

WITH ALL HER
Heart



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AN AMISH CALLING NOVEL

KELLY IRVIN

 ZONDERVAN®

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With All Her Heart

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



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

Proverbs 16:18 (NIV)



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

Psalms 9:10 (NIV)

Featured Families

Lee's Gulch, Virginia

Silas and Joanna Miller (grandparents)

Charlie and Elizabeth Miller (parents)

Toby Jason Elijah Declan Layla Emmett Josie Sherri Sadie

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

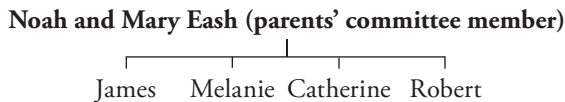
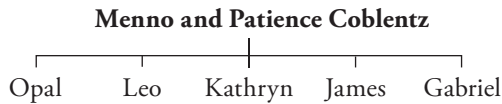
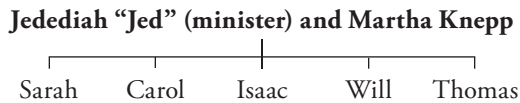
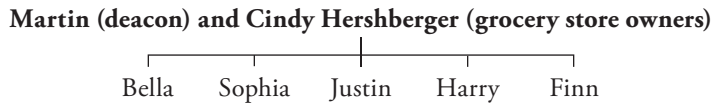
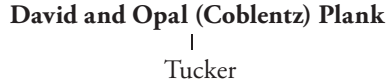
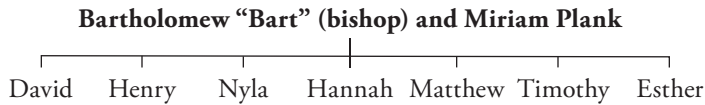
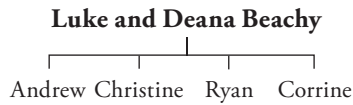
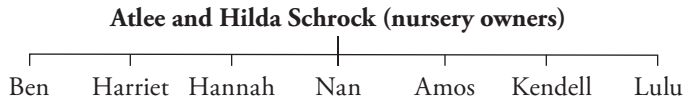
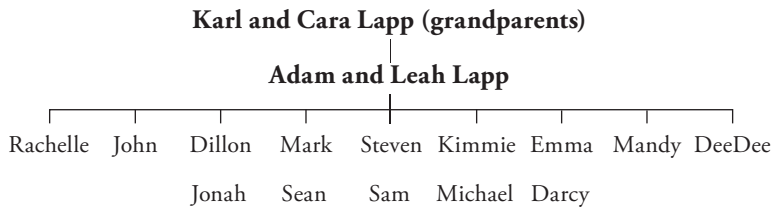
Tammy Rose Rodney Carter Thomas Serenity

Theo (widower) and Ellie Beiler (deceased)

Noah

Aaron and Katherine King

Bethel Enos Claire Robbie Judah Liam Melinda





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 gebortsdaag: happy birthday

fuhl: fool

gaul: horse

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

gern gschehme: you're welcome

Gmay: church district

groossmammi, groossmammis: 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)

sub, 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 as 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 one 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

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a term of 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 with disabilities into the world 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 wood-crafting 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.”

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 doggy 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. He had slunk away when Elijah yelled at him but paused on the road, head down, tail wagging. Now Slowpoke unfurled his long, muscular body and sat up on his haunches.

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 three times 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

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was a busy place, which boded well for local artisans like Elijah. Hopefully.

At the moment, the three-block stretch of Main Street dotted 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 Anns here.” Elijah glanced at Slowpoke. The dog’s ears went up, then flopped down. The doggy 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. “Wh-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

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cinnamon, blueberry, vanilla, lemon, and a potpourri of other smells emanating from homemade candles and soaps assailed him. His head hurt. Slowpoke woofed from the spot he'd commandeered 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.

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."

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With only one customer, an English lady from nearby Nathalie, 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 3 spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA3 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

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that were once skills all women were expected to have. So many of them remember their grandmas and great-grandmas making quilts 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. Instead, 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

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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 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

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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.”

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

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family. They loved every child, abled or disabled, equally. But Plain men needed wives who could take care of the house, bake, sew 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 earlier 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," Bonnie had told the doctor.

With All Her Heart

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, hard-working 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.