

# [PDF] A Season For Tending: Book One In The Amish Vines And Orchards Series

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## Description:

**About the Author Cindy Woodsmall** is a *New York Times* and CBA best-selling author of nine works of fiction and one work of nonfiction, whose connection with the Amish community has been featured widely in national media and throughout Christian news outlets. She lives outside of Atlanta with her family.

**Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *It's time...***

Emma's voice rose from the past, encircling Rhoda and bringing a wave of guilt. Unyielding, unforgiving guilt.

Rhoda plucked several large strawberries from the vine and dropped them into the bushelbasket. "Time for what?" she whispered.

The moment the words left her mouth, she glanced up, checking her surroundings. She quickly looked beyond the picket fence that enclosed her fruit and herb garden but saw no one. Her shoulders relaxed. When townsfolk or neighbors noticed Rhoda talking to herself, fresh rumors stirred. Even family members frowned upon it and asked her to stop.

*It's time...*

Emma's gentle voice echoed around her for a second time. "Time for what?" Rhoda repeated, more a prayer to God than a question to her departed sister.

God was the One who spoke in whispers to the soul, not the dead. But whenever Rhoda heard a murmuring in her mind, it was Emma's voice. It had been that way since the day Emma died.

The sound of two people talking near the road caught Rhoda's attention. Surely they were real. She rose out of her crouch, pressing her bare feet into the rich soil, and went in the direction of the voices, passing the long rows of strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries and her trellises of raspberries and Concord grapes. Heady scents rode on the spring air, not just from the ripening fruits, but from her bountiful herb garden that yielded rosemary, sage, scarlet bergamot, and dozens of other plants she'd spent years cultivating. Dusting her palms together, she skirted the raised boxes that held the herbs and peered through a honeysuckle bush.

She was relieved to see actual people speaking to each other. Then she recognized them, and her fingertips tingled as her pulse raced. Her mother's eldest sister walked beside Rueben Glick, a man who wanted to make her life miserable.

"Surely her Daed will listen to me this time." Aunt Naomi clutched her fists tightly. "He indulges her. That's the real problem."

Rhoda had no doubt they were talking about her. Since Emma's death two years ago, the church leaders had avoided responding to all the trouble that Rhoda caused, however unintentional. They offered grace and mercy as her family tried to deal with their grief from the tragedy. But Rueben and Naomi made it their responsibility to keep Rhoda's family aware of how the Amish and non-Amish in Morgansville felt about her.

"I can bring a witness this time, more if need be." Rueben's tone was confident, with a familiar edge of bitterness.

More than anyone else in Morgansville, Rueben detested her. But unlike the others, he was only too happy to speak his mind directly to her and her family. And Rhoda knew why. He wanted to make her pay for turning his girlfriend against him. Rhoda had plenty of things to feel guilty for, but Rueben losing his girlfriend was not one of them.

Her aunt paused at the corner of the fence, studying Rhoda's house. "There should be no need for a witness, especially from those who are not Amish. The quieter we keep this matter, the better."

Rueben had found witnesses who weren't Amish? How? She tried her best to keep anyone from

knowing her business. She never even shared with her family her comings and goings based on intuition. Dread pressed in on her, and she bit back her growing contempt for Rueben Glick.

“Kumm.” Her aunt crossed the driveway with Rueben right beside her. Naomi tapped on the screen door and waited. The fact that she didn’t let herself in was a sign of the troubled feelings between her Daed and his sister-in-law.

Not counting Rhoda, six adults and five children were living in the house right now—her parents, two of her brothers, and their wives and children. Regardless which adult answered the door, Naomi and Rueben would take up matters concerning Rhoda only with her father.

Mamm came to the door and invited her sister and Rueben into the house. Rhoda moved out from behind the honeysuckle bush, curiosity and anxiety mixing inside her. What accusation did Rueben have against her this time? Regardless of the new charge, this visit would put more tension inside an already overloaded household and would only isolate her more. No matter how many people lived with her or how deeply loyal they were, she stood on an island by herself, forbidden to acknowledge the largest part of who she was. She meandered toward the gate, running her fingertips across the various herbs as she went. A few bloomed now, in May, but come July these plants would be bursting with vivid color. More important, they would provide people with natural relief from certain illnesses. She paused in front of the red clover, but despite its name, this particular clover was splashed with lovely purple blooms.

Many of these plants—the clover, dandelion, and thistle, to name a few—were considered nuisances. Like Rhoda herself. But each herb offered health benefits under the right circumstances. Maybe she was like them in that way too. Her people used to believe her, used to trust her with their health. If they would only give her a chance, perhaps she could help them again.

“Rhodes?”

She blinked, coming out of her thoughts and realizing that someone had been calling her name. She turned toward the road that ran along one side of her berry patch.

Landon was sitting in his old pickup on the main road, banging on the door. Officially, he worked for her, but he was also one of her few friends.

“There she is, back from Oz again.”

Although she hadn’t seen the movie, he’d explained enough that she understood Oz was somehow connected to witches. And he was talking about it out loud, right here in the thick of busy Morgansville. She put her index finger to her lips.

Landon grinned. “Okay, I’m hushing—not that it’ll do any good.”

A short line of cars stacked up behind him, and someone honked. He drove forward twenty feet and pulled into her driveway. Once out of his truck, he walked toward her. “In my two years of working for you, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you doing nothing while standing inside this garden.” Before opening the gate, he grabbed one of the empty baskets stacked outside the picket fence. “What has you so distracted?”

She turned away and walked down the long path at the end of the rows. “Just wondering if I ordered

enough canning supplies to last through the month." She kept her back to him so he couldn't read her face and know she was fibbing. She returned to her strawberry bush, crouched down, and began dumping more of the velvety fruit into her basket.

He went to the other side of the row and started picking. "You were studying the red clover. Rotating it out seems like it was a good idea. Looks like we'll get a bumper crop this year. That should give you lots for making that ointment."

"Ya," she mumbled, wishing she knew what was going on inside her house. Did Rueben have proof that she'd disobeyed the church authorities and her parents?

When the back door slammed, she jolted. But it was just one of her sisters-in-law taking another load of freshly cleaned diapers to the clothesline. "First you're in la-la land, and then you jump at nothing. What gives, Rhodes?"

Landon knew her better than most. Emma had once known her best, but what good had that done Emma? If Rhoda had been half the sister Emma deserved, she would still be alive.

Rhoda moved the basket down the row. "How are things at the mail store today?" Maybe if she got him answering questions rather than asking them, she could avoid his probing. The tactic worked most days.

"Still slow. If the economy doesn't pick up soon, working for you may be the only job I have."

"I wish I could afford to pay you for more hours."

"Me too, although both of us in that tiny cellar working long hours week after week might cause one of us to disagree with the other, ya?" His grin lifted her spirits a little.

One of the things she enjoyed about Landon was his ability to speak his mind with total honesty. She loved truthfulness between people. Stark. Radiant. And powerful.

Unfortunately, it seemed to be in short supply—from her most of all.

"What's going on with you today?"

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me, Rhoda."

His use of her real name caught her attention, and she turned to face him. He pointed at his eyes, demanding she look at him. "It's not your fault." She stared at him. Would she ever be able to believe that? Since Emma's death, she hadn't found one moment when she could accept it as true. There was nothing she could do to free herself. And if he knew everything she did, he wouldn't say that to her.

Images flashed through her mind—fire trucks, policemen with guns strapped to their hips, groups of women whispering on the sidewalk. Even now, a crushing sense of guilt and panic rose within her again.

All her sister had wanted was for Rhoda to help her bake a cake for their Daed's birthday. And

Rhoda had promised she would. Throughout the morning Emma kept asking Rhoda to stop weeding her garden and to go buy the items they needed. Even though she was seventeen years old, Emma hated going places by herself. Strangers frightened her. And Rhoda kept putting her off, assuring her they'd have a great time making the dessert when she was finished tending the garden.

Finally, fed up with waiting, in an unusual act of self-reliance, Emma stormed off to the store without Rhoda, her eyes filled with tears.

A strawberry flew throu...

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