

*Amish*  
COOKING CLASS



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To Pastors Jim and Pam Merillat. Thank you for the many blessings you bestow on others. Your dedication to God and your church family is appreciated.

*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*

LUKE 18:27



# Chapter 1



*Walnut Creek, Ohio*

Heidi Troyer's skin prickled as a gust of wind blew into her kitchen. After peeling and cutting an onion to go in the savory meat loaf she was making for supper, she'd opened the window a few minutes ago to air out the room.

Glancing into the yard, Heidi watched as newly fallen leaves swirled over the grass. Across the way, freshly washed laundry she'd hung on the line a few hours ago fluttered in the unseasonably cool breeze. Even the sheets made a snapping noise when the wind played catch and release.

They'd soon be saying goodbye to the month of August, and Heidi was glad. A long dry spell had caused some of the trees to drop their leaves early, and the rustling of those still clinging to the branches sounded like water rushing down a well-fed stream after a heavy rain.

"I wish it would rain. Even a drizzle would be nice." Heidi looked toward the sky, but not a single puffy cloud was in sight. September was a month of transition, teetering between warm, summer-like days and cool, comfortable nights, so maybe the rain would come soon. She looked forward to its fresh, clean scent, not to mention it removing the necessity of watering her flowerbeds and garden.

Heidi glanced at the plot where she'd planted a variety of vegetables in the spring. The potatoes and other root vegetables still needed to be dug and put in the cellar, and she wanted to get the chore done before Kendra's baby was born and the adoption became official. Once the infant came, Heidi would put her full attention on raising the child. She'd already made the decision not to teach any more cooking classes—

at least not until her son or daughter was older and didn't require round-the-clock attention. Heidi certainly couldn't teach and take care of the precious baby, and she didn't want to juggle between the two—especially after waiting so long to become a mother.

Heidi's senses were heightened, and she giggled out loud as she visualized herself holding the infant while stirring a batch of cookie dough. After being married to Lyle for eight years and finding herself still unable to conceive, the idea of soon becoming a mother was almost more than she could comprehend. In a matter of weeks, her dream would finally come true. How thankful she was that Kendra had moved into their home and agreed to let them adopt her child. Once the baby was born and Kendra got her strength back, she would find a better-paying job and move out on her own. It wouldn't be right to ask her to leave until she was physically and financially ready.

Heidi sighed. *What a shame Kendra's parents turned their back on her and she felt forced to give up her baby. But then if they hadn't, Lyle and I would not have been given the opportunity to raise Kendra's child.*

Satisfied the onion smell was gone, Heidi took one more breath of the late summer-scented air, then closed the window and took a seat at the table. She owed her aunt Emma a letter and would start writing it while the meat loaf cooked. Maybe by the time supper was ready, Kendra would be back from her doctor's appointment, and Lyle from Mt. Hope, where he'd put his auctioneering skills to good use most of the day.

*I can hardly wait for us to be sharing a warm meal at the kitchen table, so I can hear about the events of their days.* Heidi was most anxious to get updates on Kendra's doctor's appointment. She'd offered to go with her this afternoon, as she had several other times since Kendra moved in with them. Today, however, Kendra had said she had a few stops to make after seeing the doctor and didn't want to take up Heidi's day.

*I wouldn't have minded. I enjoy being with Kendra.* Heidi's nose tickled, and she rubbed it, trying to stifle a sneeze. Smelling onion on her fingers, she wet her hands under the faucet, then rubbed them along the sides of their stainless steel sink. After a few seconds, she smelled her fingers again and was amazed the onion scent was gone.

Heidi didn't know how it worked, but she was glad her friend Loretta had recently given her this unusual tip.

"I'll have to keep this in mind to share with my students once I decide to start up the cooking classes again." Heidi wrote a note to remind her, since it would be a good while before she taught more classes.

After she stuck the note in her recipe box, Heidi turned her attention to a daily devotional book lying near her writing tablet. She read Psalm 9:1, the verse for the day, out loud: "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works."

Closing her eyes and bowing her head, Heidi prayed: "Thank You, Lord, for Your many blessings. I praise You with my whole heart for all Your wonderful works. Thank You for this day, and for my family and friends. Protect us, and shower Your people with many blessings. Amen."

Heidi had no more than finished her prayer when she heard a car pull into the yard. She went to the window and looked out, smiling as she watched Kendra get out of her driver's car. Since Kendra didn't have a vehicle of her own, she'd hired one of Heidi and Lyle's drivers to take her into town. If Heidi had gone with her, they might have traveled by horse and buggy; although it would have taken them longer.

Keeping an eye on Kendra, as she made her way toward the house, Heidi couldn't help noticing her slow steps, and how she pursed her lips, while holding her stomach, as though in pain.

Heidi's shoulders tightened as she rushed to open the door. She hoped the doctor hadn't given Kendra unsettling news today.

"Sorry I'm late." Kendra entered the house, avoiding eye contact with Heidi, and took a seat at the kitchen table. "We need to talk." She pushed a lock of auburn hair behind her ears.

Heidi pulled out a chair and sat. "What is it, Kendra? Is everything okay with the baby?"

"No, not in a physical sense at least." Kendra's brown eyes looked ever so serious as she took the seat next to Heidi.

"What do you mean?"

The young woman's shoulders curled as she bent her neck forward.

“The whole way here, I thought about how I should tell you this.” Kendra took a shuddering breath. “And still, I don’t know where to begin.”

Heidi held her hands in her lap, gripping her fingers into her palms. “Please, tell me what it is you need to say.”

“Well, the thing is. . .” Kendra shifted in her chair. “Miracle of miracles—my dad called my cell phone this morning. He asked if I’d be free to come by his office this afternoon.” She paused and drew a quick breath. “I went there after I left the doctor’s office, and. . .” Her voice faltered, and she paused to swallow before continuing. “He said it had been a mistake to kick me out of the house after I told him and Mom I was pregnant.”

Heidi smiled. “That’s good news, Kendra. I’ve been praying for it to happen. I hope things will be better between you and your parents from now on.”

“Yeah, well, Dad wants me to move back home so he and Mom can help raise the baby.”

“Raise the baby?” Heidi blinked rapidly, her breath bursting in and out. “Does this mean you’ve changed your mind about Lyle and me adopting your child?”

Kendra gave a slow nod. “Since my parents are willing to help, there’s no reason for me to give up the baby now. And since the contract the lawyer drew up says. . .”

Heidi held up her hand. “I know what it says; although I never expected you would go back on your word.”

“I. . . I wasn’t planning to, but things have changed.” A few tears trickled down Kendra’s cheeks. “I never wanted to give up my baby; you have to know that. I only agreed to it because I had no support and knew I couldn’t take care of a child by myself.” She touched Heidi’s hands: both of them had turned cold. “I can see you’re disappointed, and I’m sorry, but I hope you understand.”

*Understand?* Heidi’s stomach clenched, and she pressed the wad of her apron against it. She sat in stunned silence, unable to form a response. The tension felt so strong, she could almost touch

it. It didn't seem possible, after all these months of Kendra living with them, that she had changed her mind. Heidi wanted to be happy for the young, pregnant woman sitting at her table. It was good Kendra had reconciled with her parents and been invited to move back home. But Kendra's decision to keep the baby put a hole in Heidi's heart—one she felt sure would never close. Her dream of holding a tiny baby she could call her own was just that—only a dream. The walls in this house would not echo with the laughter of children. Tiny feet would never patter across the floor. No chubby arms would reach out for a hug. Heidi fought for control. The ringing in her ears was almost deafening.

She glanced toward the hall, knowing the nursery that had already been set up would have to be dismantled. All the baby blankets and clothes would have to be packed away. The crib would be disassembled. She'd have Lyle haul it out to the barn, for having the crib in the house would be a painful reminder of their loss. Heidi didn't even want to look at it now.

She thought about the scripture she'd quoted several moments ago and wondered if she would ever praise the Lord again.



Less than an hour later, Heidi checked on the meat loaf, decided it was done, and turned the oven temperature to low. It was all she could do to get supper ready for when Lyle got home. Kendra's shocking announcement numbed her mind. She wondered what Lyle's reaction would be when he heard the news.

Kendra came into the kitchen and stood watching as Heidi took a sack of potatoes from the pantry. "Would you like help getting supper ready?" she asked.

"We need a kettle for boiling the potatoes." Heidi could barely make eye contact with the young woman. Truth was, she wished she could be alone to deal with her grief.

Kendra went to the lower cupboard and took out a medium-size pot. "I'll add water to the kettle and set it on the propane burner to heat."

Without a word, Heidi slid over the jars of home-canned beans she'd taken out earlier. After removing the lids, she dumped the contents into a kettle and sprinkled some leftover onion bits on top. She stirred them around a bit, set the lid in place, and put the pan on the stove. She felt like a robot, merely going through the motions of preparing their meal.

"Is there anything else I can do?" Kendra waited by the stove.

"We'll have iced tea to drink. Could you make that while I cut up a few carrot and celery sticks?" Heidi glanced at Kendra. *This meal will be so awkward. I'd give anything if Kendra's decision wasn't absolute.*

Her hands trembled as she took out the carrots and began slicing them. She wished it was still morning and things were as they had been before Kendra's shocking announcement. *Is there even a chance she might think things over and change her mind? Is it right to cling to that hope?*

"When I'm done making the tea, I'll set the dining-room table." Kendra put the tea bags in the pitcher of hot water.

"Okay." Heidi washed celery stalks and cut those as well, pausing briefly to glance at the clock. Lyle would be home soon, and he'd be hungry. Her insides twisted; she had no appetite at all.

Silently, Kendra got out the plates, silverware, napkins, and three glasses. She placed them on a large tray and headed for the dining room, elbows tucked into her sides. This had to be difficult for her, too. Heidi and Kendra had become close during the months she'd been living here. Heidi felt sure the young woman did not want to hurt her. But she had, and Heidi needed to come to grips with it, despite her disappointment.

A few minutes later, as Heidi watched the water bubbling over the potatoes, she heard the familiar sound of Lyle's horse and buggy pull in. She glanced at the timer on the counter. The potatoes had ten more minutes to go. It felt like it was a countdown to the moment she would give Lyle the news. *Should I tell him before supper or wait until we've finished eating?* Either way, there simply wasn't a good time nor an easy way to say it.

The back door squeaked open and clicked shut. A few seconds later, Lyle entered the kitchen, carrying his lunch box. He placed it on the counter, then pulled off his straw hat and smoothed back his thick auburn hair. “How was your day, Heidi? Did everything go well here?”

She moved away from the stove and gave him a much-needed hug. At the moment, Heidi felt so overwhelmed she could barely speak.

“You’re trembling, Heidi. Is something wrong?” He patted her back gently. “Wasn’t Kendra supposed to see the doctor today?”

“*Jah*.” Heidi’s voice sounded muffled as she held her face close to his chest, hoping to draw strength from his embrace.

“There’s nothing wrong with the *boppli*, I hope.”

“No, Kendra’s baby’s fine.”

Kendra came into the room just then. “Are we about ready to eat?”

“Almost.” The timer for the potatoes went off, and Heidi stepped back to the stove to shut off the burner. The beans were also well heated, so she turned them off, too. “I’ll set everything on the dining-room table, and we can take our seats.” She’d already decided not to tell Lyle about Kendra changing her mind regarding the adoption until they were alone this evening. It would be too difficult to say it in front of Kendra.

“Okay, just let me get washed up.” Lyle gave Heidi’s arm a tender squeeze before he left the room.

Kendra picked up the amber-brewed tea sitting near the refrigerator. She also got out a tray full of ice before turning to face Heidi. “Lyle doesn’t know about me moving back with my folks, does he?”

“No, I haven’t said anything yet.” Heidi’s voice caught in her throat. She picked up a pair of pot holders, opened the oven door, and brought out the meat loaf. After placing it on a platter, she sliced up their main course.

Kendra paused a minute, blinking rapidly, then without a word, she made a hasty exit with the tea and ice cubes.

Soon Lyle returned from washing up and offered to carry the meat loaf to the table. Heidi gave a brief nod and followed him with the beans and potatoes. Then, remembering the carrots and celery that had been

sliced, she returned to the kitchen to get the container. When Heidi returned to the dining room, she took a seat across from Kendra, and they all bowed for silent prayer. Lyle sat at the head of the table, and he cleared his throat when he'd finished praying. Heidi took this as a cue, and she lifted her head. It had been difficult to even formulate a prayer. Although she was thankful for the food on their table, she felt no gratitude for the fact that her hopes and dreams of being a parent had been crushed. She couldn't let it defeat her, though; she had to be strong.

After the food was passed around, Lyle looked over at Kendra and smiled. "I was asking Heidi about your appointment earlier. How did it go?"

Kendra picked up her iced tea and took a drink. "Umm. . . It went fine. The doctor said the baby and I are doing okay."

"Good to hear." As if sensing Heidi's gloomy mood, Lyle reached over and lightly touched her arm. "You're not eating much."

Her lips quivered. "I—I'm not really hungry tonight."

"How come?" He reached for the bowl of potatoes and helped himself to several pieces. "Did you have too much to eat for lunch?"

Before Heidi could respond, Kendra blurted, "I believe it's my fault Heidi's not hungry. She's upset." She paused and looked at Heidi before continuing. "I can't blame her, and I'm sure you'll be upset, too, with what I have to tell you."

Lyle's brows drew together. "What is it, Kendra?"

"I've changed my mind about giving up my baby."

His eyebrows shot straight up. "What?"

Kendra explained the situation and said her parents wanted her to move back home. "I'll be packing up my things and leaving in the morning."

Heidi wished Kendra hadn't said anything—especially during their meal. Her shoulders slumped as she dropped her gaze and stared at her uneaten food. Heidi felt her husband's eyes upon her, and she couldn't help wondering what Lyle must be thinking right now. Her heart felt like it couldn't sink any lower. *It's so unfair. How could this be happening to Lyle and me?*