husband's tools from the lumberyard and the lawn ornaments he made all went very fast. I'm sure you noticed."

But she hadn't noticed at all. She'd forced herself not to watch or to listen, not wanting to know which of Henry's whatever's went where. Or what things left their property with whom. She'd only been on hand to answer questions about his belongings if need be. But there hadn't been any questions from the few Amish and mostly *Englisch* who had dropped by.

If there were any questions at all, there were hers. All the whys and the hows that kept taunting her mind. Torturing her heart. Interrupting her sleep for the past weeks. And as of yet, *Gott* hadn't seemed to be filling in the answer to a one of them.

"I can take the remainder of your husband's things to

Goodwill if that would help,” he offered. “I’ve got my pickup truck here.”

“*Nee, nee*, Mr. Cohen.” She quickly found her voice. “I appreciate it. But I shouldna be having you do that. I should do it myself.”

Drawing in an uneasy breath, she wondered how many trips it would take to haul the remaining items to town. She wasn’t much accustomed to driving the buggy. Henry had typically taken the reins, as he had done with most all things in their marriage.

But the job had to be done. It had to. The living weren’t meant to hold on to the possessions of those who passed. Weren’t meant to treasure them. Or store them. For fear of turning their loved ones into idols. Though it wouldn’t be easy on her nerves—or her heart—she would just have to manage.

“Well, if you’re sure . . . Josh and I will move the remaining items into your barn.” The auctioneer nodded to his older son, who was already gathering up the rest of Henry’s things. “Then we’ll take the canopy down and be out of your way.”

“That would be *gut*, Mr. Cohen. Thank you.”

The auctioneer nodded in reply, his eyes offering one more look of sympathy before he turned to walk away.

“Oh, Mr. Cohen!” she blurted, suddenly realizing Henry wasn’t there to take care of business anymore. “You did take your fee out of the money, *jah?*”

“Honestly, Mrs. Gruber, under the circumstances . . .” The auctioneer paused to rub his chin. “I just wouldn’t feel right about taking a fee. It’s the least I can do. I mean, your husband—I didn’t know him. But, well, he was out there volunteering with the rest of those firefighters. Trying to help. And if the fire had gotten beyond the church . . .” He puffed out a relieved-sounding sigh. “We’re all just thankful it didn’t.”

She’d heard someone say that if the fire had spread, it could’ve

set the entire Main Street of Sugarcreek aflame. But even so, she wasn't used to getting something for nothing. It didn't feel right.

"But you've spent your entire day here," she reminded. "And we agreed on a fee, and—"

He held up his hand to stop her. "It's all good."

It was a very kind gesture, and one she should've felt at peace with. Yet her mind and insides twisted with indecision. Henry had never been one to do such a thing. He would have protested and would've demanded to pay. But at this minute she was beyond tired. Far too weary to argue. "Then thank you again for your services, Mr. Cohen."

"If you need anything . . ."

His parting offer brought another sting of tears to her eyes. People had been saying that to her since Henry died. People she didn't know. People who had shown up on her doorstep with a meal or condolences, whose faces weren't familiar to her. So many strangers after living in the small town all this time.

But in all honesty, she didn't know what she needed. Besides Henry. He'd organized every minute of her days. Every year of her life. And right now, all she knew how to do was to figure out a moment at a time.

As the men began to take down the canopy, the rain started to come harder. And in that moment what Lydia needed couldn't have been clearer—she needed to get out of the rain. But the muted sound of car engines stopped her legs from moving. As she watched the last of the *Englischers* pull away in their vehicles, a deep, gnawing yearning tightened her chest.

Oh, if only she could be one of them. If only she could drive. If she could, she'd drive far away. So far, to some place where there might be comfort for her hurt. Where the unbearable aching inside her could flutter right out the car window and be left behind.

But then . . . that was a silly notion, wasn't it?

Because no matter where she went, Henry wouldn't be there. He was gone from her forever. Forever gone. And no matter where on earth she was, no matter how far she went, there was no escaping that truth.

Be strong, Lydia.

Be strong. . . .

Finally letting the pent-up tears flow freely down her cheeks, she turned from the sight of the cars. Making her way over the wet grass, she headed back to the only place she knew. To the house she used to share with Henry.