

## PRAISE FOR AMY CLIPSTON

“Amy Clipston has once again penned a sweet romance that will have her readers rooting for a heroine who deserves her own happily-ever-after. Crystal Glick is a selfless, nurturing woman who has spent her life caring for others—to the detriment of her dream of a family of her own. Duane Bontrager is a much older widow with three nearly grown sons. Readers are in for a treat as these two overcome one obstacle after another to be together. The real stars of the show, however, are Crystal’s nieces and nephews. They’re enchanting. Grab a cup of coffee, a piece of pie, *Foundation of Love*, and settle in for a lovely Clipston story.”

—KELLY IRVIN, AUTHOR OF *THE BEEKEEPER’S SON AND UPON A SPRING BREEZE*

“A heartwarming story that works as both a standalone romance and a satisfying series installment.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON *THE COFFEE CORNER*

“Clipston always writes unique and compelling stories and this is a good collection of light reading for evenings.”

—PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL ON *AN AMISH SINGING*

“Amy Clipston’s characters are always so endearing and well-developed, and Salina and Will in *The Farm Stand* are some of my favorites. I enjoyed how their business relationship melded into a close friendship, and then eventually turned into so much more. *The Farm Stand* honors the Amish community in the very best of ways. I loved it.”

—SHELLEY SHEPARD GRAY, *NEW YORK TIMES*  
AND *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“This series is an enjoyable treat to those who enjoy the genre and will keep readers wanting more to see what happens next at the Marketplace.”

—PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL ON *THE FARM STAND*

“Clipston begins her Amish Marketplace series with this pleasing story of love and competition . . . This sweet tale will please fans of Clipston’s wholesome Amish romances.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON *THE BAKE SHOP*

“Fans of Amish fiction will love Amy Clipston’s latest, *The Bake Shop*. It’s filled with warm and cozy moments as Jeff and Christiana find their way from strangers to friendship to love.”

—ROBIN LEE HATCHER, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*WHO I AM WITH YOU* AND *CROSS MY HEART*

“Clipston closes out this heartrending series with a thoughtful consideration of how Amish rules can tear families apart, as well as a reminder that God’s path is not always what one might expect. Readers old and new will find the novel’s issues intriguing and its hard-won resolution reassuring.”

—*HOPE BY THE BOOK*, BOOKMARKED REVIEW,  
ON *A WELCOME AT OUR DOOR*

“A sweet romance with an endearing heroine, this is a good wrap-up of the series.”

—*PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL* ON *A WELCOME AT OUR DOOR*

“*Seasons of an Amish Garden* follows the year through short stories as friends create a memorial garden to celebrate a life. Revealing the underbelly of main characters, a trademark talent of Amy Clipston, makes them relatable and endearing. One story slides into the next, woven together effortlessly with the author’s knowledge of the Amish life. Once started, you can’t put this book down.”

—SUZANNE WOODS FISHER, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE DEVOTED*

“With endearing characters that readers will want to get a happily ever after, this is a story of romance and family to savor.”

—*PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL* ON *A SEAT BY THE HEARTH*

“[*A Seat by the Hearth*] is a moving portrait of a disgraced woman attempting to reenter her childhood community . . . This will please Clipston’s fans and also win over newcomers to Lancaster County.”

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“This story shares the power of forgiveness and hope and, above all, faith in God’s Word and His promises.”

—*HOPE BY THE BOOK*, BOOKMARKED  
REVIEW, ON *A SEAT BY THE HEARTH*

“This story of profound loss and deep friendship will leave readers with the certain knowledge that hope exists and love grows through faith in our God of second chances.”

—KELLY IRVIN, AUTHOR OF *THE BEEKEEPER’S SON* AND  
*UPON A SPRING BREEZE*, ON *ROOM ON THE PORCH SWING*

“This heartbreaking series continues to take a fearlessly honest look at grief, as hopelessness threatens to steal what happiness Allen has treasured within his marriage and recent fatherhood. Clipston takes these feelings seriously without sugarcoating any aspect of the mourning process, allowing her characters to make their painful but ultimately joyous journey back to love and faith. Readers who have made this tough and ongoing pilgrimage themselves will appreciate the author’s realistic portrayal of coming to terms with loss in order to continue living with hope and happiness.”

—*RT BOOK REVIEWS*, 4 STARS, ON *ROOM ON THE PORCH SWING*

“A story of grief as well as new beginnings, this is a lovely Amish tale and the start of a great new series.”

—*PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL* ON *A PLACE AT OUR TABLE*

“Themes of family, forgiveness, love, and strength are woven throughout the story . . . a great choice for all readers of Amish fiction.”

—*CBA MARKET MAGAZINE* ON *A PLACE AT OUR TABLE*

“This debut title in a new series offers an emotionally charged and engaging read headed by sympathetically drawn and believable protagonists. The meaty issues of trust and faith make this a solid book group choice.”

—*LIBRARY JOURNAL* ON *A PLACE AT OUR TABLE*

# FOUNDATION OF LOVE

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*The View from Coral Cove*  
(Available May 2022)

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*The Farm Stand*  
*The Coffee Corner*  
*The Jam and Jelly Nook*

### THE AMISH HOMESTEAD SERIES

*A Place at Our Table*  
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*A Seat by the Hearth*  
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### NONFICTION

*The Gift of Love*

# FOUNDATION OF LOVE

An Amish Legacy Novel

AMY CLIPSTON

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*Foundation of Love*

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*For Zac Weikal with appreciation.  
Thank you for sharing your talent,  
knowledge, and expertise with me.  
You are a blessing!*

## GLOSSARY

*ach*: oh

*aenti*: aunt

*appeditlich*: delicious

*Ausbund*: Amish hymnal

*bedauerlich*: sad

*boppli*: baby

*bopplin*: babies

*brot*: bread

*bruder*: brother

*bruderskind*: niece/nephew

*bruderskinner*: nieces/nephews

*bu*: boy

*buwe*: boys

*daadihaus*: small house provided for retired parents

*daed*: father

*danki*: thank you

*dat*: dad

*Dietsch*: Pennsylvania Dutch, the Amish language (a German dialect)

*dochder*: daughter

*dochdern*: daughters

## GLOSSARY

*Englischer*: a non-Amish person

*fraa*: wife

*freind*: friend

*freinden*: friends

*froh*: happy

*gegisch*: silly

*gern gschehne*: you're welcome

*Gude mariye*: Good morning

*gut*: good

*Gut nacht*: Good night

*haus*: house

*Ich liebe dich*: I love you

*kaffi*: coffee

*kapp*: prayer covering or cap

*kichli*: cookie

*kichlin*: cookies

*kinner*: children

*krank*: sick

*kuche*: cake

*kumm*: come

*lieve*: love, a term of endearment

*maed*: young women, girls

*maedel*: young woman

*mamm*: mom

*mei*: my

*naerfich*: nervous

*narrisch*: crazy

*Ordnung*: The oral tradition of practices required and forbidden  
in the Amish faith.

*schee*: pretty

## GLOSSARY

*schtupp*: family room

*schweschder*: sister

*schweschdere*: sisters

*sohn*: son

*Was iss letz?:* What's wrong?

*Wie geht's:* How do you do? or Good day!

*wunderbaar*: wonderful

*ya*: yes

*zwillingbopplin*: twins

AN AMISH LEGACY SERIES FAMILY TREES

**Connie (deceased) m.**

**Duane Bontrager**

|  
Tyler  
Korey  
Jayden

**Wanda m. Hershel Stoltzfus**

|  
Monroe  
Clemons  
Jared m. Jeannie  
Owen

**Arlene (deceased) m.  
Perry (deceased) Glick**

|  
Kane m. Leona  
Crystal

**Tricia m. Harley  
(deceased) Mast**

|  
Kathleen  
Ella May  
Dora

**Leona m. Kane Glick**

|  
Alisha  
Nate  
Jevon  
Hope  
Evelyn "Evie" (Morgan's twin)  
Morgan (Evelyn's twin)

## A NOTE TO THE READER

WHILE THIS NOVEL IS SET AGAINST THE REAL BACKDROP OF Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the characters are fictional. There is no intended resemblance between the characters in this book and any real members of the Amish and Mennonite communities. As with any work of fiction, I've taken license in some areas of research as a means of creating the necessary circumstances for my characters. My research was thorough; however, it would be impossible to be completely accurate in details and description since each and every community differs. Therefore, any inaccuracies in the Amish and Mennonite lifestyles portrayed in this book are completely due to fictional license.



## CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY APRIL SUN WARMED THE BACK OF DUANE Bontrager's neck as he climbed the porch steps of the large, white farmhouse. He looked up and smiled at the cloudless, azure sky while birds sang in nearby trees. It was another perfect spring day.

"Kane has four barns and a *daadihaus*," Jayden, his youngest son, said, pointing behind them. "Does he want the roofs replaced on all of the buildings?"

"He mentioned the barns and the main house in the message, but he didn't say anything about a *daadihaus*," Duane explained. "He said all of his roofs were damaged in that storm we had last fall. He's been waiting to fix them."

Duane took in the large pasture dotted with cows and the row of four red barns, each looking as if they hadn't been painted in a decade or more. The red paint had long faded and the doors hung at odd angles. Even the pasture fence needed a new coat of paint and many slats repaired or replaced. Perhaps the farmer had decided it was time to finally do some much-needed maintenance on his property, starting with the roofs.

Jayden rubbed his chin. "This is a big job, *Dat*."

Duane adjusted his straw hat on his head and, squaring his

AMY CLIPSTON

shoulders, pointed toward the back door. “*Ya*, which is why I wanted to get out here and give him an estimate before we missed our chance at it.”

He walked to the back door, knocked, and waited. Beyond the door, he heard children crying and yelling. He glanced over at Jayden, who grimaced before Duane rapped on the door again, harder this time.

After a moment, the racket became louder and then a back door opened, revealing an Amish woman balancing a red-faced, screaming toddler on her hip while an identical toddler held on to the skirt of her dark-green dress and black apron and howled. Both toddlers wore light-pink dresses and had heads of thick red curls.

The woman looked up at Duane and sighed, her pretty face seeming resigned as the toddlers continued to wail. She had striking features—an ivory complexion with bright, intelligent green eyes that reminded him of the lush green pastures behind him. And the hair peeking out from under her prayer covering was a deeper shade of red than the toddlers’. He surmised she was in her early thirties.

“*Wie geht’s?*” she asked, her voice barely audible over the sobbing children.

“Hi.” Duane raised his hand. “I’m here to speak with Kane Glick. He left me a message asking for an estimate to replace your roofs.”

She held her free hand up to her ear. “Could you repeat that?” she said over the cries.

“I said—” Duane began, raising his voice.

“Excuse me.” The woman turned and hollered, “Alisha!” She peered over her shoulder at Duane and gave him a sheepish expression.

A moment later, a girl with long blond braids and blue eyes, who looked to be approximately ten years old, appeared behind her.

“I need you to take your *schweschdere*,” the redhead yelled over the fussing as she attempted to peel the wailing toddler from her waist.

Alisha looked behind her and called, “Hope! *Kumm!*”

A smaller girl, whom Duane guessed was around four, scrambled over, her long, light-brown hair in braids and her bright-hazel eyes shining.

Alisha gently untangled the toddler holding on to the redhead’s skirts and guided her toward Hope, who took the crying toddler by the hand and steered her through the mudroom where they stood and out toward a doorway. Then Alisha lifted the second screaming child from the redhead’s arms, and the woman thanked the girl before she also disappeared through the doorway, the cries fading in the distance.

The redhead smoothed her hands down her dress and apron as her lips turned up in a pretty smile. “I’m so sorry. They’re teething. Molars, you know. Now I can hear you as well as my thoughts.” She laughed. “How may I help you two?” She divided a look between Duane and Jayden.

“I’m Duane Bontrager, and this is *mei sohn* Jayden. We’re here to give Kane an estimate on the roofing job.”

She snapped her fingers. “Oh, right. It’s Saturday. I forgot you were coming today. Kane is out in the barns somewhere. Hang on one minute. I’ll get one of the *buwe* to take you out there. I believe Jevon came back inside a few minutes ago.” She disappeared into the house.

“One of the *buwe*?” Jayden muttered beside him. “How many *kinner* do they have?”

AMY CLIPSTON

Duane grinned. "It sounds like quite a few."

The redhead appeared a few moments later beside a small blond boy. "This is Jevon." She bent down beside him. "This is Duane and Jayden. Would you please take them out to see your *dat*?"

The boy nodded, and Duane assumed he was around five years old. Then Jevon rushed out the door and down the steps.

"It's this way." Jevon pointed toward the row of barns.

The redhead gave him a thumbs-up. "You're in *gut* hands."

Jayden followed the boy, and they started toward the barns.

"It was nice meeting you," the woman told Duane.

"What was your name?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. In all the chaos, I never introduced myself. I'm Crystal Glick."

"Nice to meet you, Crystal." He nodded and then jogged down the steps and caught up with Jayden. "That Crystal has her hands full. I remember those days with *kinner* running all around the *haus*. Although, your *mamm* never had that much craziness, except when your *bruders* were both in diapers. Your *mamm* wanted a houseful, but you and your *bruders* were blessings enough."

Duane's heart twisted. He would never overcome the grief of losing his *fraa*. Sometimes it felt as if they'd lost her just yesterday instead of eighteen months ago.

As they moved toward the first barn, Duane took a closer look at faded paint flecking off the side of the barn and the doors, which looked as if they might fall off their hinges. He turned toward the other two large barns, which were in the same state of disrepair.

Beyond them, he took in the fence, noticing more missing slats than he'd observed from the porch. It looked as if the poor old fence hadn't been painted or repaired in several years. The

*daadihaus* also looked as if it could use a coat of paint and a good scrubbing of the windows.

The aroma of animals and wet hay overwhelmed Duane as he approached the barn. He and Jayden stopped at the barn door as Jevon rushed inside.

“*Dat!*” Jevon shouted. “*Dat!*”

A few moments later, a tall man with reddish-brown hair, a matching beard, and a long nose stepped out of the barn, wiping his hands on a red rag. Jevon and another boy, who looked to be about twice Jevon’s age, sidled up to him as he smiled.

The man shoved the rag into his pocket and then held out his hand. “I’m Kane. I assume you’re Duane Bontrager.”

Duane shook his hand. “*Ya*, that’s right. And this is *mei sohn* Jayden.”

“Nice to meet you both.” Kane jammed his thumb toward Jevon and the other boy who stood behind him. “These are *mei sohns*. This is Nate, and you’ve already met Jevon.”

The boys waved at Duane and Jayden and then raced back toward the house.

“So, how long have you been in business?” Kane asked.

“I’ve had my own roofing business for about twenty years,” Duane said. “I renamed it Bontrager and Sons when my former helpers moved on to other jobs and my *buwe* were old enough to help me with the work.”

Kane rubbed his long reddish beard. “*Gut, gut*. You come highly recommended. Do you live here in Gordonville?”

“No, but we’re not far from here in Bird-in-Hand.”

“Great. You can see that my farm needs some attention. I’ve put it off for years since there’s always so much work to do around here, but *mei fraa* insisted we start cleaning it up this spring. The

AMY CLIPSTON

roofs are my first priority. I need them replaced on my main *haus* and barns. We're not using the *daadihaus*, so I'm not going to worry about it just now. Next I'll hire someone to paint the barns as well as paint and repair the fencing." He rubbed his hands together. "So, I suppose you need to measure my roofs before you can give me a price."

Duane nodded toward the pickup truck waiting patiently in the driveway. "My driver has all of our equipment, including our ladders. We'll measure and then give the breakdown of our pricing."

"All right then," Kane said.

Duane and Jayden collected the measuring wheel, clipboard, and tallest ladder, and soon they were measuring the barn roofs before moving to the house.

While Duane stood on the roof of the house, he looked down to the ground toward an elaborate wooden swing, where four of the children played. Crystal stood nearby wearing a sweater with one of the redheaded toddlers perched on her hip and the other grasping her apron.

Duane shook his head, amazed at her patience as she spoke to Alisha and then to Jevon. She looked down, addressing the toddler on her hip before kissing the little one's head. Crystal seemed completely at ease, as if she were born to be a mother. She absently rocked back and forth, looking content with the toddler glued to her hip while resting her cheek on her shoulder.

As if reading his thoughts, Crystal tented her eyes with her free hand and looked up at the roof. Duane nodded at her and then returned to his task.

After they were done, Duane and Jayden descended the ladder, and Duane calculated their figures while Jayden stowed their

supplies. Duane wrote up an estimate and delivered it to Kane, who was working in the dairy barn.

“This is around what I had expected,” Kane said as he read the estimate. “When are you available to start?”

“We’re finishing up a job today and then we have two more next week, but they’ll each take only a day. We can start here on Wednesday.”

Kane held out his hand. “That works for me. I’ll expect to see you then.”

“Perfect,” Duane said, shaking on the deal. Then Kane spun on his heel and headed back to his chores.

As Duane approached the truck, he looked toward where Crystal stood with the children just as the back door opened and another woman walked down the porch steps. With blond hair under her prayer covering, she appeared to be in her midthirties, and by the way her stomach was distended and by how she rested her hands on her lower back, it was obvious she was expecting a child. He recalled how his late wife, Connie, would knead her sore back with her fingers while she was pregnant with each of their three sons.

He tried not to stare, but questions swirled through his mind as the blonde walked over to Crystal and then sat down on a nearby bench. He wondered if the blond woman was a relative visiting Crystal and Kane, but it was none of Duane’s business.

He strolled over to the four-door pickup truck and climbed into the front passenger seat beside his driver, Drew Cooper. “*Danki* for waiting for us,” he told Drew.

Drew, a friendly man with graying dark-brown hair and kind eyes, smiled. “You’re always welcome.”

“How did it go, *Dat*?” Jayden asked from the seat behind him.

AMY CLIPSTON

Duane settled on the seat and buckled in. “We got the job.”

“Yes!” Jayden clapped.

“Congratulations,” Drew said as he put the truck into gear.

“Thank you, Drew.” Duane breathed a sigh of relief.

Business had been slow during the winter months, and he’d prayed that the Lord would see fit to send them work in the spring. He was grateful his prayers had finally been answered when Kane Glick had left a message regarding the work he needed done on his barns and farmhouse.

Duane released another long breath of gratitude, quietly thanking God for this answered prayer.



Duane climbed out of the truck at the worksite where his two older sons, Tyler and Korey, stood on the roof of a two-story home owned by an *Englisher* who had seen Duane’s advertisement in the local paper.

Tyler, his oldest son, descended the ladder and met him at the top of the driveway. At twenty-four, Tyler was tall like his father and brothers and had dark-brown hair, resembling Duane’s and Korey’s, but he had inherited hazel eyes from his mother, as Jayden had. He swiped the back of his hand over his brow. “What happened?”

“We got the job.” Duane patted one of Tyler’s broad shoulders.

Tyler’s grin was bright. “Praise God. Kore and I are almost done here, and then we have those two jobs in Strasburg, but we can knock them out on Monday and Tuesday. We can start it on Wednesday.”

“That’s exactly what I told Kane.”

“How’d it go?” Korey yelled from the roof. His mirrored sunglasses blocked his deep-brown eyes, and his dark-brown hair was covered by a straw hat.

Although he was sixteen months younger than Tyler, Connie had often referred to Korey and Tyler as “the twins,” since they were so close in age. But Duane often thought of them as night and day.

Tyler glowered at his middle brother. “Come down here and ask, Kore! Don’t stand up there and bellow!”

“You’re not *mei daed*,” Korey bit back. “So quit acting like it.”

“He needs to grow up,” Tyler muttered while walking over to their large cooler filled with water.

Duane sighed and turned toward Jayden, who shook his head as he picked up a hammer and then started up the ladder.

Despite his oldest sons’ near constant bickering, he was grateful to have his three sons working for him. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

“All right,” Duane announced. “Let’s finish this job up so we can enjoy the rest of the weekend.” Then he grabbed a hammer and box of nails and ambled toward the ladder, feeling satisfied from another day of hard work with his sons.

## CHAPTER 2

“NOW YOU’RE ALL CLEAN, OKAY, EVIE?” CRYSTAL WHISPERED to her little niece, who was balanced on her hip while she held her twin sister’s hand and guided her down the steep stairs toward the kitchen later that afternoon. “And you’re clean too now, Morgan,” she told Evie’s twin.

Alisha, Crystal’s faithful helper, appeared at the bottom of the stairs. “*Mamm* said she still isn’t feeling well, and she asked me to ask you to start supper. Do you need me, *Aenti*?”

Oh, how Crystal appreciated her eldest niece! Without her, she’d never be able to finish her chores and care for the twins, which seemed to be her full-time job since Leona, her sister-in-law, was expecting her seventh and eighth babies in July and hadn’t felt well throughout this entire pregnancy.

Crystal touched Alisha’s cheek. “Oh, *mei liewe*. What would I do without you? Would you please play with your *schweschdere* so that I can cook?”

“*Ya!*” Alisha’s pretty face lit up in a smile.

“You’re an angel.”

Alisha took Morgan’s hand and nudged her away from Crystal’s skirt. “Let’s go play with Hope, okay, Morgan?”

“Okay!” Morgan smiled and allowed Alisha to guide her toward the family room, where toys were spread out, and Hope played with a doll.

Hope held the doll up toward Morgan, who waddled over to her, laughing.

Alisha reached for Evie next. “May I hold you, Evie?”

“No! I want *Aenti* Kisstal!” Evie turned away from her sister, pressing her face into Crystal’s neck.

Crystal swallowed a sigh. Evie seemed to have been attached to Crystal since the day she’d been born, but it had gotten worse when she’d started teething and had trouble sleeping. While Crystal cherished her nieces and nephews, she found it a bit suffocating when they preferred her instead of their parents or siblings.

“Evie,” Crystal began, careful to keep her voice calm, “I need you to play with your *schweschdere* so that I can make supper, okay?”

“No!” Evie’s voice was muffled by Crystal’s neck.

Alisha’s pretty blue eyes widened.

Crystal’s patience began to wear thin. “Evie, I need you to listen to Alisha or our family will go hungry tonight. Do you want everyone to be hungry?”

Evie met Crystal’s gaze and shook her head, her strawberry-blond curls bobbing with the motion.

“That’s what I thought. Would you please be a *gut* girl for me?”

Evie nodded.

“*Wunderbaar.*” Crystal set Evie on the floor, and while Alisha led Evie into the family room, she made a beeline into the kitchen.

She glanced at the clock on the wall, and she felt a rush of panic. It was nearly four o’clock! She had to get food in the oven quickly.

AMY CLIPSTON

If only Leona would have asked her earlier in the afternoon to take on the cooking. Her sister-in-law had seemed to be feeling better when she'd joined Crystal and the children outside by the swing set, and when Leona had gone to lie down, she'd told Crystal she had a headache and planned to take a short nap. She'd expected Leona to get back up before long, but now Crystal would have to scrape something together.

She opened the propane-powered refrigerator, and her spirit lifted when she found the two packages of chicken breasts she'd picked up at the grocery store yesterday. Thank goodness she hadn't stored them in the freezer!

"Baked chicken it is," she mumbled. She flipped on the oven and searched the pantry for some Shake 'N Bake. *There it is!* Then her mind wandered as she pulled out a pan and opened the box of her favorite time-saving seasoning.

Sounds of her nieces playing in the family room filtered into the kitchen as Crystal set the pieces of seasoned chicken onto a baking sheet. How she loved listening to her nieces and nephews enjoying each other's company!

Crystal slipped the baking sheet into the oven and then opened the pantry door, searching for a couple of cans of mixed vegetables.

Soon vegetables were cooking in a pot while the delicious aroma of chicken permeated the kitchen. Crystal located a bag of rolls, and after dividing them up in two baskets, she put one on each end of the table.

She smiled as she placed plates, utensils, and cups by each place. Though tasks like cooking a meal might feel mundane to some, she was grateful the Lord had given her a purpose after she had lost her father. Although God hadn't seen fit to make her a

mother, at least she was able to help care for her nieces and nephews instead of living alone in the big house where she'd been raised.

"It smells *appetitlich*."

Crystal looked over her shoulder and saw Leona standing in the doorway, yawning and massaging her lower back with her fingers. "Are you feeling better, Leona?"

Leona shrugged and yawned again. "My feet and my back never stop aching. I can't imagine how I'll survive the summer feeling this way."

"Well, it's a *gut* thing you're due in July and won't have to suffer through August and September." Crystal began filling the cups with a pitcher of water she kept in the refrigerator.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Please tell Alisha to call her *dat* and *bruders* in. Then we can get the *zwillingbopplin* in their highchairs."

Leona moved to the doorway leading to the family room. "Alisha, please tell your *dat* and *bruders* to come in for supper."

While Alisha jogged outside to fetch her father and brothers, Crystal helped Leona get the twins settled in their highchairs and Hope in her booster seat before they brought the food to the table.

Soon, all nine members of the Glick family were seated around the long oak table, and after a silent prayer, they began filling their plates with chicken and veggies.

Crystal buttered two rolls and then handed them to the twins before buttering rolls for Jevon and Hope.

"The roofers are going to start on Wednesday," Kane announced from his seat at the end of the table.

Leona nodded from the other end of the table. "So, their price was *gut*?"

AMY CLIPSTON

“*Ya*, it was competitive and close to what I had hoped for.” Kane nodded and wiped his reddish-brown beard with a paper napkin.

Crystal’s thoughts drifted to her brief encounter with Duane Bontrager while she cut up a piece of chicken for the twins. Duane looked to be in his midforties with the flecks of gray threaded through his dark-brown hair and matching beard, and he was also tall like her brother.

Although she’d only spoken to him for a few moments, she’d been struck by his easy demeanor and his warm smile. He seemed like a kind man. She had been impressed by his patience with her wailing nieces. Some men would have been irritated or rude while she had worked to silence the children, but he seemed more amused than anything.

“Did they say how long the job will take?” Leona asked.

“No, but I didn’t ask,” Kane said. “I imagine it will take a few days. Most roofers hope to finish their jobs quickly so they can move on to the next.”

After serving chicken and vegetables to Hope, Jevon, and the twins, Crystal finally prepared a plate for herself. She hadn’t realized how hungry she was until she tasted the flavorful chicken. Lunch had been more than five hours earlier, and she’d been too busy to make herself a snack.

“We have to get up early tomorrow for church,” Kane said.

Leona nodded. “*Ya*, that’s right.”

“*Brot!*” Evie hollered when her roll was gone.

Crystal smiled over at her niece. “There’s no need to yell.” Then she buttered another roll for her.

“May I have one too, *Aenti?*” Hope asked.

“Of course you may since you have such *gut* manners.” Crystal touched her nose.

“Me too, *Aenti*,” Jevon said.

Crystal nodded at him. “Of course.”

After Crystal finished buttering rolls for the kids, she returned to her chicken, which was now cold, but she continued eating it while Kane and Leona discussed church tomorrow and their plans for next week.

Soon their plates were clean, and Crystal served a container of cookies she had baked a few days ago, along with coffee for the adults. After dessert, Crystal began gathering up the plates and utensils.

Leona groaned as she stood and began kneading her lower back. “Alisha, would you please get the *zwillingbopplin* and Hope into the bathtub?”

“*Ya, Mamm.*” Alisha grabbed a wet rag and mopped Evie’s face. “You need a bath, Evie.”

Evie groaned and turned her head.

Hope smiled. “I like getting a bath.”

“Bath! Bath!” Morgan hollered.

Alisha wiped Morgan’s face next. “*Ya*, that’s right. It’s time for your bath.” Then she helped the twins down from their highchairs and led them and Hope toward the downstairs bathroom.

Shaking her head and smiling, Crystal placed the dishes in the sink and turned on the faucet. She glanced behind her as Kane gave Leona a quick kiss before he headed back out through the mudroom with his two sons in tow.

Crystal felt a familiar tug at her heart. The love between her brother and sister-in-law had been obvious since they had met when Kane was twenty-one and Leona was nineteen. From the beginning of their relationship, Crystal had witnessed them holding hands, stealing kisses, and whispering to each other when they thought no one was paying attention.

AMY CLIPSTON

If only Crystal could have found that kind of love too. She'd never expected to be unmarried at the age of thirty-three. In fact, she'd thought she was going to marry her ex-boyfriend five years ago, but he had chosen a job opportunity in Ohio over a future with her.

She quickly reminded herself to be grateful that Kane and Leona had generously welcomed her into their home when her father had died and left her alone. Being a part of this wonderful family was enough to sustain her for a lifetime. At least, she kept praying to the Lord that it would be.

Leona set an armful of cups on the counter and then rubbed her back again.

"Why don't you go sit?" Crystal said. "I can handle this."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course."

"I don't know what we'd do without you, Crystal." Leona gave Crystal's shoulder a gentle squeeze and then disappeared into the family room.

Crystal sighed and collected the rest of the dishes, utensils, cups, and serving platters from the table. As she began scrubbing the dishes, she wondered what it would have been like to have a family of her own.

She'd never know how it felt to be a wife or a mother, but she was grateful God had blessed her with the family she had.



"I cooked, so you three can decide who does the dishes," Korey announced as he carried a stack of dishes to the counter. "I'll go take care of the animals."

Jayden lifted a sand-colored eyebrow as he retrieved their empty glasses. “You cooked? You made sub sandwiches, Kore, not a pot roast.”

“Oh, pot roast,” Tyler said, his voice sounding wistful. “That sounds amazing. Remember Mom’s pot roasts?”

Jayden nodded. “They were the best.”

Duane felt a tug at his heart. Everything Connie cooked had been wonderful. He pressed his lips together. How he missed her. He’d never get over losing her.

Tyler set a handful of utensils in the sink and then opened the freezer. “Do we have a roast?”

“I’ll add it to the list.” Duane blew out a sigh and located the shopping list he’d started earlier in the week.

Jayden set the glasses on the counter and then turned on the water in the sink and added dish detergent.

Duane shooed him away. “I’ll do the dishes. Why don’t you help your *bruder* in the barn?”

“But you did the dishes last night, *Dat*.”

“It’s fine. Go.”

“*Danki*.” Jayden headed toward the mudroom.

Duane crossed to the table, where Tyler had scooped up the utensils.

“What are you going to make for tomorrow?” Tyler asked.

Duane shook his head. “Well, I guess I could throw a casserole together tonight and heat it up tomorrow since we can’t cook on Sundays. I’ll see what we have in the fridge.”

“Or we could do sandwiches again.”

“Since we had sandwiches tonight and we’ll have sandwiches for church lunch, I really won’t want to eat a sandwich again for supper tomorrow night while you all are at youth group. If I put

AMY CLIPSTON

together an easy casserole and bake it tomorrow night, then we'll have the leftovers on Monday. I'll be killing two birds with one stone." Duane moved to the counter and opened Connie's favorite cookbook and began perusing the casserole recipes.

If only he'd made it to the market yesterday. At times, he was overwhelmed by everything he had to remember in order to keep his business and the house running.

He took a deep breath. He just did the best he could. It had only been eighteen months since Connie had passed, and he felt as if he was taking life one day at a time without her, figuring it out as he went along.

He was grateful he had his sons and his business. The rest would fall into place with constant prayer and God's help—but they were all still adjusting to their difficult new normal.

Duane found the recipe for cheeseburger pie and he felt his shoulders relax. Not only was it an easy recipe, but it was one of his sons' favorites. Plus, he most likely had all the ingredients on hand.

Tyler sidled up to him. "Do you need help?"

"*Ya. Danki.* See if there's some defrosted ground beef in the refrigerator, and I'll get out a pan." Duane set the pan out on the counter and then gathered up the rest of the ingredients—an onion, salt, shredded cheese, eggs, milk, and Bisquick. For once, he already had everything he needed!

Duane and Tyler worked in silence for a few moments as they put the recipe together.

"Do we have any other jobs coming up?" Tyler asked as he mixed the ingredients in a large bowl.

"I checked my cell phone earlier, and I had two messages. I need to check the messages in the barn too. I'll call all of the customers back on Monday."

“*Gut.*” Tyler gave him a sideways glance. “I can call them back if you’d like. I really want to take a bigger role in the company. I think I’m ready.”

Duane smiled. “All right.”

“I can even go with you when you give the estimates. Maybe you can even let me write them up. I have an idea that will help with your bookkeeping too. And I was thinking we should run more ads in the newspaper and maybe on the internet.”

“Sounds *gut.*” Duane studied his eldest son. “You seem so focused on work, but you haven’t mentioned any *maed* lately. Is there a *maedel* you like from youth group?”

“What?” Tyler laughed. “No.”

“Why not? You’re almost twenty-five. I was married at twenty-two, and you made me a *daed* when I was twenty-three.”

Tyler held his hands up. “Whoa. There’s no special *maedel* in my life. Right now I just want to help you grow our company.” He paused, then turned back to mixing. “You don’t say it out loud, but I can tell you worry about a steady income. Let me help you shoulder some of that worry. That’s more important than dating.”

Duane shook his head as he covered the baking pan with aluminum foil. “The business is fine. In fact, it’s better than fine. This big job next week will sustain us for a while, even if we only have small jobs for the next month or so until the weather warms up. You need to consider your future and not worry about work so much. Think about dating, Tyler.”

“When I find the *maedel* that the Lord has chosen for me, I’ll start dating. Right now, my focus is helping you and the business.”

Duane’s heart squeezed, and he gave Tyler’s shoulder a pat. “Your *mamm* would be so proud of you.”

“*Danki.*” Tyler’s voice was hoarse. “I miss her so much, *Dat.* I

AMY CLIPSTON

don't know what to do with the grief sometimes." He swallowed and blinked, his hazel eyes glistening in the light of the propane lamp above them.

Duane sniffed and looked away. He had to be strong for his sons. "I know, *sohn*. I do too."

"I'm going to shower." Tyler headed up the stairs, his footfalls echoing.

Duane set the casserole in the refrigerator and then leaned back against the counter. He glanced across the kitchen, memories of Connie filling his mind.

It felt as if it was just yesterday that she had stood at the counter, washing dishes, while he snuck up behind her and kissed her cheek. He could still hear her giggle and see her gorgeous smile, her hazel eyes shining in the bright sunlight that spilled in from the window above the sink. She was beautiful, so very beautiful, and she was still beautiful even after cancer had ravaged her body and spirit.

Oh, how his heart ached for her. He missed their late-night talks on the porch when they would sit together on the swing, hold hands, and discuss everything from their sons to the business to their plans for the future.

The plans they never were able to see come to fruition.

Duane closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. Connie had been his first love, the love of his life. He'd never understand why the Lord saw fit to take her when she was only forty-five years old and had so much more life to live.

But it wasn't Duane's place to question God's will. Instead, he would always cherish the twenty-four years he had enjoyed as her husband. He and Connie had been blessed with children early in their marriage, and he admired the mother she became.

He could still hear her singing to the boys at night while rocking them to sleep. She rarely raised her voice, even when Tyler and Korey would wrestle in mud puddles and then run through the house, leaving a trail of mess behind them.

Connie had been loving, supportive, and patient, even when Duane lost his temper. She'd been his everything, and then she was gone, leaving him to struggle to be the best parent he could for their sons. Most of the time, he felt inept.

But he would push on, doing his best with the Lord's help.

Standing up straight, Duane began to pray.

"*Danki* for the time I had with Connie, Lord," he whispered. "Please heal my and *mei sohns'* broken hearts."

Then he walked toward his first-floor bedroom, which still felt cold and lonely without his loving wife by his side.