

WITH ALL HER
Heart

AN AMISH CALLING NOVEL



ZONDERVAN®

KELLY IRVIN

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ZONDERVAN

With All Her Heart

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*To Tim, for taking those vows—especially the one
about in sickness and health—so seriously.*



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Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18



Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

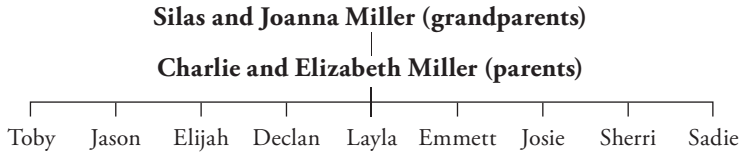
Psalm 9:10



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Featured Families

Lee's Gulch, Virginia



Toby and Rachelle (Lapp) Miller

Declan and Bethel (King) Miller

|
Nathan

Micah and Layla (Miller) Troyer

|
Selah

Marlin (deceased) and Jocelyn (Baumgartner) Yoder (widow)

|
Bonnie

Uriah and Frannie Baumgartner

┌───────────┴───────────┐
Tammy Rose Rodney Carter Thomas Serenity

Theo (widower) and Ellie Beiler (deceased)

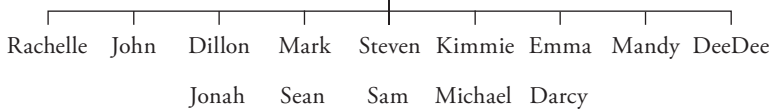
|
Noah

Aaron and Katherine King

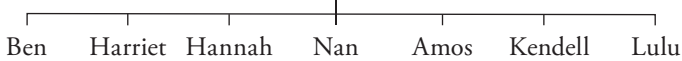
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Bethel Enos Claire Robbie Judah Liam Melinda

Karl and Cara Lapp (grandparents)

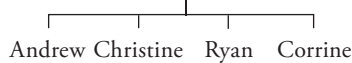
Adam and Leah Lapp



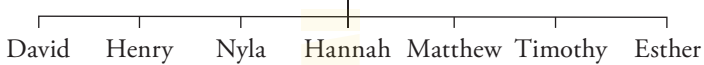
Atlee and Hilda Schrock (nursery owners)



Luke and Deana Beachy



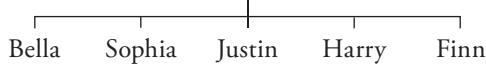
Bartholomew "Bart" (bishop) and Miriam Plank



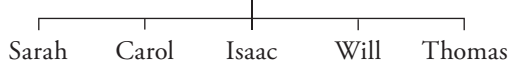
David and Opal (Coblentz) Plank

Tucker

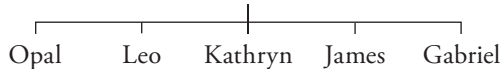
Martin (deacon) and Cindy Hershberger (grocery store owners)



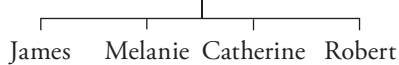
Jedediah "Jed" (minister) and Martha Knepp



Menno and Patience Coblentz



Noah and Mary Eash (parents' committee member)



Glossary of Pennsylvania Deutsch*

aamen: amen

ach: oh

aenti: aunt

bewillkumm: welcome

bopli, boplin: baby, babies

bruder, brieder: brother, brothers

bu, buwe: boy, boys

daadi: grandpa

daed: father

danki: thank you

dat: dad

dawdy haus: attached home for grandparents when they retire

dochder, dechder: daughter, daughters

dumkopf: blockhead

eck: corner table where newly married couple sits during wedding
reception

eldre: parents

Englischer: English or non-Amish

enkel: grandson

eppies: cookies

es dutt mer: I am sorry

faeriwell: good-bye

Glossary of Pennsylvania Deutsch

fraa, weiwer: wife, wives

Froh gebortsaag: Happy birthday

fuhl: fool

gaul: horse

Gelassenheit: a German word, yielding fully to God's will and forsaking all selfishness

gern gsehme: you're welcome

Gmay: church district

groosmammi, groosmammis: grandmother, grandmothers

Gott: God

guder mariye: good morning

gut: good

gut nacht: good night

hallo: hello

halbgscheit: cracked, rattle-brained, crazy

hochmut: pride

hund, hunde: dog, dogs

hundel: puppy (little dog)

jah: yes

kaffi: coffee

kapp: prayer cap or head covering worn by Amish women

kind, kinner: child, children

kinnskind, kinnskinner: grandchild, grandchildren

kossin, kossins: cousin(s)

kuss, koss: (noun) kiss, kisses

maedel, maed: girl, girls

mamm: mom

mammi: grandma

mann, menner: husband, husbands

Mennischt: Mennonite

mudder: mother

Glossary of Pennsylvania Deutsch

narrisch: foolish, silly

nee: no

onkel: uncle

Ordnung: written and unwritten rules in an Amish district

rumspringa: period of ‘running around’ for Amish youth before they decide whether they want to be baptized into the Amish faith and seek a mate

schweschder, schweschdre: sister, sisters

sei so gut: please (be so kind)

suh, seh: son, sons

wittfraa: widow

wittmann: widower

wunderbarr: wonderful

*The German dialect commonly referred to as Pennsylvania Dutch is not a written language and varies depending on the location and origin of the Amish settlement. These spellings are approximations. Most Amish children learn English after they start school. They also learn high German, which is used in their Sunday services.

A Note from the Author

With All Her Heart is book three in the Amish Calling series. It continues the exploration of mental and physical developmental disabilities as well the debilitating diseases experienced by many Amish people because of a limited gene pool, resulting in what geneticists call the founder effect (thoroughly explained in the story you're about to read). These challenges are viewed through the lens of the Amish characters and their corresponding worldview begun in *The Heart's Bidding*. As I mentioned in the author's notes for those first two books, I want readers to know I'm keenly aware of the tender issues that may be raised by the disability community when encountering the Amish term "special" children and their view that these children are "gifts from God."

As a writer, I know better than most the power of words to hurt, demean, make feel less-than, and perpetuate stereotypes. First know that I'm a Christian writer living with a disability. I came by my disability later in life. My struggle to accept this disability is ongoing. I don't see it as a gift from God. However, I respect and value the Amish perspective as Christlike and beautifully loving. Readers will see that Amish believe all children are gifts from God. They employ the term "special" for these babies as a term of

A Note from the Author

affection and love. Therefore, I use it in the context of my Amish characters' points of view. These are their views, not mine, as I walk a narrow path between what the "English" world finds acceptable and representing an authentic Amish voice.

I say all this to respectfully ask readers to honor the Amish view as loving, kind, and so much more Christlike than the worldly view of some would-be "English" parents who hold the belief that bringing a child into the world with disabilities is a choice that can be rejected. I have no doubt that Amish parents agonize, worry, and even shed tears over their "special children." But they choose an attitude of gratitude.

Many of you might disagree with the premise that women should only aspire to be wives and mothers. Others will want to argue that there is no disputing that people with disabilities can excel at any task in the same way that people do who don't have those disabilities. I personally agree. But this is an Amish romance, not an English one. If I'm going to write about the Amish, I must honor and respect their values and faith. They take great pains to not only disengage from the electrical grid, but also from the world's value system. That's how they live their faith. This story reflects that desire.

I hope you will read and enjoy *With All Her Heart*, along with the other two books, in the spirit in which the Amish Calling series is offered—to edify, provoke thought, and shed Christ's light in the world. God bless.

Chapter 1

A humming “Amazing Grace,” Elijah Miller stuck a box filled with wooden toys into the back of his buggy next to a rocking horse, a doll’s cradle, a tiny table with four matching chairs, and a child-size wooden push lawn mower toy. The humming and that particular hymn took his mind off what was coming. He brushed his hands together. “That’ll do it.”

Slowpoke barked once and proceeded to race around the buggy. The gangly pit bull mix, who seemed certain he was still a puppy, had a serious case of the zoomies.

The dog knew how to make Elijah laugh just when his owner needed it. Chuckling, Elijah shoved his straw hat back. He clapped twice. “Hey, are you going with me or what?”

Slowpoke, who was anything but slow, flung himself into the buggy. Panting, his pink tongue hanging out, he plopped down on the passenger side of the bench and smiled at Elijah as if to say, “Ready when you are.”

“I guess that answers my question.” Slowpoke’s company would help. His antics would keep Elijah from obsessing about the reason for his trip to Lee’s Gulch. He’d practiced his speech at least a dozen times in the workshop he built for himself behind his

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family's house. All he had to do was drive into town, park in front of Homespun Handicrafts Shop, walk in, show the owners his wares, and convince them to sell his pieces on consignment.

A walk in the park. For anyone in the world except Elijah. Despite a brisk breeze this cool April morning in Virginia, his palms were damp at the thought. So were his armpits underneath his blue work shirt.

The owners were three Plain women he'd known most of his life. His brain's thoughtful reminder didn't help one iota. Talking to women was even harder. Sweat ran between his shoulder blades down his spine.

He had to do it. Now or never.

Elijah heaved a breath and put one foot up to climb into the buggy.

"Elijah! Elijah, wait!"

Ducking his head, Elijah closed his eyes and opened them. He settled his boot back on the ground, turned, and faced his father. Charlie Miller's cheeks were red and his usual smile missing. "Didn't you hear me calling you, *sub*?"

"I guess I was thinking."

"Daydreaming more likely." His father tromped across the gravel road until he reached the buggy. "Toby says you told him you're not going to Richmond with us tomorrow."

"I thought I'd pass on this trip." Elijah forced himself to straighten and meet his father's gaze. His brother Toby was in charge of the day-to-day tasks of running their auctioneering business that covered five states. That included what he called staff scheduling. "I'm trying to get my business up and running."

His business. His father had agreed to the artisan woodcrafting business as long as it didn't get in the way of the family business. Miller Family Auctioneering needed all its menfolk to

make it work. His grandfather Silas had started the business as a young man. When he retired, Dad took over. His strong suit was working with his hands, not reading, writing, and numbers. He'd learned pretty quick to delegate the scheduling and such to his sons. He expected all five of them to share the load. "Why did you wait until the auction season kicked off to do that?"

Being on the auction circuit all of March had encroached on the time Elijah needed to build up his inventory. But that wasn't the real issue. It had taken him that long to summon the nerve. "I wanted to have my best work to show to the shop owners in town. My very best work."

"I understand you don't feel like you're suited for auctioneering. You're twenty-six. It's long past time for you to get over it." His tone softening, Dad treaded closer. "You took the classes and got certified. You've practiced. Once you're on the platform, it'll come to you. You'll get over the stage fright. I did. Your *brieder* did. You'll see."

Toby loved being center stage. He loved auctioneering. So did Jason. Declan had too, until his throat cancer took away his most important tool—a strong voice. Emmett was eighteen, and he was chomping at the bit to have his turn.

The images whirred in Elijah's brain. *Walk up the steps. Walk across the platform. Pick up the microphone. Face the crowd.* A wave of nausea washed over him. His throat went dry. His heartbeat surged. His hands shook. "I can't," he whispered. "I wish I could, but I can't."

That was a white lie. Fine, a lie. *Forgive me, Gott.* No way Elijah's father would understand. Working in the shop, taking a piece of wood and turning it into a horse or a herd of cattle or a wagon. Birds, possums, foxes, raccoons. No audience. No noise except the robins chattering outside the open windows, the leaves

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rustling on the maple, redbud, and white oak trees, and the crickets serenading him—that was enough. More than enough.

“With Declan not able to call auctions anymore, we really need you.” Dad jerked his thumb toward the road that led to the highway and Lee’s Gulch. “Go. Take your toys into town. See what you can get for them. But when you get back, you best pack your bag. You’re going with us tomorrow.”

Elijah’s toys. Like making toys and children’s furniture didn’t amount to a suitable occupation for a Miller son. Not really a job. Elijah could make full-scale furniture. But seeing his nieces and nephews playing with their little farm animals, pretending to be farmers, happy in their make-believe, it was the best job ever. “*Dat—*”

“We need you to spot bids and help with the inventory if you’re not going to get on the platform.”

Dad might be trying to hide his disappointment, but he wasn’t doing a very good job.

“Understood.” ZONDERVAN®

Whistling tunelessly, Elijah’s father strode toward the business office down the road from the house.

Message delivered.

“Well, that’s that.” Elijah climbed into the buggy and picked up the reins. Slowpoke had curled up on the seat with his snout resting on his mammoth paws. He opened one eye, closed it. Elijah snorted. “A lot of help you were. Some friend you are.”

Slowpoke yawned so widely that his tonsils wiggled. Dogs had tonsils, didn’t they? His stinky doggie breath rolled over Elijah, along with the pungent smell of something that had been dead awhile.

“*Ach*, you stink. If I didn’t need you to listen to my spiel, I’d leave you here. Wake up, sit up, and make yourself useful.”

Slowpoke's good ear, along with the one that had been torn half off when Elijah found the dog, ribs showing, snout bloodied, shivering in the cold as he scavenged for food in the family's trash barrels, perked up. Slowpoke unfurled his long, muscular body and sat up on his haunches. He had slunk away when Elijah yelled at him but paused on the road, head down, tail wagging.

Declan claimed that Slowpoke was the ugliest dog he'd ever seen. Who could look at that ugly face and not feel bad? Slowpoke might be a cross between a German shepherd and a pit bull. It was impossible to say. He had grayish-brown short fur, long legs, and a pit bull-shaped face. Kids were scared of him at first. But his insistence at joining their play—whether it be basketball or hide-and-seek—won them over.

Slowpoke had never met a person he didn't like. He made a good friend.

"Here we go."

For the next hour Elijah practiced his sales pitch. Toby had said he needed a sales pitch. Elijah couldn't simply stroll into a store and expect them to gaze upon his made-with-love toys and fall for them. Store owners were businesspeople. They made decisions based on existing inventory, customer demographics, and proven sales records. Since taking over managing the family business, Toby had acquired a vocabulary that boggled the mind.

All too soon Elijah arrived in downtown Lee's Gulch, a town of about seven thousand that swelled to twice that size with college students in the fall and spring. In the summer months, tourists swarmed local Civil War-era attractions that included a museum and a thirty-one-mile trail that followed the path of Confederate General Robert E. Lee during the war. It was a busy place, which boded well for local artisans like Elijah. Hopefully.

At the moment, the three-block stretch of Main Street dotted

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with Plain-owned businesses and tourist-driven English businesses was quiet. Only a few cars occupied the angled parking slots. Elijah pulled the buggy into the space designated for it and stopped in front of Homespun Handicrafts Shop.

The sweat under his arms was back. His hands were slick on the reins. “Maybe I should wait until I have more doll cradles. They sell a lot of Plain dolls and Raggedy Annes here.” Elijah glanced at Slowpoke. The dog’s ears went up, then flopped down. The doggie version of a shrug. “I know. I’m not a coward.” Even if his dad might think so. “What if they say no?”

What if they didn’t? His dad would never be convinced that Elijah could earn a living making toys and kids’ furniture. “Here goes nothing.”

Elijah hopped down and headed to the back of the buggy. Slowpoke joined him. “Are you going in with me?”

The dog trotted up the long wheelchair ramp that led to the wood-frame-and-glass door, turned, and glanced back with an inquiring face. A wreath of bound straw, daisies, sunflowers, and purple asters covered the window under a painted wood sign that said WELCOME! And underneath it BEWILLKUMM!

“I’m coming, I’m coming.”

Elijah gathered up the box of toys and headed for the door. It swung wide just as he attempted to balance the box on his knee so he could open it.

“*Hallo, hallo, bewillkumm.* It’s nice to see you, Elijah.” Bonnie Yoder, one of the shop’s co-owners, had one hand on the door, the other on her walker. Her smile grew as Slowpoke pranced in ahead of Elijah. “And you too, sir. I assume you’re with Elijah.”

Slowpoke woofed softly and kept going.

“I hope it’s okay if Slowpoke comes in. He sees himself as my business partner.”

“Mr. Slowpoke is certainly welcome, as long as he minds his manners. I suspect he’ll do a better job than some of our two-legged customers.” Smiling, Bonnie pointed toward a basket of baby quilts. An enormous, cream-colored, fluffy cat slept in it. The cat raised its head, opened one eye, then went back to snoozing. “Puff is officially employed here as a mouser, but she likes to think she owns the place. As long as Slowpoke doesn’t bother her, she won’t bother him.”

“Slowpoke’s indoor manners are better than a lot of people’s. That’s for sure and for certain.” Elijah shifted the box and leaned his shoulder into the door. “I’ve got the door. I don’t want you to fall.”

“My balance isn’t that bad.” Bonnie’s smile faded. “My legs aren’t so weak I can’t hold the door for a customer.”

“I’m not a customer.” Elijah cringed inwardly. If he was bad at making conversation with people in general, he was at his worst with women. Even ones like Bonnie whom he’d known since first grade. Especially pretty, soft-spoken Bonnie, who didn’t have a mean bone in her body. She would never tease a shy kid. And she had warm caramel eyes and chestnut curls that often refused to stay under her prayer covering. Not that he’d noticed. “What I mean is, I mean, it’s, these are . . .”

Stutter, stumble, stuck. That was him.

Bonnie grabbed her walker, which had wheels, which meant it was probably called something else, and moved away from the door. “Regardless, it’s always nice to see a familiar face. What brings you by?”

“I . . .” Elijah’s sales pitch, so earnestly memorized, disappeared. Frantic, he searched his memory. The overwhelming scents of cinnamon, blueberry, vanilla, lemon, and a potpourri of other scents emanating from homemade candles and soaps assailed him. His head hurt. Slowpoke woofed from the spot he’d commandeered

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as his own near the window display of Plain dolls. *I know, I know.*
Heat billowed. Elijah's face burned. "I . . ."

His mind had gone blank.



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Chapter 2

Elijah Miller's stricken expression sent a flaming arrow straight to Bonnie Yoder's heart. She angled her rollator between him and the door to keep him from making a run for it. "That box looks heavy." She gentled her voice, talking to him the way her father used to talk to the stray cats he fed scraps to on the back porch after supper on frigid winter nights. The thought of her father's kindness didn't hurt as much as it would've only a few months earlier. "Why don't you set it on the table over there where we have the craft classes?"

His head bent as if studying the box's contents, Elijah didn't move.

Okay, that was okay. Bonnie waved at Hannah Plank, her part-timer, who'd been straightening and dusting merchandise on the displays by the floor-to-ceiling windows at the front of the shop. "Hannah, can you handle the cash register while I talk with Elijah?"

Hannah's big grin signaled her delight at the added responsibility. The seventeen-year-old had worked at the shop for about six months, mostly cleaning or helping customers and artisans carry packages. "No problem."

With only one customer, an English lady from nearby Nathalie

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in the store, she was probably right. “*Danki*. Just call out if you have any questions.”

Taking advantage of an aisle made extra wide to accommodate wheelchairs, Bonnie passed Elijah and took the lead past displays of leather goods, jewelry, birdhouses, candles, soaps, ceramics, pottery, paintings, scarves, totes, baskets, and handmade greeting cards, all created by area artisans. Then bookshelves filled with books written by Plain authors and even some Amish romance novels written by English authors followed. Bonnie and her co-owners did their best to give local and regional artisans, specifically ones with disabilities, a place to sell their wares.

If Elijah noticed the carefully curated displays, he didn’t say anything. Bonnie’s earliest memories of him were of a boy who rarely spoke and never raised his hand in class. If his older brothers hadn’t insisted on including him in games during recess and after church, he probably would’ve sat them out. He was too shy to ask to join in.

Big brothers Toby and Jason also took care of anyone who dared to pick on a Miller kid. They were a close-knit family. A person always knew when she was seeing a Miller boy too, because they were all cut from the same cloth: tall, lean, blond hair, blue eyes, and dimples. Elijah was shorter and slighter but still had the trademark dimples and sky-blue eyes. If he knew he was a handsome man, he surely didn’t show it.

What made a child in a family of boisterous, loud, outgoing kids so painfully shy? Maybe it was exactly that. He couldn’t compete. Bonnie had no way of knowing. She was an only child who often longed for a noisy bunch of siblings, especially a sister.

It never happened, much to her parents’ sadness. “*Not Gott’s plan*,” Bonnie’s mother had always said. Instead His plan somehow involved allowing their only child to be born with a rare disease called type three spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA for short.

Now wasn't the time to noodle the nature of that unfairness or the others that seemed to follow. Like her dad slipping away, his heart giving out while he slept after a hard day's work at a barn raising almost two years earlier.

"Two or three times a week and every Saturday, we offer customers the chance to learn some of the crafts represented by our artisans." Maybe her prattle would help Elijah relax and keep her mind off what couldn't be helped. "Last week Sophia led a class in watercolors. Even though it's not tourist season yet, we had ten ladies participate. All English, mostly from around Lee's Gulch. I call that a success."

Sophia Hershberger was one of Homespun Handicrafts' three co-owners. She'd been in a buggy accident at age eleven that resulted in paralysis of her legs. She used a wheelchair to get around. A talented artist, she created greeting cards, postcards, and small framed paintings that regularly sold out.

Bonnie glanced back to make sure Elijah still followed. He did, along with Slowpoke, who panted as if he'd been chasing a possum across an open field. He surely felt his owner's nerves and wanted to make sure no one gave Elijah a hard time. Such a good dog.

Bonnie stopped at one of the long wooden tables used for the classes. After locking the brakes on her rollator, she balanced herself with one hand and used her other one to quickly move aside skeins of yarn, knitting needles, sewing kits stuffed with embroidery threads in bright colors, needles, tomato-shaped pin cushions, and small scissors.

"For the next three months, Carol is teaching classes twice a week in crochet, embroidery, and knitting. We have a ton of women signed up. It always interests me to see trends that bring back crafts that were once skills all women were expected to have. So many of them remember their grandmas and great-grandmas making quilts

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or embroidering dresser scarves and knitting mittens and shawls. Most of them can't darn a sock or reattach a button."

Carol Knepp, the shop's third co-owner, was born with a mild form of spina bifida that she never let slow her down. She handled her crutches like extensions of her body. A person should pray for anyone who got in her way, but when it came to their customers who wanted to learn to sew, Carol had an unending wealth of patience.

The kind of patience a person needed to coax a shy person from his shell. Her co-owners loved what they called "helping the underdog." Elijah definitely fell in that category. "Sophia and Carol will be here in a bit. They come in later and stay later so we can have extended store hours." Bonnie patted the table. "You can set your box right here."

Elijah obliged. Bonnie restrained herself from peeking. Elijah's mother, Elizabeth, and his sisters always talked about how talented he was, but Bonnie had never seen his work. Unless they were a member of the Millers' massive extended family, most people hadn't. Restraining herself, she inhaled the enticing scent of fresh coffee and cocked her head toward the nearby coffee and pastry bar. "Would you like some *kaffi*? We have cinnamon rolls and banana-nut muffins if you're interested."

The complimentary offerings kept browsing customers in the store longer, which frequently led to more sales.

Elijah rubbed his clean-shaven face with both hands. His Adam's apple bobbed. "*Nee*, but danki."

Likely he was too nervous to think about food or drink. "Maybe later, after we're done with business. I don't know about you, but I could drink *kaffi* all day long. I do, in fact. My *mamm* baked the pastries so I can vouch for them being mighty tasty." Elijah heaved a

breath. A little less tense now? Bonnie tapped on the box. “I’d loved to see what you’ve brought us. May I?”

Elijah nodded. Slowpoke woofed in obvious agreement.

“*Wunderbarr.*”

It was hard to know where to start. Elijah had filled it with handmade flannel bags. One contained a set of miniature farm animals, all painstakingly painted in realistic colors. Another held forest animals. Deer, raccoon, fox, rabbits, frogs, squirrels, and a wolf, all whittled by hand. A third featured zoo animals. “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my.” Bonnie bestowed her most encouraging smile on him. “These are beautiful. Almost too beautiful to let *kinner* play with them.”

“Nee. Toys.” Elijah touched the rooster with an oversized red crest. “For *kinner* to have fun.”

Now he was talking. Bonnie nodded. They would make an arresting display next to the dolls, stuffed animals, and puppets she and her friend Opal Plank created—when Opal, who was married and had a baby now—had time. The usual pesky envy twinged in Bonnie’s chest. Smaller than it had been when Opal confided that she and David would marry. Hard work kept the ugly envy at bay.

Focus on the shop. The shop gave Plain folks like herself, with disabilities, a way to earn their keep when traditional Plain tasks couldn’t be accomplished. More importantly it gave them a sense of self-worth, a sense that they contributed just as their abled family members did.

Elijah didn’t have a physical disability, but his shy nature might be considered a disability by his family of outgoing auctioneers if it kept him from fulfilling their expectations that he, too, be an auctioneer. Maybe he never wanted that life. Maybe his craft fulfilled him.

“We’ve been wanting to expand our toy section. These beauties

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will make great birthday and Christmas presents.” Bonnie smoothed her fingers over a horse pull toy and admired its regal bearing. “Even the *Englischer* shoppers will want them so they can display ‘Amish-made’ knickknacks in their homes next to their quilt wall hangings. You do beautiful work.”

“Danki.” He ducked his head, making it hard to see his face under his straw hat. After a second, he reached into the box and pulled out a sheet of paper. Without looking at her directly, he held it out. “Lots to choose from.”

Indeed. “Yo-yos, tic-tac-toe games, Noah’s ark with two dozen animals, wooden tractor and wagon, alphabet boards, a barn with farm animals, a corral with horses, a wooden piggy bank.” Bonnie ran down the inventory list on which each item was meticulously described. “And that’s just a start. I see you have kinner’s furniture as well. Did you bring any of those for me to see?”

Elijah’s head came up. The beginnings of hope mixed with obvious surprise flitted across his face. “I can get them if you really want to see them. They’re not much. I mean, I try to make them nice . . .”

“If they’re anything like what you’ve shown me so far, they’ll be just what I’ve been wanting.” Bonnie popped the rollator’s brakes, wheeled around, and pointed it toward the door. “I’ll come with you.”

“Nee, nee, I’ll bring them to you.”

“If you’re going to do business here at Homespun Handicrafts, the first thing you have to learn is not to treat us like we’re not able to do for ourselves.” Bonnie silently berated herself. She could’ve been more diplomatic about it, but this was her number-one pet peeve. “I know you’re just trying to help, but the best thing you can do is ask if I need help first. If I do, I’ll let you know.”

His face red as a candied apple, Elijah nodded jerkily. “Is it all right if I get the door for you?”

“That would be great.” She reached for her most conciliatory tone. Mom was always telling her she was way too prickly. Mom didn’t have everyone trying to wait on her hand and foot. She probably wished she did sometimes. “One day I’d love to install one of those doohickeys that opens the door automatically, when we can afford it.”

They had electricity in the store, but it was bare bones and needed to be upgraded. They had to be careful not to overtax it. First priority was keeping the air-conditioning working, which the English customers expected. Ceiling fans weren’t enough during the summer months. They wouldn’t browse if they were sweating, and if they didn’t browse, they didn’t buy. Plus the automatic door mechanisms were expensive themselves.

Slowpoke led the way to the buggy. He hopped into the back as if he would do the show-and-tell himself. He really was a good friend and business partner. Bonnie hung back to give Elijah a chance to gather his thoughts. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Elijah leaned into the buggy and pulled out an old-fashioned rocking horse with the ease of a man who did heavy lifting. His biceps strained against his shirt’s faded blue cotton sleeves. He set the horse on the sidewalk. He nudged the head and set the horse rocking. The woodworking was beautiful. Bonnie ran her hand over the padded leather-covered seat and examined the yarn mane and tail. “This is really nice. Beautiful work. Is it walnut?”

“Oak with a medium walnut stain.” He ducked his head, his face darkening to a scarlet hue. The man had a hard time taking a compliment. “My *schweschdne* helped me with the yarn. Josie and Sherri help with painting the animals too. What they do, Sadie has to do, of course.”

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Elijah's sister Sadie was born with Down syndrome—not that she let that stand in her way.

“Opal Plank helps me with a lot of the fine sewing needed for my dolls and sock puppets and my stuffed animals.” Bonnie's fingers weren't nimble enough for the fine work. “It's *gut* to have help, especially family. They must be excited for you to start your own business.”

If that was what this was. Someone as talented as Elijah could go a long way toward earning a living with his skills. Bonnie studied his face. His expression had gone wooden. His calloused fingers smoothed the horse's mane. “Some of them,” he mumbled.

Some of them. But not all. *Don't you worry, Elijah, we'll win them over. In time.* Just as Bonnie had won over her parents when they'd objected to three young, single, Plain women, all with disabilities, opening their own business. It hadn't been easy. But that was a story to be shared at another time. “What else did you bring?”

Next came a child-size table and four chairs. Then a child's footstool and a wagon big enough for two kids. Followed by a child's desk and chair. And then a child-size push lawn mower with moving parts.

“This is wunderbarr. How fun.” Bonnie rolled closer. She gave the mower a gentle push. The inner workings made a *clink-clink* as the barrel turned. “English kinner will have fun with this too.”

They wouldn't know what it was used for since their own parents likely used gas-powered or electric mowers. Plain children didn't have to wait long before they were enlisted to cut the yard with a real push mower. “These will make great nostalgia pieces for older English shoppers.”

“You think so?” For the first time, Elijah seemed to forget his awkwardness. “You're really interested in selling them?”

“Of course we’re interested. Do you know how consignment works?”

“I make the toys. You sell them. We split the proceeds.”

Simple as that. “It’s a sixty-forty split. Does that sound fair?”

“I get forty. You get sixty. That seems fair.”

“Nee, nee. You get sixty. We get forty.”

“Ah, ah.”

“Why don’t you bring them into the shop? Then we’ll fill out the paperwork. It’s important to get everything in writing.”

The beginning of a smile blossomed into a full-fledged grin. Her grip tightening on the rollator handles, Bonnie paused, suddenly breathless. She racked her memories. Surely she’d seen Elijah smile during their school years. Maybe not. She would’ve remembered that knock-your-apron-off smile.

“I’m right behind you.” Elijah blessedly didn’t seem to notice her sudden disorientation. “Do you want me to get the door first?”

He learned quicker than most. Bonnie settled the lawn mower on the rollator seat. “Sure. If you’ll put the doorstep in front of the door, I’ll get Hannah to help you bring in the other items. She’ll show you where to put them in the storage area. Once that’s done, you and I can talk business. After we set the prices, she’ll help you create the inventory tags and attach them.”

“I would like to talk business.” Elijah’s tone held undisguised surprise. “Very much.”

“Gut.” Bonnie trudged back inside. Her brain wanted to run. Her weak legs would never cooperate. It was ridiculous to be so aware of a man like Elijah. He was here on business. He wouldn’t think twice about a woman like her.

Disability made no difference to Plain folks when it came to family. They loved every child, abled or disabled, equally. But Plain men needed wives who could take care of the house, bake, sew

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clothes, plant and reap gardens, and take care of babies with little or no help.

The thought of babies brought with it the memory of Dr. Newcomb's question during her last appointment at the Center for Special Children. A searing heat swept over Bonnie.

"Are you dating, Bonnie? As we've discussed before, there's no reason you shouldn't."

Dr. Newcomb had sat Bonnie down years early to explain that she could have romance, marry, and bear children. Her life expectancy, praise God, was the same as any other woman's. Childbearing would be harder and might cause her muscle weakness to progress more quickly, but women with SMA did it.

Maybe English women with their electric appliances and bounty of conveniences, but how could a Plain woman with limited mobility cook, clean, bake, can, garden, and take care of children when she didn't have the strength in her arms to pick up a baby, let alone carry him around or bathe him? Because of the titanium rods that guarded her spine against further progression of her scoliosis, she couldn't bend over to pick up a toddler, even if she had the strength. She couldn't run after a wayward child who decided to toddle too close to the road or deep water. She couldn't keep him safe.

Dr. Newcomb's question had been salt in the wound. As if to say, "What are you waiting for?"

Waiting for someone to ask me to take a buggy ride.

Waiting for someone to see past the rollator. Waiting for someone to see beyond my limitations to my potential.

"Men see the rollator first. Old ladies use walkers. Not the kind of woman a man wants to court."

Her expression so full of kindness it hurt Bonnie's heart, Dr. Newcomb had patted Bonnie's arm. *"Any man worth his salt will*

look past that rollator and see a beautiful, smart, funny, hardworking woman he'd be blessed to have as a wife."

"Would he be blessed? The honest answer seems to be no, not really."

"Don't sell yourself short."

"I'm not. I'm trying to be realistic."

Having pie-in-the-sky dreams didn't help Bonnie. It created longing, discontentment, and a peevish desire for things she couldn't have. Better to seek contentment and count blessings.

That was Mom talking in her ear. Mom, who sought to be content in her new life as a widow.

Most of the time Bonnie tried to take a page from that same book. She was happy with the life she'd carved out for herself. She loved her store and her job. But sometimes, like today, it hurt to think a kind, sweet man like Elijah wouldn't give her a second thought.

To him, Bonnie was likely just business.

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Chapter 3

*N*o spiel necessary. All that worry for naught. God’s Word advised against worrying. Yet Elijah couldn’t fathom how a person stopped. How long had he been holding his breath? He exhaled, wiped his sweaty palms on his pants, and followed Hannah into the shop’s storage room, filled with a desk complete with a computer monitor to one side, a round table and chairs, and a mini refrigerator. Beyond that, under a bank of four windows, stood an electric-powered treadle sewing machine next to a long worktable covered with all manner of cloth, felt, dolls, stuffed animals, and puppets in various stages of completion. This space did quadruple duty—storage, office, workspace, and break room. Even so, they kept it clean and well organized, and it smelled of a forest air freshener.

“We’ll keep your items in the box for now until you get your tags on them. You can’t do that until you and Bonnie agree to a price for your items.” Hannah set the rocking horse she’d taken from Bonnie’s walker onto the floor in front of an open section of wooden shelves that reached to the ceiling. She pointed to an open spot above the horse. “Take that space near the middle. It’ll make

it easier for you to put the tags on and for me to reach them when it's time to build the display.”

Elijah squeezed past her. If Hannah had any qualms about making conversation with a Plain man she hardly knew, she didn't show them. He racked his brain for something to say. “You design the displays?”

“Nee. Bonnie does all that. She has an eye for it. I just carry everything to the front and do any heavy lifting needed.”

When Hannah smiled, which she seemed to do a lot, she was the spitting image of her father, Bishop Bart Plank. The hair around her prayer covering was the same golden blonde, and she had the same inquisitive pale-blue eyes and wiry build. Still grinning, as if tickled by the idea that she might do display design, she turned to the cart that held the remainder of Elijah's bigger items. “Sometimes I get to help customers if they're busy. I like that too.”

“It's a gut job.” Glad to have something to do with his hands, Elijah slipped his box onto the shelf. The task of making conversation with a girl he knew only because she was friends with his sister Josie wore him out worse than a day working in the family's alfalfa fields. “How long have you worked here?”

“Six months in April.” Hannah retreated toward the door. “It's fun because Bonnie and the others like to tease each other and talk and laugh. It's not all business all the time. I do work, though. I dust, sweep, mop, and I also clean the bathroom. I earn my pay.”

“I never doubted it.” Heat ran through Elijah. Had he suggested otherwise? “Josie works in the auction office now.”

“Josie's good with numbers like your *schweschder* Layla. Me, not so much.”

Lots of numbers swirled in Elijah's head at that moment. He did okay with numbers. Not great, but not bad. He'd been an average student. Good enough to get by. A sixty-forty split. It was more

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than equitable, but now Elijah needed to calculate and set his prices to cover the cost of materials, his own labor, and a fair profit. How much would he need in order to buy more supplies?

Thoughts, ideas, and a surge of almost overwhelming hope swirled around him. He could do this. A Miller man could start a new business, one that had nothing to do with auctions, stages, microphones, and chatty customers who wanted to know all about this bed set or that table and chairs. Nothing to do with sleeping in hotels and eating in restaurants, facing an unending gauntlet of strangers.

His toys on display in a store. The thought didn't fill Elijah with pride so much as determination. Determination and hope. He could make his own way.

"Help yourself to a soda pop from the fridge if you're thirsty." Hannah dusted off her hands and headed for the door. "There's a pitcher of water too."

"Danki," Elijah muttered, still thinking about sixty-forty commissions. "For the help too."

"Bewillkumm to the store."

Elijah sank into a chair at the table. He needed a pencil and piece of paper to make a list of supplies he'd buy from the lumber hardware stores. His hands itched to get started. He pulled his pocketknife and a small piece of wood from his pocket. The fox with a bushy tail had taken its time revealing itself. He smoothed his fingers over its thin snout and pointy nose. His fingers shook. Maybe not the best time to whittle.

But whittling would calm his nerves.

"Sorry for the wait." Bonnie rolled into the room. She paused at the desk, where she grabbed a sheaf of papers. "A customer way-laid me wanting to talk about custom-made quilts. I don't do quilt consignments. I don't want to cut into the Kauffmans' business."

Quilts are their bread and butter at their store. Some people are just too lazy to drive out to their farm.”

Elijah nodded. Made sense. Not much more needed to be said. A quilt lover could find bed-size quilts, crib blankets, lap quilts, doll-size quilts, and pot holders, plus everything needed to make quilts at Kauffmans’ Store. Plus quilting frolics and classes. The Miller womenfolk had quilts on consignment there. They loved the store too.

Bonnie laid the paperwork on the table. She then turned her rollator around and used it as her chair. “The padded seat is more comfy than the chairs,” she said as if by way of explanation. “That’s a cute fox. You do such fine work. How did you learn to whittle like that?”

He hadn’t learned so much as it just happened. Elijah shrugged. “The wood talks to me.”

She would think he was nuts, but he’d simply spoken the truth. He didn’t know how else to explain it.

“I love it.” There was that smile again. How could a person not smile back? Bonnie turned the top sheet of paper so it faced Elijah. “Now that you’ve had time to think about it, are you okay with the sixty-forty split?”

Elijah nodded again.

“Wunderbarr.”

Her caramel eyes warm, Bonnie held out the contract. When some of the boys had teased Elijah at recess, she’d shoved her way through their cliques, using her walker—in those days it had been a silver metal contraption with neon tennis balls on the front legs—to get to him. She told the boys she needed Elijah to carry her books to her buggy or return her lunch box to the schoolroom.

The truth was, Bonnie really hadn’t needed anyone’s help when she was younger. She drove herself to school in a pony cart and

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never let anyone help her unhitch or hitch her pony. Buttercup—that was the pony’s name. She couldn’t play baseball or volleyball, but she played a mean game of cornhole. And she always won the English spelling bees.

It didn’t matter what time of day it was, her prayer cover neatly hid her hair’s bun. Her dress and apron were clean and unwrinkled.

It was obvious her disease had progressed from her legs to her arms, making them weaker, but she still had the same neat appearance and kind voice.

“Elijah?”

Bonnie’s dark brows had risen. The paperwork still hung in the air. Heat scalded Elijah’s face. His ears burned. She’d surely caught him studying her high cheekbones and pretty, perfectly shaped nose. Some might call what he did woodworking or whittling, but it was more like art, and he had an eye for what was symmetrical and beautiful. Bonnie was beautiful. Elijah accepted the document. “*Es-es-es dutt mer*,” he stuttered. “I was thinking.”

“Thinking hard. I know how that is. I get lost in thought sometimes. Mamm gets irritated with me.”

Same with Elijah’s mom, but more so with his dad. “Same here.”

“Go ahead and review the contract. Read the fine print. In the meantime, I’ll make a list of what I’d like to have in the first order.”

The room was quiet except for the scratching sound of Bonnie’s pencil on paper. The contract was detailed. They would set the price for his items together. They would keep a written inventory of what sold and when. He would be paid once a month. If an item or category of items didn’t sell in six months, those items would be returned to him.

“Do you have any questions?”

Elijah looked up to find Bonnie studying him. He shook his head.

“Are you sure? You seem . . . concerned.”

“Nee.” He glanced around. “I don’t have a pen.”

“I’ll get you one.” She started to rise.

“Nee. Let me.”

“I told you I can do for myself.” She sounded peeved.

“It’s not about you being able or not.” Elijah searched for words that wouldn’t offend her more. It would be easier to let it go, but her being mad at him didn’t set right. “Isn’t it polite for a man to offer to help a woman—any woman—no matter what the world says about equality and such?”

“You’re right.” Her cheeks reddened, which only made her prettier. “My *mudder* says I’m prickly as a desert filled with cacti, but I don’t like people to think I can’t take care of myself.”

“I would never think that.” Not in a billion years. “Can I get the pen?”

“Of course. *Sei so gut.*”

Now they were both being polite. Elijah didn’t need a please or a thank-you. Finally he had the pen in hand and the contract signed.

“Here’s my list.” Bonnie handed it over in exchange for the contract. “I’m not sure how fast you can turn these items around, so I’m not setting a deadline, but sooner rather than later would be gut. The tourist season seems to arrive earlier every year. In the meantime, I can sell the items you brought today, if you like.”

Five corrals with horses, wood tractors, alphabet boards, and children’s stools each. *Each!* A dozen wooden yo-yos. Five Noah’s arks with the animals. Four more push mowers. Four more rocking horses. A child’s desk and chair. A checkers set. A wooden toy box

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to use in the toy display. The display of Elijah's toys. "That would be great."

"I know you have up-front expenses for your supplies." She tapped the table with one finger. "I can give you a down payment against sales if need be."

Elijah had a nest egg from his auctioneering salary. As an unmarried brother still living at home, he didn't pull down nearly what his married brothers did. Which was only fair. He was able to save most of it, except for what he spent on workshop supplies. "Not necessary."

"Gut. Then let's set prices for what you've brought me today."

This would be hard. The more he earned, the more he could save toward opening his own business. With an employee who would handle the front end—dealing with customers and taking orders. Still, he didn't want to price himself out of sales. "I think twenty-five dollars for the rocking horse. I know that's a lot—"

"A lot?" Bonnie hooted. "Seriously?"

"I could go down to twenty—"

"Elijah! You truly don't get how in demand well-made, hand-crafted Amish toys and furniture are." Shaking her head, Bonnie clasped her hands together. "Fifty dollars would be on the low end."

"Seriously?"

"I can show you some in an Etsy store that they want ninety-five for."

"What's an Etsy store?"

"It doesn't matter. The point is, we want you to get enough to recoup your costs and still make a nice profit for both of us."

Agreed. "So what you think, then?"

"I'd say sixty-five, ninety-five."

His mom would likely faint. She'd talked about selling them in the combination store for thirty dollars. "If you think they'll sell."

“They’ll sell.”

Down the list they went, setting prices that seemed far too high. Bonnie assured Elijah if any item didn’t sell initially, they could reduce the price before withdrawing it from the inventory. “Sometimes it’s trial and error to hit the sweet spot for consumers.”

She sounded like the English men who came to the auctions to buy furniture that they would resell on the internet as “authentic Amish furniture.” They had to know just how much to pay and still be able to sell it for a profit.

“You’re sure these prices are—?”

“Elijah, your *bruder* is out front!” Panting as if she’d run a race, Hannah dashed into the room. Slowpoke hopped to his feet and barked at her. “Hush, *hund*. He says come quick.”

“Which *bruder*?” Like it mattered. Elijah stood. Leaving the paperwork, he ducked past the girl and raced toward the door. “Es dutt mer. I have to go.”

Slowpoke’s bark grew louder.

A clatter sounded behind Elijah.

“Ach, ach, Slowpoke!”

Elijah whirled. Bonnie lay flat on her back, her rollator lying on top of her.

Chapter 4

*N*ee, nee.” Elijah rushed to where Bonnie lay on the storage room’s tiled floor. He knelt and thrust the rollator aside. “Slowpoke, back off, back off now.”

“It’s not his fault.” Wincing, Bonnie raised her head. Her hand touched her prayer covering. “He wanted to go first. I understood. He didn’t want to get left behind. I tried to back up to get out of his way. I’m not supposed to do that—not in a hurry, anyway. I lost my balance and fell backward. Like a *dumkoph*, I didn’t think to let go of the rollator.”

“Are you hurt?” Elijah took her arm, then released it. He shouldn’t touch her without her permission. Or maybe even with it. “Do we need to call 911?”

“I’m fine. I’m gut.” Her face bright red, she struggled to sit up. “I never fall down anymore. I’m always so careful.”

“A dog underfoot doesn’t help.” Embarrassment flooded Elijah. He should never have brought Slowpoke into the storage room. He’d taken the man’s-best-friend pact too far. “Can I help you up?”

“What’s going on in here?”

The voice tinged with anger and concern didn’t belong to a man. Elijah glanced over his shoulder. Jocelyn Yoder swept into

the room, followed by Elijah's brother Toby. Jocelyn didn't wait for an answer. She pushed past Hannah and Slowpoke and dropped to her knees. "Why are you on the floor, *Dochter*? What is Elijah doing in here with you?"

A fresh wave of mortification threatened to drown Elijah. "I was . . . we were . . . we just—"

"Elijah is our newest vendor, Mamm." Bonnie grabbed her mother's hand. "Help me up. It was just a little fall. It's not his fault. I'm fine. Everybody's fine."

"Jocelyn is right, though. The hund doesn't belong in the store." Toby had an arm around Slowpoke, holding him back. The dog whimpered. "Elijah, Jason is on his way to the hospital in Richmond. The paramedics think his appendix ruptured."

Elijah stumbled to his feet. "I have to go, Bonnie. If you don't want to do business with me—"

"Because I fell down? Don't be *halbgscheit*." Bonnie grasped both her mother's hands. Jocelyn tugged her into a sitting position. "Start bringing in your inventory as soon as you can."

"He'll have to get back to you on that." Toby nudged Slowpoke toward the door. "Let's go, Bruder."

"Es dutt mer." Saying the same phrase over and over wouldn't change the result. If only it could. Elijah swiped the contract from the table and stuffed it into the folder on his way from the storage room. He raced to keep up with Toby, who was halfway to the front door.

"What's going on?"

Sophia Hershberger pulled her wheelchair into his path. Behind her Carol Knepp swung to a stop on her crutches. The two presented a united front, their expressions fierce. "What happened?"

"Bonnie fell, but I think she's okay. She says she is." In his haste Elijah stumbled. He knocked into a display of sewn goods. Two

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sweaters tumbled to the floor. He paused to scoop them up. “Es dutt mer, es dutt mer.”

“Out of the way.” Sophia bulldozed past him. “Let us through.”

Elijah squeezed into the next aisle. The two women left him standing there without a second glance.

“Don’t worry about Bonnie. They’ll take care of her. They take care of each other. They’re the three musketeers.” Hannah popped up next to him. She took the sweaters from him. “You go take care of your family.”

“That’s gut. It’s gut.”

Elijah heaved a breath and shoved through the door. Outside Toby had already climbed into his buggy. He held the reins. His heart still slamming against his rib cage, Elijah paused at his buggy. “Is Jason going to be all right?”

“The paramedics were talking about infection. If the appendix burst, pus and bacteria leak all over your insides.” Toby’s expression was grim. The muscle in his jaw pulsed. “He’s so *narrisch*. He’s been throwing up and complaining of a stomachache for two days. He insisted it was food poisoning.”

Calling his brother stupid was Toby’s way of saying he was worried. “But he’ll be okay?”

“It’s in Gott’s hands.” Toby wrapped the reins around his hands. His broad shoulders hunched. “*Dat* hired a van. He and Mamm and Caitlin are on their way to the hospital. She was beside herself, not being able to go in the ambulance with her husband, but she needed someone to watch the kinner. Josie is doing it. *Dat* will call when they know something.”

“So we’re not going to Richmond?”

“Not to the hospital, nee. We have an auction tomorrow, remember? We have a contract. We can’t let those folks down.”

Elijah’s heart revved. Hands shaking, he untied the reins

from the hitching post. They dropped to the ground. A low whine rumbled in Slowpoke's throat. He thought he was in trouble. Elijah picked up the reins. "It's okay, buddy." He climbed into the buggy. "Why do I have to go to Richmond?"

"Because we need you to call an auction. Jason was supposed to handle the furniture and household goods. Who knows how long he'll be out." Stress lines carved lines around Toby's mouth. "*Daadi* is coming along as backup, but he wants you to call it."

Dad had to stay with Jason. No question about that. Still, dread careened through Elijah. His stomach rocked. His sweaty palms were back. "Ach, it would be better for *Daadi* to do it. He's experienced."

"His arthritis has gotten worse. His joints hurt if he stands too long." Toby snapped the reins and clucked at his horse. "See you back at the farm. You can help us finish loading the trailers and then pack your bag."

Elijah smoothed the folder for a second. God's plans always came before man's best-laid plans, Mamm would say. He climbed into his buggy next to Slowpoke. "They're called accidents for a reason." He patted the dog's head. "Bonnie said it wasn't your fault."

Slowpoke lowered his head and settled onto the seat.

"I'm not sure how fast you can turn these items around, so I'm not setting a deadline, but sooner rather than later would be gut. The tourist season seems to arrive earlier every year." Bonnie with her head for business and a sweet smile that made it almost easy to talk to her.

Five corrals with horses, wood tractors, alphabet boards, and children's stools each. Each! A dozen wooden yo-yos. Five Noah's arks with the animals. Four more push mowers. Four more rocking horses. A child's desk and chair. A checkers set. A wooden toy box to use in the toy display. The display of Elijah's toys.

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He could still work on the smaller items between auctions. It was only until Jason got back on his feet.

Sure.

“Elijah!”

He glanced up. Toby had pulled into the street, headed for home. “Don’t just sit there, Bruder,” he called over his shoulder.

“Get a move on. We need you.”

The family needed him. Family came first.

“Right behind you, Bruder.”

The dream would have to wait.



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