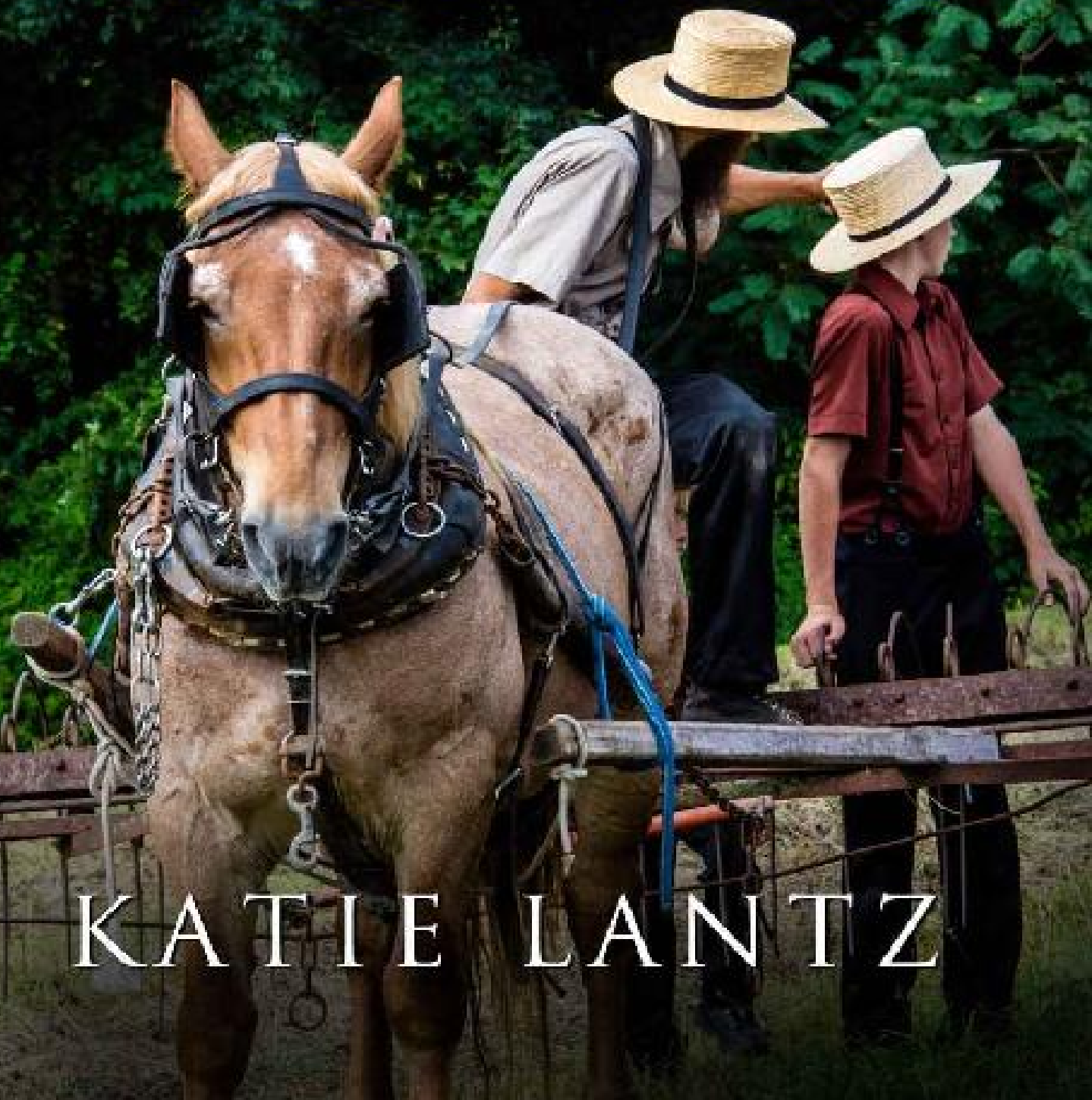


AMISH ROMANCE

THE
AMISH
WIDOWER



KATIE LANTZ

The Amish Widower

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Chapter One

Abram paced the living room floor. He could hear his wife groan in the bedroom. Her pain troubled him, but with the midwife, his mother, and her mother all caring for her, he was sure Elizabeth and the baby would be all right.

Abram's father sat on the wooden chair and twiddled his thumbs. "Stop pacing, Abram, you're making me nervous."

Abram smiled. It was his father's first grandchild. He could see he was excited, too. He stopped walking and rubbed his hands on his trousers.

"I know. I'm going out to my shop to get my surprise for Elizabeth. I'll be back in a minute."

"No rush. She'll be a while, son."

Abram quickly went outside and retrieved the project he had been secretly working on for months. Ever since Elizabeth had told him they were going to have a baby, he'd dreamed of making something special, and he had done it. It was his masterpiece.

Abram bent down and picked up the cradle with both arms. It was quite heavy since he did not expect it would need to be moved much after it was in pride of place.

He carried it into the house. "Did I miss anything?" Abram asked his father.

Levi shook his head. "No. Haven't heard anything for a little while. A cradle, eh?"

Abram nodded, demonstrating the gentle rocking. Then he pulled out some hidden extensions under the cradle bed, added legs, then slid out the sides of the cradle to make it

twice as big. “It’s also a crib for when baby Solomon or Anna get a little older.”

“Solomon? That’s his name?”

“Solomon if it’s a boy, after your *daed*, and Anna for a girl, after Elizabeth’s *mamm*.”

Abram saw his father’s eyes tear up. He nodded and turned his face away. Amish men didn’t like to show emotion to one another, even on such a sentimental occasion.

Abram ran his fingers across the rim of the cradle. He wanted to be sure it was perfect for the new addition to his family.

Abram’s mother opened the bedroom door abruptly. “Abram, come now.”

Abram felt his heart race. His mother’s expression was one of worry, and her voice trembled.

Abram quickly entered the bedroom. He saw Elizabeth lying still on the bed.

“Beth?” He ran to her side and held her hand. She didn’t respond.

He looked at his mother. “What happened?”

His mother placed her hand on his shoulder. “She gave birth to a boy, but he wasn’t breathing. Annie tried to revive the baby, but nothing worked, Abram. I’m sorry.”

Abram sensed that his mother-in-law was standing behind him holding his dead baby. He couldn’t bear to look in her direction.

Abram felt his wife’s limp hand in his. He spoke louder and patted her hand. “Beth! Wake up!”

He moved to her face and put his hands on her cheeks. Her face looked pale and lifeless. She felt cold. Abram felt

panic sweep over his body. He heard himself scream. Beth was gone. He could see it.

He buried his head on the bed and wept. He didn't acknowledge anyone else in the room but was lightly aware that the people quietly left the room so he could be alone with his wife. He stroked her hair and cried. They'd had such amazing plans for a life together, creating a family and a home. Now he would never hear her voice again, or see her laugh, or even get a scolding for being late to dinner. He had never wanted to live without her. She was his reason for everything.

The next few days were a blur. Abram felt like he was in a fog most of the time. He was aware there were people visiting in and out of the house for three days. As was their custom, he had two caskets in his living room; a large one with Elizabeth's body, and a small one for Solomon. People came and paid their respects. Abram heard many comments about how Elizabeth was caring for Solomon in heaven, and how *Gott* had called her home. None of it was comforting.

Underneath his calm demeanor, Abram was fuming. Why would *Gott* call her home so early? And why would *Gott* not even give Solomon a chance to live on this earth? It made no sense!

"It is not for us to know or understand *Gott's* ways," the bishop told him.

Abram nodded in outward submission but gritted his teeth. He thought he was going to explode with rage.

As they lowered the caskets into the ground in the cemetery, Abram's mother tried to console him by putting her arm on his back. He wasn't aware that he was sobbing. He couldn't watch and walked away before they were done. He

heard his mother call his name, but he just kept walking. All he knew was that he had to leave.

People told him it would get easier. What did they know? Most of them had never lost a wife and child at twenty-six years old. Abram filled his days with routine. He tended to his animals, worked sixteen hours a day, ate only what his mother brought over for him, and slept. That was it. He became accustomed to loneliness. It was easier to be alone than with other people.

Abram's assistant, Levi, handled the sales of his woodwork. He wasn't even fully aware of what Levi did or how, but he saw the money Levi left for him when his items sold to local English vendors.

Sometimes Abram's mother would visit even when he didn't want her to.

"Abram, you need to eat more. You're so thin."

Abram sat at the table and sipped the soup she brought him. It had no taste. Nothing did. He said nothing. He couldn't think of anything to say. He didn't care if he was thin or if he stayed alive.

"Why don't you come over after church on Sunday? Your brothers miss you. We all do, Abram."

Abram just stared at the wall. He knew she wanted him to go, but he just didn't care.

"I'm worried about you. You can't go on like this."

"Why not?" Abram said.

His mother seemed surprised when he finally spoke. She sat at the table next to him. "This is not the life Gott has planned for you. He did not create you to mope around and talk to no one."

“I work. That is what Gott created me to do.”

His mother got up from the table and slid opened the window drapes that Abram kept closed at all times. The light from the sun outside filled the room.

“That is only part of life, Abram. You are also to experience relationships with other people, have emotions, feel joy ... like you used to.”

Abram squinted from the brightness in the room. “I had other people. Gott took them from me. My joy died with Elizabeth.”

Abram’s mother breathed in deeply and then exhaled. “Maybe you need a new start, Abram. Maybe living with all the memories is keeping you in a state of grief.”

Abram made eye contact with his mother. It was the first time she had said something since Elizabeth’s passing that made any sense to him.

“How?” Abram couldn’t fathom what a new start would entail. It was easier to just continue going through the motions.

“Well, as much as I would miss you, your daed wondered about your moving to Indiana with the Amish community there.”

Abram stroked his beard. He pondered the thought of living elsewhere. He liked the idea of people not knowing what he’d lost. There would be no pity. He wouldn’t have to keep answering the dreaded question, “Are you all right?” No one really wanted to hear, “Of course not.”

In a new place, he wouldn’t have to talk to anyone. He could mind his own business, and people would mind theirs.

The next day, Abram put a sign up on his house and shop that read, “For Sale.”

Chapter Two

One year after the passing of Elizabeth and baby Solomon, Abram was set up in Elkhart County, Indiana, with a new shop and a room in the back where he lived. He kept to himself and had no desire to meet anyone or become an active part of the community. He did the minimum of what was expected of him to be allowed to stay in the Amish community, attending church but socializing as little as possible.

Abram found woodworking soothing. It kept him busy, and he found satisfaction in turning a dead log into something practical, useful, and beautiful. Though the Amish liked their households to be plain and humble, the *Englisch* preferred artisan and customized pieces, and Abram enjoyed being creative. He eventually had so many requests from Englisch customers that he wasn't able to keep up and deliver the items in a timely manner. He recognized that he needed help with the management side of the business so he could focus his time and energy on woodworking itself. So one day, Abram put a sign on his shop window marked "Help Wanted." Days went by and he mostly forgot about it.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lantz?"

Abram looked up from his project. He always felt a little perturbed when he was interrupted.

"Yes?"

"I'm inquiring about the help wanted ..."

Abram saw a boy of about fourteen years standing before him.

He shook his head. "I need someone with experience in bookkeeping and customer service."

“I can help you with that, sir. I can learn.”

Abram remembered the pressure on a fourteen-year-old boy to find his way and learn a trade.

“I just don’t have the time to teach you. I’m sorry.”

“I can learn by watching. I promise I won’t say anything. I’ll just copy you.”

Now that was intriguing. Not having to talk sounded good. But that wasn’t what he needed.

“Not now. Check back in a few months if you’re still looking.”

The boy nodded and left. He seemed nice enough. Abram wasn’t sure why he’d told the young man to come back. He hadn’t considered training anyone before. He’d expected to do it with a son, but since that was no longer going to happen, perhaps he should consider it. Especially if he didn’t have to talk. The boy had had a good attitude.

The door opened again before Abram had a chance to get back to his project. He looked up again. This time it was a young woman who looked to be in her early twenties.

“May I help you?” Abram said out of habit.

The woman looked at him, and their eyes met. Abram felt a jolt in his heart. They both stood there in silence for a moment, feeling a little stunned.

“I saw your sign in the window. What kind of help are you looking for?”

Abram couldn’t think of an answer. He couldn’t stop looking at her. He struggled to find any actual words.

She continued. “I should clarify. I don’t know anything about woodworking. But I am very good with people, and I helped manage the books for my father’s business for several years.”

Abram blinked to gain some composure. “Uh, yes, I’m looking for someone to do the bookkeeping, communicate with clients and vendors, and to help with managing the inventory.”

She started to step forward but stopped herself. “I would like to be considered for the position. Do you have an application?”

Abram tilted his head. She seemed a little awkward and guarded. He felt he understood her in an inexplicable way.

He stood and walked toward her, extending his hand for an introduction.

“No, nothing that formal. I’m Abram Lantz.”

The woman accepted his hand and shook it. “Dawn Hartzler. Nice to meet you, Mr. Lantz.”

Abram smiled. “You can call me Abram. Why don’t we just give it a try for today and see how it goes?”

Dawn smiled. Her warm countenance sent tingles up Abram’s spine.

“All right, thank you. How can I help you?”

Abram looked around. It all suddenly seemed overwhelming. “Uh ...”

“Should I begin by making a list of inventory?”

Abram exhaled. “Sure. And I have a bunch of notes to different clients that need follow-up communication scattered on my desk.” He pointed to a desk toward the back of the room.

She nodded and started walking in the direction in which he’d pointed. “I’ll organize that for you, Mr. Lantz.” She paused. “Sorry, Abram.”

Abram's chest warmed. The way she said his name was very soothing. His body started to relax. He shook his arms, tilted his head toward each shoulder, and rolled his neck. He had been carrying more stress than he knew. Abruptly, he realized he hadn't felt this calm since Elizabeth ... just the thought of her tensed him right back up. How dare he let his guard down, even for a moment?

He cleared his throat and spoke loudly and deeply. "Did you find them, Miss Hartzler?"

"Yes," Dawn responded.

"I'll leave you to it, then." Abram squinted his eyes to focus back on the project before him.

He silently reminded himself that she was not to be a distraction. She was there to keep his business on track. Nothing more.

Chapter Three

Dawn felt so invigorated after her first day of working in the Lantz Woodshop that she skipped home. It was too perfect a day to stroll.

She entered the front door to her home, excited to tell her mother the good news.

“Hello, Mamm?”

“In the kitchen, Dawn.”

Dawn entered the kitchen and saw her mother peeling potatoes for supper. She immediately started helping.

“I found a job today,” Dawn burst out, followed by a slight squeal.

Ruby smiled. “You sound very happy about it.”

“I’m doing paperwork, inventory, and customer service for Mr. Lantz. He owns a new woodshop near town. He has a showroom in the front, and his shop right next to it. He uses all hand tools and does the work where people can see him. I’ve admired his pieces in the front window several times.”

She saw her mother raise an eyebrow.

“Anyway, I saw a sign in the window when I went to pick up the mail today. I inquired, and he said we could try it out for the day. At the end of the day, he said ‘see you tomorrow.’”

“That’s it? Just ‘see you tomorrow?’”

“He’s a man of very few words.”

“Did you tell your daed yet?” Ruby checked on the bread in the wood oven and stirred the vegetables on the stovetop.

“No, not yet. I can still do Daed’s books in the evenings. It just feels good to spread my wings a bit and work outside of the family business.”

“He counts on you, you know.”

“Oh, Mamm, I don’t do anything you or Emma and Lydia couldn’t do.”

“Sounds like training Emma might be a good idea for the future. I have enough to do with your younger brothers.”

Dawn began cutting the potatoes in small pieces. “Yes, she’s done with school now and is probably ready to do something other than dairy work. Good idea. I’ll have her start with me tonight.”

Ruby wiped her hands on her apron and sat at the table. “We have a few minutes while the food cooks, Dawn. Now sit down and tell me about Mr. Lantz.”

Dawn sat at the table and smiled. She looked down. Dare she tell her mother how’d she felt a jolt through her heart when their eyes met? It was like nothing she’d ever experienced. No, that was a private matter and not meant to be shared with anyone. It was something special between her and Gott.

“There’s nothing to tell, Mamm. He’s quiet and a little shy. We barely spoke.”

Ruby touched Dawn’s hand. “I haven’t seen you smile like this since Daniel was around.”

Dawn withdrew her hand and turned away. “Please, Mamm, let’s not bring this up again.”

“I’m not, Dawn. I just don’t know what happened. You know I wonder about it. You never shared with me.”

Dawn stiffened her neck and looked squarely at her mother. She wanted to appear brave and strong. “There’s

nothing to share. He chose a different path.”

“I know Daniel loved you.”

Dawn felt her eyes well up with tears and her bottom lip quiver. “Love isn’t always enough.”

She felt the tears drop down her cheeks. Not wanting to lose control, she wiped the tears and dried her eyes.

Dawn held it together until her mother wrapped her arms around her. Then she finally broke down and cried.

Ruby patted her and rubbed her back until the sobs stopped. Dawn had to admit it felt good to release the pent-up emotions. She finally regained composure and wiped her face with a kitchen towel.

“It has been nine months, and I still can’t think about it without crying,” Dawn admitted.

“What did Daniel do, Dawn?” Ruby asked.

Dawn pulled back from her mother’s embrace and looked at her.

“He chose to live in the English world, Mamm. He came back here from Indianapolis during his *rumspringa* and asked me to marry him. He had a job and an apartment. He said he still believed in Gott, but he didn’t want to join the Amish community. He wanted to build a life with me and have a family ...” Dawn felt her throat constrict, and her voice cracked.

“It was not Gott’s will then, Dawn,” Ruby declared.

“I’m already baptized, Mamm. I made my choice. It never occurred to me that it wouldn’t be his, too. I told Daniel I couldn’t leave with him or I would be shunned and never be allowed to see you and Daed again. He was crushed, Mamm.” She swallowed and took a deep breath in and out. “I haven’t

seen or heard from him since. It hurts, Mamm. I loved him. I still do.”

Dawn cried some more, and Ruby held her and comforted her. “Gott will heal your heart, Dawn, but it will take time.”

Dawn knew her mother would say that. It didn’t help.

After dinner that night, Dawn helped Emma learn how to keep track of the family dairy business. She was ready to be done with it.

She sat alone in her room that night, tired of being sad. It was time to move forward. She was ready to let go of the pain, but told herself she would never put herself in that situation in the future. She would guard her heart so she would not risk it breaking again.

Chapter Four

Abram noticed by the end of the first week that Dawn had everything organized. She left a spreadsheet on his desk of current projects and expected due dates. He found this tremendously helpful. He especially appreciated how quiet she was during the day so he could focus on his work.

When Dawn arrived the next Monday, Abram was eager to see her.

“Miss Hartzler, I appreciated your list of projects and due dates. It helps me focus.”

Dawn nodded and smiled. “I’m glad you find it helpful, Mr. Lantz.”

“Please, call me Abram.”

“All right, if you will call me Dawn.”

Abram nodded and looked down. He didn’t trust himself to look into her beautiful blue eyes again.

“I finished the bed frame for the Spencers. Will you write them a letter and inform them it’s ready? They said they would pick it up.”

“Absolutely.”

“I see the dining table and chairs are next on the list.”

“Yes, the date you quoted them is only one month away. Would you like me to change that and inform them of a new date?”

“No, that should be fine. They picked a set I already started and set aside. They just wanted some finishing.”

Dawn nodded and sat at the desk. Abram watched as she found a paper and began to write the letter. She was so

graceful and humble. She didn't ask a bunch of questions. He wanted to watch her longer but forced himself to get back to work.

The door opened, and Abram heard Dawn get up from the desk and walk toward it. It was nice not to have to attend to every straggler who entered the showroom. He heard them talking but didn't tune in to exactly what was being said.

He heard the talking stop and Dawn's footsteps heading toward him. He didn't stop sanding the table in front of him but was ready to listen.

"Yes, Dawn?"

"Excuse me, Abram. There's a couple here asking if you could make a cradle for a baby they have on the way."

Abram felt a sting in his gut. He stopped sanding and stared straight forward.

After a long pause, he said, "No." He started sanding again.

Dawn stood there and didn't move. "I'm sorry. No, you are too busy? Or ..." Dawn leaned in closer and whispered in his ear, "What about the cradle I saw in the back? Is that for sale?"

Abram didn't take his eyes off the table. "I don't make cradles."

He couldn't bear to look at the couple. They were probably happy, even giddy. He couldn't deal with it.

He heard Dawn walk back to the couple, say a few words, and then heard the door open and close again.

Dawn walked past him and back to the desk.

Abram tried to get back to work. He was glad they left. He probably owed Dawn an explanation for his shortness, and

for the cradle in the back. But he wasn't sure how to talk about it.

Several hours went by. Abram and Dawn worked quietly on their own projects.

Dawn finally spoke. "Abram, I brought two sandwiches for lunch today. Would you like one?"

Abram stopped working and stood up straight. She didn't seem upset with him. And he was a little hungry.

"I don't want to take from you. Go ahead and eat."

Dawn walked closer to him with a sandwich. "You're not taking from me. I brought it for you. I noticed you don't eat much during the day. You need your strength. You work hard." She stretched her arm out and offered the sandwich.

Abram looked at her. Her smile made the whole room brighter. He accepted the sandwich and took a bite. It felt like the first time he'd actually tasted food in over a year.

Abram savored the flavor. "This is very good. Thank you, Dawn."

She blushed a little and looked down. "You're welcome."

Dawn began to walk back to her desk. Abram didn't want her to leave.

"Please ... join me."

Dawn looked a little surprised at his request but smiled as she walked back to his working table and sat down in a nearby chair. She took a bite of her sandwich.

Abram cleared his throat. "I feel like I should explain about my shortness before regarding the cradle."

Dawn raised her hand. "No, Abram, you don't owe me anything. It's none of my business."

“It’s just that I made that cradle for my son ...” Abram’s voice trailed off. He couldn’t seem to say any more words.

Dawn waited patiently.

Abram felt a flood of emotions flow through his body. He focused on breathing and letting them pass before speaking again.

“He died along with my wife, just over a year ago.”

Whew, he’d said it. It was done. He hoped she didn’t ask any questions. He kept his eyes on the floor. It felt safer.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Abram. I didn’t realize.”

Abram nodded. “I don’t like to talk about it.”

“I understand.”

They sat in silence for several minutes. Abram finished his sandwich and wiped his hands on his trousers. “Well, thank you again for the sandwich. I had forgotten how good they were.”

Dawn giggled as if he was joking. Abram smiled. He realized it did sound strange, but he honestly couldn’t remember the last time he had tasted such a good sandwich or enjoyed the company of another person. Dawn was a gift from Gott.

Chapter Five

Dawn enjoyed going to work every day. She felt useful and like she had a purpose. Abram was an artist and preferred to work in silence. She understood it and was very comfortable with the quiet work environment. It felt peaceful.

Dawn packed a lunch for Abram each morning. She started with just a sandwich but added some vegetables from her garden and some dessert treats. She suspected it was all he ate so she wanted to make sure it was enough to keep him healthy. Without a wife at home, she suspected Abram appreciated her extra effort. Though he never made her feel like bringing his lunch was expected or part of her job, she enjoyed sharing food with him. It was the only time he visited during the day. But he was getting more and more comfortable talking at lunch, and it was becoming her favorite part of the day.

In the mornings, Abram usually reviewed his plans for the day and informed her of any changes or communications that needed to be made. While he crafted his wood items, Dawn managed the customers who came into the showroom, made sales, kept the accounting straight, wrote letters to vendors and customers, and kept everything organized and clean. She was very proud to represent Abram's work to others because his products were the finest quality she'd ever seen, and his finishing touches made them beautiful as well.

In the mail, Dawn read a letter from the Elkhart Farmer's Market regarding an upcoming craft show. She kept it on the desk until lunchtime so she wouldn't disturb Abram's work routine. At noon, when he put down his carving chisel, Dawn brought him his lunch and sat next to him at his work table, as usual.

“Abram, are you interested in selling your items at a local craft show?”

Abram wrinkled his nose. “What do I have to do?”

“You don’t have to do anything. I’ll take care of it. I can gather up some of the beautiful items you have here in your showroom and bring them to a table at the show. It’s a good way to introduce yourself and your work to a new community of people.”

“Where is it?”

“Elkhart. I know several of our Amish family take part in it with their woven baskets, quilts, and hand-sewn clothing. I think your wood art would be a wonderful addition to the show.”

“You’re thinking the small pieces?”

“Yes, like ...” Dawn looked around the room. “... your train set, birdhouse, those decorative boxes, and the stick horses. Kids love those.”

Abram smiled. He remembered his younger siblings enjoying his stick horses.

“I suppose that’s a good idea.”

“I could find someone to go with me that could help load some large items, too, like that beautiful hope chest. I know people would love it. It’s exquisite.”

Dawn admired the hope chest for a few moments. When she looked back at Abram, he had a big smile on his face. She had never seen him smile so openly. It was captivating.

“You like my work?”

Dawn blinked. She couldn’t believe he didn’t know how much she admired his work. “Oh, Abram, your work is inspiring. Every piece you craft is special and unique. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Abram sat up straighter in his chair and looked around. “You know, I’ve poured my heart and soul into my work for a long time. I guess I haven’t noticed what other people think about it. I’ve just been focused on the creation part.”

“Well, your work shows that you put your heart and soul into it. And anyone who sees your work is struck by its intricate details and perfect finishing. It’s like every item has a story.”

Abram stood up and started to look around. “It does! Everything I made came from a vision of someone using that piece of wood, or from a memory of mine.”

Abram stopped at the birdhouse. “See this? I used to have a family of blue birds nesting in a tree outside my bedroom window. I remember the first morning I heard the baby birds chirping after watching their mother dutifully sit on her nest for a couple of weeks. Elizabeth and I had just gotten married and we had such hopes. We watched the whole process carefully and celebrated when the birds left the nest a month later. It was like we saw our future. Well, we thought we did, anyway.”

Abram’s voice trailed off, and he stared at the birdhouse. It was the first time he’d shared a memory of Elizabeth with Dawn. She was glad he finally felt comfortable talking about her. It was an important step in his grief recovery.

“That’s a beautiful memory, Abram.”

Abram breathed in and exhaled. “So when I built this birdhouse, I wanted it to be about building a loving home with hope and future.”

Dawn walked over and stood next to Abram at the birdhouse. “All of the detail you put into the roof and the flower boxes on the windows. It looks like a house anyone would want to live in.”

Abram's mouth curved upward.

"Maybe I'll go with you to the craft show."

Dawn raised her eyebrows. "That would be wonderful!"

"I think I'm ready."

Dawn put her hand on Abram's shoulder. "I think you are too."

"Why don't you sign us up for that, and then make a list of the items you think we should bring? Getting out there and meeting people who are interested in woodcraft will help me come up with new ideas for the next show."

Dawn felt new energy coming from Abram. It was like something had awoken inside him that had been sleeping for a while. The timber of his voice sounded more animated, and his feet didn't drag on the floor when he walked. She was witnessing a spark of joy in Abram, and that gave her hope that she could feel joy again too someday.

Abram closed the shop that night when Dawn left. It was the first time he had stopped working before he was ready to go to bed. Something had shifted. He used to be crippled by depression whenever he stopped working. Crafting wood was the only thing he had been able to do since Elizabeth and Solomon's deaths. It was like the only thing over which he had control. But after his conversation with Dawn about his items having stories, and his revelation of the feelings that went into each piece of work, he was suddenly freed from the compulsion to work. He was finally ready to just sit and feel.

The idea of allowing such vulnerability was frightening at first, but as Abram sat in his rocking chair, he noticed that he was no longer overwhelmed with sorrow. He still felt sad and missed his wife terribly, but his emotions were not debilitating like they once were.

For the first time since Elizabeth's death, Abram reached for his Bible and began to read. The last time he'd tried, he'd read Psalm 23 and felt so much anger and resentment that he had thrown the Bible across the room and screamed.

This time, he softly prayed and thanked Gott for His understanding and forgiveness. He accepted Gott's grace for his reactions and knew that Gott recognized his pain. He asked Gott to heal his heart and begin the process of renewal in his life.

He read aloud, and this time, found comfort in the words:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

"Amen," Abram concluded.

Chapter Six

On the morning of the craft show, Abram got up early and started loading his wagon. Dawn had a very clear list of things to bring and had gathered them all in one place in the showroom so it was easy to find everything.

A young man delivering the morning paper walked up to Abram. “Good morning, Mr. Lantz. Good to see you out and about.”

Abram remembered the young man from a few months earlier. He was looking for a job.

“Ah yes, thank you. What is your name?”

“Peter, sir.”

“Yes, Peter. You found a job I see.”

“Well, delivering papers is something I’m doing until I find my true calling.”

“You still interested in learning about woodcraft?”

Peter’s eyes brightened. “Yes, sir.”

“Well, I think I’m ready to teach.”

“I would be honored to learn, Mr. Lantz.”

“If you’re free today, my assistant and I are going to the Elkhart Craft Show. We could use some help.”

Peter nodded. “Absolutely. I’ll be done with my route in about thirty minutes. I can help you load the wagon then.”

Abram tipped his hat and watched Peter rush off to finish his deliveries. Abram breathed in the fresh air and looked at the morning sun. He hadn’t noticed the beauty in Indiana before. The wide-open spaces, green grass and trees, growing life all around him, and subtle hills ... what a beautiful place

Gott had created for him to live. And what a shame he had not taken time to recognize it for so long. Abram breathed a prayer of thanksgiving and went back to work.

Dawn kept busy flitting around with her lists, given Peter directions as they set up at the craft show. She seemed to know many people there and was very friendly with everyone she talked to.

Once the show opened and customers started streaming in, Dawn was greeted by an English woman.

“Dawn, so good to see you again. Are you not displaying your baskets today?”

Dawn shook the lady’s hand. “No, ma’am, today I’m here with wood artist Abram Lantz. We’re showcasing some of his handcrafted items. Every one of them is unique and tells a story of love and family.”

Abram was impressed with Dawn’s natural sales ability.

The woman looked carefully at the items displayed. “Oh, I see what you mean, Dawn. The details are amazing.”

Abram quietly sat in his chair. He felt a little self-conscious as people kept admiring his work.

The woman looked at him. “Are you the artist?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I’ve never seen such fine work, young man. I own a chain of stores that features Amish-made products. I have stores all over Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and just opened one in Illinois. We also have a huge online business. Would you be open to creating some exclusives for me?”

Abram wasn’t sure how to respond. He looked at Dawn, and she was beaming with a smile that made his heart race.

“What kind of products are you looking for?”

The woman ran her hand over the hope chest. “Well, I love this. My customers often ask for unique coffee tables with character. Living room furniture pieces that tell a story of a strong home and fine taste with a touch of playfulness would be wonderful. A coffee table says so much about a person.” The woman laughed. “Oh, and they love hidden compartments where they can store things.”

Abram smiled. “Yes, I think I can do that for you. It takes time to craft unique items.”

“Oh I know, dear. But I will make it worth your while. My customers pay boo koo bucks to have the very best.”

Abram looked at Dawn and shrugged his shoulders. What did boo koo mean? He guessed he got the idea. Dawn giggled.

The lady gave Abram her card. “There’s my address. Mail me some sketches and some of your ideas or plans and we can make a deal.”

Abram looked at the card and then watched her walk away holding several bags of merchandise on each arm.

Abram looked at Dawn, and they both started to laugh.

“I’ve never experienced someone like that,” Abram said.

“Oh, the Englisch think we’re very quaint. And they love to make money off us.”

Abram shrugged. “Sounds like it could be a great opportunity. I just don’t want her to think I actually work for her.”

“You’ll have to make that clear. You can tell her how many pieces per year you can create for her,” Dawn suggested.

Abram stroked his beard and put the card in his pocket.

Peter bounced over and stood between Abram and Dawn. “This is wild! People are knocking each other over to get to your stuff first, Mr. Lantz.”

Abram laughed. “Looks like I’m going to need to teach you fast, Peter. I’ve already got more work than I can handle alone.”

Peter jumped up and down. His youthful energy made Abram laugh. It felt good to feel joy around him again.

At the end of the day, there wasn’t much left to pack up.

Dawn counted the cash from the day and carefully put it in her purse.

Abram asked, “How did we do?”

Dawn smiled. “You did very well. You have enough to cover all of your expenses and start a very nice savings account.”

Abram looked pleased. “Make sure you account for a nice bonus for yourself and for Peter for your work today.”

Dawn nodded. “I will. Thank you.”

“Thank you for pushing me to do this. I didn’t realize how badly I needed to shift my perspective to start seeing the good in things and people again.”

Dawn understood. After Daniel had left, she couldn’t see the point of anything and had buried herself in work and projects. But seeing Abram come to life over the last month, and feeling the exuberance of people around her, she now related to his new outlook on life and refreshed spirit.

“I know what you mean.”

On the way home, Dawn sat in the middle on the wagon seat between Abram and Peter. Her sleeve sometimes grazed Abram’s sleeve, and just the very simple touch sent tingles up her spine. This spark between them was new to her. She’d never even felt that with Daniel.

For so long, Dawn had gotten used to Abram's quiet nature. She assumed that was his personality. But on the way home from the craft show, Abram chatted away. He didn't stop talking about all the people and what they said and did until they got home.

"Did you not have exposure to the Englisch in Lancaster?"

"I saw them on their tours and such, but I never talked to them. My assistant, Levi, took care of deliveries and communication with outsiders. And my wife, Elizabeth, did some shopping in town, but I was able to get all of my supplies and tools through local Amish families. I just never had the need to venture out. Today felt like an adventure."

"Yes, it was. It's nice to see you so full of life."

"Dawn, it's nice to feel life again. Thank you for being so understanding over the last several months. I realize now how difficult I must have been."

"Not difficult, Abram. Just quiet and very reserved. I liked it."

"Oh," Abram laughed. "I see, you miss the quiet. I know I can't seem to stop talking now. It's odd."

Dawn laughed. "No, no, I like this, too. It's just ... I was in a similar emotional place of needing quiet and space. We helped each other."

Abram turned and looked at her. "I was so wrapped up in myself, I never even thought about what you were going through. What happened?"

Dawn felt her stomach flutter. She looked at Peter, who had his eyes closed and looked like he was sleeping, even with all of the bouncing from the wagon. She nudged her head toward Peter and looked at Abram.

“I’ll share with you another time.”

Abram nodded and focused his attention on the road. Dawn noticed he was quiet the rest of the way home. She figured he was thinking through their former conversations, trying to piece things together and make sense of what she meant. She had been careful not to divulge any past hurts or pain to him. She was sure he had no idea she was also crumbling under the pain of loss. She felt ready to tell him and looked forward to some time they could spend in private again.

Once they reached the shop, Dawn woke Peter up and the three of them unloaded.

“Should I report for work tomorrow, Mr. Lantz?”

“Come on in as soon as your paper route is complete,” Abram said.

Peter nodded and skipped off.

Abram gestured toward the shop door. “Do you have a few more minutes before you have to get home?”

Dawn nodded and walked toward the door. Abram opened it for her. She walked to her desk, and he pulled up a chair to sit by her.

“Now tell me what you’ve been going through that I was completely oblivious to.”

Dawn collected her thoughts.

“It’s not a big deal, Abram. I’m sorry if I compared it to your grief in any way.”

“Stop apologizing and talk,” Abram said. He leaned in toward her and gave her his undivided attention.

“There was a boy that I loved and thought I would marry, but he chose to stay with the Englisch. My feelings were hurt.”

“Doesn’t sound like a mere schoolgirl crush.”

“No, it wasn’t. We courted for several years. We made plans for a family. We dreamed of a life together. And when he came back, I thought ...” Dawn’s voice cracked and she started crying.

Abram let her cry for a little while. “It’s very hard when Gott works in ways we don’t understand.”

Dawn nodded and wiped her tears. “I just had to wrap my head around a different life. I thought by the time I turned twenty-two I would be a wife and mother and have a home to take care of. But I have nothing.”

Dawn felt the tears stream down her face again. Abram held her hands in his.

“I know what that feels like. I can tell you that your presence here, and your ability to leave me alone and not try to fix me, helped me heal better than anything anyone else tried. I moved here because I couldn’t take all the advice my family and friends in Lancaster had to offer. I couldn’t bear to hear about Gott’s will one more time.”

He squeezed Dawn’s hands.

“We’re not ready to move on until we’re ready. There’s no remedy or cure for heartache. One has to find his own way through. And while our hearts can heal, there will always be scars from where we loved deeply before.”

Dawn wiped her tears. It was refreshing to not have someone tell her to get over it or tell her Daniel wasn’t worth her tears. She knew Abram understood like no one else could.

“May I walk you home?” Abram asked.

Dawn’s heart warmed, and she nodded her approval.

On the way home, Abram took her hand in his and held it. He felt an electrifying current run through his arm when they touched. He wondered if she felt it too.

Abram knew they connected on a spiritual level through their shared journeys of sorrow and disappointment. He had hope that one day the two of them could get beyond their shadows of disillusionment and seek a hopeful future, maybe even together.

As they neared her family home, Abram turned to say good night just at the same time Dawn turned her face, and she accidentally kissed him on the lips. She looked surprised and embarrassed. He was stunned, and unsure how to react.

Dawn looked like she was about to cry. "I'm sorry, Abram." And she ran off.

Abram watched her run but couldn't bring himself to say anything. He wanted to call her name and assure her that everything was all right, but he couldn't speak. He just watched her enter her home.

What a surprising day. Perhaps it was all too much to process at once. One thing he knew for sure: he was falling in love with Dawn Hartzler.

Chapter Seven

The next day, Abram found Peter a delight to train. He was observant and didn't ask too many questions. He knew something about carpentry and proved to be very careful and diligent in his work. He was slow though, there was just no getting around that. One was either slow and careful or fast and made mistakes that needed to be redone.

If Abram was going to be able to fill all the orders in a timely fashion, he would need to hire a woodworker with experience. He put a sign in the window. It had worked when he found Dawn and Peter, so maybe it would work this time, too.

Dawn came to work at her usual time. Abram was a little concerned that it was going to feel awkward, but she acted like everything was as it had been for the last several months, so he did, too.

"I've got Peter working on some basic assembly so I can spend a little time on designs for the Englisch lady."

"What would you like me to work on?" Dawn asked.

"I'd like a full report on the craft show income, expenses, and the current inventory. I should finish the dining table this week. Please write a letter to inform the customer and give me another list of orders that are waiting. I need to come up with a real strategy to handle all of this."

Dawn nodded. "I see you're advertising in the window for a woodworker?"

"Yes, do you know someone?"

Dawn stared at him like a deer in the headlights. "Uh ... no."

That answer didn't seem complete. Abram waited to see if she had anything to add. She didn't. Did she want to talk about last night?

"I'll get right on that list," Dawn said. She walked briskly to her desk.

Abram followed her. He stood next to her and spoke softly to avoid Peter hearing.

"About last night ..." Abram started.

Dawn put her hand up between them. "Oh please, we don't need to talk about it. I'm embarrassed enough."

Abram held her hand. "There's nothing to be embarrassed about, Dawn. I had a lovely day and evening with you. I hope we'll have many more."

Dawn's shoulders relaxed a bit. Her lips curved up. "Me too."

The next few weeks were spent training Peter, finishing projects during the day, and designing and dreaming up new ideas at night. Abram regretted that lunches with Dawn were not as free with Peter around. He often joined them, which was nice in that he brought a sense of humor and lightness, but Abram missed the days when he could talk with Dawn alone. He wanted to find a way to invite her to dinner sometime.

The door opened, and a young man asked to talk to the owner. He was dressed as an Englishman but spoke with their local accent.

Abram shook his hand. "I'm Abram Lantz. How can I help you?"

"Hello, I'm Daniel Smucker. I'm a woodworker. Are you still looking?"

"Yes, I am. Are you from here?" Abram asked.

“I grew up here. I currently live in Indianapolis, but I’m looking to move back to town.”

“Well, I’m not much on formal applications. Are you familiar with hand tools?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why don’t you show me what you can do?”

Daniel nodded. Abram showed him some scrap lumber and watched Daniel construct a simple table. It was true and sturdy. He was exactly who Abram needed.

“When can you start, Daniel?”

“Right now?”

“Very well. Let me introduce you to my assistant.”
Abram walked, and Daniel followed him, to the desk in the back.

“Dawn, this is ...”

Dawn looked up and dropped her pencil, eyes going wide. “Daniel!”

Dawn couldn’t believe it. She’d never expected to see Daniel again. Her heart was just beginning to heal. Why now? What could Daniel be doing here? Her mind was racing.

“Dawn, it’s good to see you,” Daniel said.

He stood there in front of her, holding his English-style hat and gazing at her with those big brown eyes she’d loved for so many years. His voice was deep and strong. It had made her feel safe and secure for years. Now she didn’t know how it made her feel.

“What are you doing here?” Dawn’s voice was shaky and weak.

“I’m the new woodworker.”

Dawn felt lightheaded. This couldn't be happening. What did this mean? Dawn sat down. She was confused and felt very uneasy.

Abram sat next to her. "Is there a problem, Dawn?"

She couldn't speak. She just shook her head. It shouldn't be Abram's concern that the man she loved had just walked back into her life and she didn't know how to deal with it.

Abram whispered to Dawn, "Is there something I should know about Daniel?"

She looked at Abram. Of course he didn't understand why she was so taken aback. She had never told Abram the name of her former love. She needed to at least explain her reaction.

"Daniel is the man I told you about. He left the Amish community last year." Dawn looked long and hard at Abram, hoping he would catch her reference.

Abram's jaw dropped. He looked at Daniel. "I hadn't realized you knew my assistant, Dawn."

Daniel smiled. "I didn't know she worked here. I promise. Seems like Gott brought us back together."

Abram cleared his throat and stood up. "You know, Daniel, on second thought, why don't you let us get some paperwork together and come back tomorrow morning for a final interview."

"Don't worry, Mr. Lantz. I'll clear everything up with Dawn. Our relationship will not get in the way of our jobs."

Abram smiled politely and nodded. "Even so, come back tomorrow."

Daniel nodded and bowed a little. He walked out of the shop.

Abram asked, "Are you all right?"

“Honestly, I’m not sure, Abram. I never expected to see him again. I don’t know what it means, and I don’t know how I’m supposed to respond.”

Abram looked hurt. He leaned against the desk and stared at the floor.

After several minutes, Abram looked at her directly. “Dawn, I feel something special between us, and I know you do too. I realize we haven’t talked about it yet, and I’m not sure we’re at the point where we need to. We’ve been through a lot, and we’ve helped each other. Maybe that’s all Gott intended for us. I don’t know. But what I do know is that if I had a second chance with Elizabeth, I would cherish it.”

Dawn’s heart sank. Was she going to lose Abram?

“Abram, I don’t know why Daniel is here. I don’t know if he’s asking for a second chance with me.”

“Well, maybe you need to find out. Take the rest of the day off.”

“You mean you want me to leave?”

Abram touched her shoulder. “Dawn, don’t misunderstand me. I’m not upset with you in any way. No, I don’t want you to leave. But I do want you to be clear on what is happening, and I think you need to talk with him. I don’t want to stand in the way of that.”

Dawn looked at Abram’s kind face. He had come to mean a great deal to her. He was patient and understanding. She wasn’t sure how she felt about Daniel anymore.

Dawn walked out of the shop and saw Daniel standing outside.

“Dawn, we need to talk.”

Chapter Eight

Dawn felt like a schoolgirl all over again. One look from Daniel, and her knees were weak, her stomach fluttered, and her mouth was dry. She had fallen in love with Daniel when they were in seventh grade. Charming and handsome, he'd walked her home from school and carried her books.

“You want to get some coffee?” Daniel asked.

Dawn nodded.

They walked to the local coffee shop. Daniel ordered two coffees, and they found a quiet table in the corner so they could talk.

Dawn felt uneasy. She didn't even know what she wanted him to say. Did she want him back? Did he want her back?

Daniel finally spoke. “Dawn, I've missed you.”

Dawn saw sincerity in his eyes, and she felt the ice in her chest begin to melt.

“I've missed you, too, Daniel. I was just learning to move on without you.”

“I tried, Dawn. I was enchanted by the English world and all it had to offer. I thought it was what I wanted, but the last fourteen months without you have been empty and lonely. I finally realized I didn't want that world if it meant I didn't have you by my side.”

Dawn heard his words but tried to stay strong. She wasn't ready to completely let her guard down yet.

“Are you saying you're coming back to our community because of me?”

“Well, yes, if you'll have me.” Daniel placed his hand on top of Dawn's.

Dawn slid her hand out from under his and put it in her lap.

Daniel continued. “Dawn, I don’t expect you to just take me back right away. I’ll work to win your love again.”

“What’s your plan, Daniel?”

“I want to find work here in Elkhart, which I did ... honestly, I had no idea you worked there.”

Dawn tilted her head and squinted a bit. Was that the truth? Had Gott planted him here? Or was that a coincidence?

“And then I plan on meeting with the bishop and getting baptized so you and I can be together.”

“Your choice to follow our ways has to be for Gott and the whole community, not just one person. You know that, Daniel.”

“I know Gott reveals Himself through other people. I feel close to Gott when I’m with you. He shines through you, Dawn. I need you in my life in order to feel Gott.”

Dawn stood up. “No, you don’t. You may think you need me to feel Gott, but that’s something you need to work out with Him, not me.” She walked out of the coffee shop.

As soon as Dawn hit the edge of town and followed the dirt road to her house, she started to cry. After so many months, he still affected her deeply. She was disappointed in his immature faith and felt he was making choices out of desperation and need, not from a place of spiritual calling or guidance.

She walked through a field of wildflowers. They were colorful and a perfect example of Gott’s beautiful and purposeful creation.

Dawn cried out to Gott, “Please, Gott, show me your way. Make clear to me your purpose. Am I to offer Daniel

forgiveness and grace? Or is he just a temptation for me to stray from your path? And what about Abram? He looked so heartbroken. How could I possibly walk away from such a devout man who has shown me love and to whom my heart has opened? Why is all of this happening?”

Dawn sat in the field and let the tears fall. She knew Gott had promised to be near to the brokenhearted. She believed in His love for her and trusted that He would guide and direct her.

Abram felt like his world was caving in around him. He had allowed his walls of protection around him to crumble and now he was paying the price. It was much easier to close himself off from other people. It was safe and predictable. It was the only way to survive in this world of pain and loss. He sat at his favorite working chair and focused on his carving.

Carving was satisfying. He knew just how to manipulate the chisel to create the exact shape he envisioned for the wood. He was in control. The wood didn't have free will, and it couldn't choose to leave him. It would become exactly what he chose for it. Yes, this he could trust.

Peter called out from the other end of the shop and broke Abram's concentration. "Mr. Lantz?"

Abram snapped, "What?"

Peter's eyes got wide and he backed up a bit. "I'm sorry. I'm having a little trouble with this table leg."

Abram tossed his wood piece and chisel on the table and stomped over to Peter's side. "Now what?"

Abram looked at the table. He leaned over so his eyes were even with the top of the table. "This is terrible work, Peter. It's way off. Did you even use the level?"

Peter looked down. “No, sir. I measured ...”

Abram cut him off. “Measuring is not enough! I taught you this.” Abram stepped in between Peter and the table. Peter stepped back to get out of his way.

“Just leave it. I’ll fix it.”

“Should I—”

“Just go home, Peter. That is enough for today. I can’t handle anymore,” Abram said sternly.

Peter didn’t say anything. He left the room quickly. Abram knew he had been too hard on the boy and that his frustration was not really about him, but he couldn’t seem to contain his outburst. Life was much easier without people around.

Abram worked most of the night. He finally quit in the early morning hours and lay down on the cot for a couple of hours before the sun rose. His stomach was in knots wondering what Dawn was going to say when she arrived.

When the door opened, Abram looked up, hoping to see Dawn. Instead, it was Peter.

Abram cleared his throat. “Peter, please accept my apology for my attitude yesterday. I was out of line.”

“No, sir, I messed up and I’m sorry.”

Abram raised his hand to silence Peter and lowered his voice. “No. You’re learning. I’m teaching, and I failed you yesterday. I allowed my personal feelings about something else to get in the way. I’m determined to do better today.”

Peter scratched his head and looked down. Abram had noticed before that Peter did that when he was nervous. He did have a likable quality about him. It was difficult to stay angry at him for very long.

“Come here,” Abram motioned with his hands. “I’ll show you what happened and how to fix it.”

Peter walked to Abram’s side. He stayed quiet and listened. Abram knew Gott had placed this kid in his life to teach him patience and give him purpose. It was time he stepped up and did what Gott expected of him instead of wallowing in his own pain.

The door opened again, and Abram looked up to see Dawn. She stopped at the door and looked at him.

Abram left Peter and walked over to her. “Did you talk with Daniel?”

Dawn nodded. “Yes. He said he came back because he missed me. I told him that wasn’t enough of a reason to join the community.”

“And what did he say?”

Dawn shrugged. “Not much else. I walked away.”

Abram stood straight. “Oh, so you two are not ...”

“... together? No.”

Abram smiled. There was still hope.

The door opened again, and all three looked at Daniel.

Abram walked toward him and extended his hand. “Let’s get to work, shall we, Daniel?”

Chapter Nine

Abram couldn't help but like Daniel. He was a good woodworker, and he didn't need much direction. He was funny and friendly and brought laughter to the workplace. He was also great with Peter. He was patient and a much more natural teacher than Abram was. Abram started to realize that though Dawn had helped him come out of his fog of depression, he still had a long way to go. With the comradery and Daniel, Peter, and Dawn, Abram was starting to feel like his old self again.

Business was booming, and with Daniel and Peter filling orders for walkins, Abram was able to design and create items for Miss Polly at Artful Living. She loved his sketches and gave him a handsome down payment for the exclusive rights to several products. Abram spent most of his time on those.

Dawn acted very professional while at work. She was pleasant, but Abram missed the alone time they once had during lunch. As far as he could tell, Dawn and Daniel were not officially courting, and he had given them a little space and time to figure out their current relationship. He wanted to tell her how much she meant to him.

Dawn approached Abram. "You received a rather large check from Artful Living today, Abram. I'm going to walk over to the bank and deposit it."

"I'll go with you," Abram replied.

Dawn smiled, and Abram noticed that Daniel's head popped up and he watched them leave.

Abram and Dawn walked down the sidewalk toward the bank.

"It's nice to have a few minutes alone," Abram said.

“Yes, it is.”

“How are you doing, you know, with Daniel here and all?”

“I’m fine. I’m giving him time and space to figure things out. If he chooses to stay, I want him to do it for himself and not for me.”

“I didn’t want to like him so much,” Abram admitted.

Dawn giggled. “He does have a way about him that appeals to people. He has always been the life of the party.”

“I also understand how missing you could make a man change his ways.”

Dawn stopped walking and looked at Abram. “What do you mean?”

Abram took her hand in his. “Before I met you, I became comfortable living in my very dark place. Not because I enjoyed it or found comfort in it, but because it was familiar. I didn’t care about being lonely because I didn’t feel anything. I had become numb to life. But when you entered my life, I started to remember that feeling things didn’t have to mean pain. With you, I felt joy, and I’m grateful for that.”

Dawn opened her mouth, “Abram, I ...”

Abram gently put his finger up to her mouth. “Please ... let me finish.”

Dawn closed her mouth and nodded.

“Over the last few weeks, since Daniel arrived, I’ve kept my distance. I need you to know that it wasn’t because my feelings for you changed or diminished. It was out of respect for you and your history with Daniel.”

Dawn’s lips curved up, and Abram saw that beautiful chin dimple he adored. “When I thought I was losing you, I was tempted to crawl back into my cave of loneliness and

despair. I thought it would spare me from pain. But Gott showed me I had more to learn before I could fully embrace life and love again.”

“Oh?” Dawn tilted her head and continued to listen.

Abram put her hand through his arm and started strolling again with her.

“Gott brought Peter and then Daniel into my life and showed me the power of friendship. As I gave of myself to them, I found more of myself again. My confidence has returned, and my faith has been renewed.”

“Oh, Abram, that’s amazing. Praise Gott.”

“So, you take your time, Dawn. I’m praying for you and Daniel. Gott will show you His way and I’m ready to trust His plan for you and for me.”

Dawn leaned in and squeezed his arm. “I appreciate that, Abram.”

They arrived at the bank. Abram asked for cash back. He didn’t trust banks. He only had the account to accept business checks. He carried the cash in a large envelope.

They walked back toward the shop. “Perhaps you should get a safe for your office where you can keep your cash?”

“Nah, I’m there all the time. I’ll just keep it near me.”

Dawn smiled. “I’m proud of you, Abram. And I know Gott is proud of the way you have surrendered your life to Him. He’s rewarded you by giving you this business.”

“Yes, that’s true. I’m blessed with the money. I know Gott will use it to help others, and to allow me to provide for a family someday.”

“It’s inspiring to see you so full of hope.”

They arrived back at the shop. Abram felt relieved to have finally shared all of that with Dawn. She was so easy to talk to, and her love and devotion to Gott gave him a reason to trust the future to Gott's hands.

In the early evening, Dawn and Peter left, but Daniel continued to work. "You taking off soon, Daniel?" Abram asked.

"I'd like to stay and finish this if you don't mind, Mr. Lantz."

"I don't mind."

They worked in silence for a while. It wasn't like Daniel to not talk for hours in a row. Abram started to wonder if there was something going on with him. Abram took a break from his project and walked up to Daniel.

"Everything all right, Daniel?"

He kept working. "Yes, sir. I just ... well, I was wondering if I finished some projects earlier if I could get paid earlier?"

Abram crossed his arms and stroked his beard. "Yes, I think we could work that out. Are you in urgent need of money?"

Daniel wouldn't look Abram in the eye. "Just bills ... you know. I got a little behind and I'm feeling some pressure."

"From people around here?"

"Oh, no—in Indianapolis, where I used to live. The Englisch aren't so willing to work with you when times get tough."

Abram felt drawn to help. "How much do you need to settle your bills?" Abram opened his envelope of cash.

Daniel's eyes widened. "Oh no, I couldn't ask you to help. I'll work for it."

"I know you will, Daniel, but you'll work better without pressure from the outside. Gott has blessed me; I want to bless others."

Daniel looked down and up. He was fidgety. "Five thousand."

Abram raised his eyebrows. He'd never expected such a high amount. "That is some bill, Daniel."

Daniel looked at the floor. "Yes, sir. I made some bad choices."

"That's about two months' worth of work."

"Yes, sir," Daniel said.

Abram wrinkled his eyebrows. "I can give you two months advance in pay, but I expect to continue to see good solid work from you."

Daniel lifted his head. "Thank you, Mr. Lantz. I won't let you down."

Abram handed him five thousand dollars in cash and put the rest back in his envelope.

He shook Daniel's hand. "You better go take care of it tomorrow."

Daniel nodded. "Yes, sir. Thank you."

Abram left the shop. It felt good to give to someone in need. He slept better than he had in years.

Chapter Ten

Dawn helped her mother finish the dishes and then sat outside on the porch swing to enjoy the summer evening air. She couldn't help but think of the many evenings she and Daniel had sat there together, dreaming of their future. She'd thought it was all so simple then. Life sure hadn't gone the way she expected.

Dawn saw a figure walking down her driveway toward the house. Who was that? Could it be Abram? No ... he had no beard. As he got closer, Dawn could see plainly ... it was Daniel.

He approached the porch steps. "May I join you on this lovely evening, Dawn?"

She nodded. He was carrying a bunch of wildflowers and handed her a bouquet. "They made me think of you."

"Oh, Daniel, you think all the same tricks are going to work the second time around?" Dawn teased.

Daniel smiled. "We'll see."

When Daniel smiled, it seemed like the whole world got brighter. His perfectly straight white teeth and the deep dimples on his cheeks ... it just wasn't fair. It made every girl swoon. Dawn wasn't sure how long she could resist.

Daniel sat next to her on the swing. "I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to take care of some business in the city tomorrow, so I won't be at work."

Dawn dangled her feet as he pushed the swing back and made it sway gently. "You don't owe me an explanation."

"I know. But once I take care of this business, things will be different."

“What do you mean? Different how?”

“Like how they used to be. I’ll be able to fully leave the English world behind me and focus on us.”

“What have you been focusing on, Daniel?”

“Oh you know, just establishing myself again. Trying to figure things out.” Daniel discreetly raised his arm and put it on the back of the swing.

Dawn leaned back and felt his hand on her shoulder. She felt tingles all over her body. Oh, how she’d missed his touch.

“So, you have it all figured out now?”

“I think so. Job, been meeting with Bishop Lapp, doing lots of praying ...”

“Have you really?”

“Yes, really. Like you said, I need to make sure this whole life is right for me as an adult before I fully commit in baptism.”

Dawn perked up. “Have you been talking about getting baptized?”

“Yes. Maybe even next month.”

Dawn felt her heart beat faster. He seemed serious. Maybe he was sincere after all.

Daniel slid closer to her on the swing and pulled her close to him. She wanted to sink into his chest and rest in his embrace. She wanted to let her feelings of love come flooding back again.

She put her head on his shoulder. “Tell me what you see in our future, Daniel.”

Daniel gently caressed her cheek. “I see us sitting by a fireplace in our cozy house in town, and maybe a bassinette near us.”

Dawn snuggled closer and closed her eyes. “What’s in the bassinette?” His voice was strong, yet soothing.

“A little girl.”

Dawn smiled. “That sounds lovely, Daniel.”

“Yes, it does.” He kissed her on the forehead.

It felt like they hadn’t lost any time at all. She was losing her strength to resist all together and was starting to dream of a life with him once again.

The next day, Dawn felt like she was floating on air. She wondered what kind of business Daniel had to take care of in the city but thought mostly of his promise to return that evening with a surprise.

She was startled when Abram spoke to her.

Abram laughed. “I’ve never heard you sing at work before.”

Dawn laughed. “Was I singing? I wasn’t aware.”

“You seem happy,” Abram smiled.

She looked at him and smiled back. “I am.”

Abram nodded. “Say, have you seen my envelope of cash?”

Dawn looked around her desk. “No, I haven’t seen it since yesterday at the bank.”

“Hm,” Abram said. “I had it in my office when I went to bed last night, but when I woke up this morning it was gone.”

Dawn felt a heaviness in her chest, like something terrible had happened. “What do you think happened?”

Abram shrugged. “I don’t know. I must have put it somewhere.”

Dawn helped him look all over the shop. Her sinking feeling got worse. “Abram, did Daniel know you had that money?”

Abram stopped looking and stared at her. “Yes.”

“I have a horrible feeling ...”

“You think he would have taken it?”

Dawn exhaled heavily. “I don’t know. He said he had to take care of something in the city today.”

Abram’s eyes grew wide. “Do you know where he went exactly?”

“No, but I know where he used to live.”

Abram grabbed her hand. “Let’s go.”

“To Indianapolis?”

“Yes, we’ll hire a car.”

Abram left Peter in charge of the shop and left. He needed to find Daniel. He must have owed more than the five thousand. Suddenly, helping the downtrodden didn’t feel so good after all.

Chapter Eleven

Dawn ran home and retrieved an old letter with the return address Daniel had used in Indianapolis. She could only hope this old address would be of some use in finding him. It made her sick to her stomach to think Daniel would betray such a kind, honest man as Abram. He had given him a job and befriended him, and what had Daniel done? He'd stolen from him! She was worried for Abram and very angry with Daniel. There was a small part of her which hoped she was wrong and thought maybe Daniel had a good explanation or would turn out to be completely innocent. Maybe it was a misunderstanding. But that small part was just a tiny voice compared to the loud screams in her head that Daniel was a thief and a liar.

Dawn returned to the shop and found Abram ready to go with the horse and wagon.

"I thought we were going to hire a car," Dawn said as climbed into the wagon seat.

"We'll find one in Elkhart. I inquired at the bank and the post office, and they gave me a place to hire a car and driver."

"Abram, I'm so sorry Daniel did this."

"We don't know that for sure, Dawn. I mean, he probably did. He told me he had money troubles."

Dawn turned to look at Abram. "He did?"

"Yes, he told me had some bills and I gave him some money. I was under the impression I gave him enough to pay off his debt. We arranged for him to work it off with me."

Dawn crossed her arms and stared straight ahead. She was fuming inside. How dare Daniel take advantage of such a

generous man? Abram had just begun to trust people again. Who knew what this would do to him?

“You know, it actually felt really good to have the money to help someone.”

“Until he stabbed you in the back.”

“Yes, that is troubling. But let’s keep some perspective. It’s only money. No one is hurt.”

“I respectfully disagree. It hurts me to know that someone I once loved would steal from you.”

Abram nodded. “Well yes, it does hurt emotionally. You’re right. But through Gott’s grace, we can be healed. We both know that.”

“Gott’s grace is greater than mine,” Dawn admitted.

Abram didn’t respond, but she saw a slight smile. She knew he understood and was trying to think it all through and work it out in his head. Yes, it was good to follow the rules set out in the *Ordnung* that demanded forgiveness and grace, but they were also human and allowed to wrestle with the injustice.

Abram arrived at a house just outside of Elkhart. He helped Dawn off the wagon and introduced her to the owner of the house, Jacob.

“Jacob grew up in an Amish community but didn’t choose the life as an adult. He’s going to let us leave the horses here in his barn and will drive us to Indianapolis.”

Dawn nodded. “Thank you for your help, Jacob.”

Jacob tipped his cowboy hat. “Happy to help, miss.”

It took nearly three hours by car to reach Indianapolis. Jacob dropped off Abram and Dawn at the address she had from her letter.

Jacob rolled down his window. "I have some business to take care of while I'm here. I'll check back here in a few hours and see if you're ready to return home."

Abram thanked him and waved as Jacob left. He looked at Dawn. "Well, let's see if Daniel is here."

The address matched an apartment complex, and the envelope had an apartment number on it. They located the specific apartment and Abram knocked on the door. A young man answered the door. He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans and squinted at the bright sun. Abram noticed the apartment was very dark and smelled like smoke.

"Yes?"

Abram spoke. "We're looking for Daniel Smucker. Is he here?"

The young man blinked a couple of times. "Hang on."

He closed the door. Abram looked at Dawn and raised his eyebrows. She shrugged.

They heard the man yell out to someone else in the apartment. Dawn leaned in closer and put her ear next to the door to hear better.

The muffled voice said, "There's some Amish people at the door."

The door opened again and there was a different young man standing there. Dawn recognized him. "Uriah?"

Uriah smiled. "Oh hey, Dawn. How are you? What's up?"

Abram spoke clearly and sternly. "We need to speak with Daniel Smucker. Is he here?"

Uriah looked back and forth from Dawn to Abram. “No, man. He was here earlier but he left. Said something about settling a score or debt or something like that.”

Dawn asked, “Will he come back here?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. He still has some stuff here.”

Dawn started to ask more questions, but Abram interrupted. “We’ll wait out here.”

“Suit yourself.”

Uriah closed the door.

Abram pointed to a shaded area with a picnic table and bench. “Let’s wait there.”

They sat down at the table. “Uriah might know more than he said. It seemed like he wasn’t telling us everything,” Dawn said.

“I know, but I think it’s better to wait.”

Dawn nodded.

“You know Uriah from home?”

“Yes, he and Daniel were friends. They came here together. Uriah was always a wild one. He and Daniel were always getting into trouble together.”

Abram nodded. “They may be in over their heads here.”

“No doubt.”

Several people walked by and stared at Dawn and Abram. Some pointed and laughed. One took a picture with his phone.

“What if he doesn’t come back, Abram?” Dawn asked.

“I don’t know. I’m starting to realize there’s not a lot we can do. Daniel and the money may be gone forever.”

Dawn heard disappointment in Abram's voice, and it shot pain through her heart. He didn't deserve this.

After waiting in silence for two hours, Abram saw Daniel walking up toward the apartment.

"Daniel!" Abram called out.

Daniel turned and saw who it was. He hung his head.

Abram walked toward Daniel, and Dawn followed. They met in the courtyard.

"Oh, Abram, I'm so ashamed."

Dawn burst out, "You should be. You are a rotten, dirty thief! How dare you!"

Abram put his hand on her shoulder, and she stopped yelling. She didn't want to embarrass Abram. It was his money, and she wanted to respect how he handled it, but she also wanted to give Daniel a piece of her mind!

"Tell me what happened."

"I wanted to pay off my debt so I could start over."

Abram confirmed, "Your five-thousand-dollar debt?"

Dawn gasped.

Daniel looked down. "That's what I told you. It wasn't the whole truth."

Abram put his hand on Daniel's arm. "Come, sit down and talk to us, Daniel. We need to know the whole truth."

Dawn couldn't believe how calm Abram was. How was he managing it? She wanted to scream and yell, but she contained her emotion and allowed Abram to be in charge. She noticed a crowd was starting to gather. She supposed Amish people in the city was enough to gawk at, but seeing them

argue was even more intriguing to the Englisch. She could see the wisdom in maintaining control.

Daniel followed them back to the picnic table, and they sat down. People started moving on and stopped staring.

“I actually owed closer to ten thousand dollars.”

“Daniel!” Dawn yelled out, then immediately got quiet again. “How in the world did you come to owe that much?”

Daniel paused and shifted his eyes around. “Gambling.”

Abram crossed his arms.

Dawn’s jaw dropped. “Gambling? Like with cards?”

“Yes, with cards. It started out with just a few buddies playing games. But I got really good at it and started making some money. Some nights I made more than I could make in a week at the factory!”

Dawn put her elbows on the table. She wanted to know the rest of his story, but it was painful to hear.

“So, I joined a higher stakes game and entered with all the money I had. When I ran out, they spotted me more, until before I knew it, I owed thousands of dollars.”

“Why didn’t you tell me the whole amount, Daniel?” Abram asked. “Why lie and then steal?”

“I was ashamed, Abram. I hoped I could use the five thousand to make up the rest.”

“Oh no.” Abram put his hand on his head like it ached.

“I lost it all.”

Abram slammed his fist on the table and stood up. “That was not your money to lose, Daniel!”

Dawn sat up. She had never heard Abram speak so loudly. His anger was justified.

Daniel hung his head like a child and begged for mercy. "I'm so sorry, Abram. I promise I'll make it up to you."

Abram put his hand up to silence Daniel. He lifted his face up into the sky and closed his eyes as if receiving something from above. After several minutes of silence, Abram looked at Daniel.

"I will forgive you, Daniel. But I will not forget." Abram walked away.

"Neither will I," Dawn said as she stood up.

Daniel started to cry. "Dawn, wait. Please ... It wasn't all lies. You need to know that. I love you!"

Dawn followed Abram. She heard Daniel's pleas and cries but would not turn around. How could she have ever loved this weak man? This was not the same person who'd made her promises just the night before. He knew what to say and how to behave to get her to start to fall for him again. Dawn held her head high and walked toward Abram. She would never fall for Daniel's schemes again.

Chapter Twelve

Dawn found Abram on a street corner. His shoulders were hunched, and his arms were crossed. He was pacing back and forth.

“Abram, what can I do?”

Abram shook his head. “There’s nothing to do. We’ll go home.”

A car pulled up next to the curb, and the passenger rolled down his window. “Hey, Amish, go back where you came from!” They tossed a cup of fluid at Abram, and it landed on his face. His hair and beard dripped.

Dawn untied her apron and handed it to Abram. He wiped off his face.

“Why would anyone choose this kind of life?” Dawn questioned.

Abram shook his head. “I guess they don’t understand there’s a better way.”

Abram looked away from Dawn. She couldn’t help but wonder if he blamed her for bringing Daniel into his life. If it weren’t for her, he would have never shown up and ruined his business. She wanted to hold him and tell him everything was going to be all right, but his body language told her to give him some space.

It was a quiet ride home with Jacob. Abram closed his eyes. Dawn wasn’t sure if he was praying or sleeping but she could tell he didn’t want to talk. It felt a little like it did when she first met him. She prayed that Gott would protect him from retreating into himself again.

The next day, Dawn arrived at work to find Abram teaching Peter how to finish the project Daniel had been working on.

“Good morning,” Dawn said.

Peter smiled and said good morning. Abram said nothing. Was he upset with her?

Dawn joined them. “Abram, I was thinking. We could go to the police and tell them everything.”

Peter looked up at Dawn. “Tell the police about what?”

Dawn ignored Peter. “They could arrest Daniel.”

Peter’s jaw dropped. “Daniel? Why? What happened?”

Abram didn’t stop working. He shook his head. “I didn’t want to trouble Peter with this.”

Dawn stopped talking and backed up, realizing she shouldn’t have said all of that in front of Peter. She walked back to her desk and quietly worked.

Abram kept working. Why couldn’t she just leave it alone? Why did she have to run her mouth?

Peter asked quietly. “What did Daniel do, Mr. Lantz?”

“It’s not your concern, Peter. This will not be a place for gossip. All you need to know is that Daniel is not working here anymore, so you will need to step up your efforts and help me fill orders.”

“Yes, sir,” Peter agreed.

At lunch, Dawn gave Peter an errand to run so she would have a chance to talk with Abram. She felt if she didn’t speak about it now, she never would be able to.

She handed Abram a sandwich. He refused it and kept working.

“Abram, can you take a lunch break?”

“No.”

Dawn paused and breathed. “All right then. First, I apologize for speaking of Daniel in front of Peter. That was unprofessional and inappropriate, and I won’t do it again.”

Abram kept working. He didn’t look up or acknowledge that she had said anything.

Dawn continued. “Second, I was thinking I could work out a payment plan with Daniel to pay you back every penny he took. If he gets his job back at the factory, he could ...”

“No.”

“He owes you that, Abram.”

“He owes me nothing! That money was Gott’s, not mine. Everything I have is Gott’s. Daniel will answer to Gott, not me.”

Dawn looked down. She admired Abram, but she was also worried about him and his business.

“But how can you run the business without any money?”

“I work. I build things and sell them. The same way I ran it before I had any money.”

Dawn began to wring her hands. She wasn’t comfortable with this conversation, but as Lantz Woodshop’s accountant and administrator, she knew he couldn’t sustain the business with no cash on hand.

“Abram, your rent here is due tomorrow, and you need supplies to be able to build or craft anything. Now, Peter and I can wait on getting paid; that’s not a problem, but ...”

Abram’s voice became louder and more intense. “No. I want to pay you and Peter. I will work something out with the landlord. I will handle it. I handled things before you arrived you know.”

Dawn backed down. “Yes, of course. Whatever you want.”

Dawn turned to walk back to her desk.

“Wait. Don’t leave me,” Abram whispered.

Dawn turned toward him and put her hand on his shoulder. “I will never leave you, Abram.”

Abram hung his head and began to cry. “How could I let this happen? Gott blessed me and I blew it.”

Dawn gently rubbed his back. “You didn’t blow it, Abram. Daniel did.”

“I should have known better. I should have left it in the bank or gotten a safe like you said.”

“We learn as we go, Abram. We all make mistakes. You opened your heart and trusted someone. Gott will not blame you for that.”

Abram wiped his eyes and turned toward her. He gently caressed her face. “I trust you with my heart, and I know that is not a mistake.”

His fingers slowly rounded her jaw and chin. He raised her head and leaned in and kissed her gently on her lips, then pulled her close to him and held her.

Dawn felt Abram’s arms around her and knew that, together, the two of them could handle anything life threw at them.

Chapter Thirteen

One year later, Abram paced in his living room. He knew it wasn't a very large house considering they wanted a large family, but it was a start. With Dawn and Peter's help, Abram had been able to get Lantz Woodshop back on track. A very strong work ethic, regular sales at the farmer's market, steady orders, and exclusive custom work for Artful Living had all contributed to his success, and Gott had blessed Abram's business once again. He now kept his money in the bank, and had even taken out a loan to purchase a small house after he and Dawn had gotten married.

Abram was grateful for a second chance at love, his business, and now, a family.

Abram heard Dawn groaning in the other room. The midwife and Dawn's mother were in the room with her. This brought back some terrible memories for Abram but he prayed and trusted that Gott would bless this new life.

Peter bounded into the room. "I heard the baby is coming," he bellowed.

Abram chuckled. "Yes, thanks for coming, Peter."

"I found something in the back office I thought you might like."

Abram stood in shock when Peter brought in the cradle he had made years ago.

He remembered the pain he used to feel when he saw that cradle. So many times he thought about destroying it but couldn't bring himself to do it. But now, he didn't feel pain. He looked at the cradle and felt warm. He felt like Elizabeth and Solomon were looking over him and were pleased that he had found love again.

Abram walked over. "Let me show you something special about this cradle, Peter."

Abram unlocked the hidden legs and slid out the sides. "It turns into a crib!"

"Mr. Lantz, that's genius! I never even saw you working on this project."

Abram laughed. "I don't know about genius. I finished this project a few years ago."

"You did?"

"It was for my first child, Solomon."

"You have another child?" Peter asked.

"Not on this earth. My late wife and son are in heaven."

"Oh I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"I can honestly say it's all right. It took me a long time to accept Gott's will. For as long as I'm alive, I will not understand why Gott chose to take Elizabeth and Solomon at such a young age, but it's not for us to understand Gott's ways, Peter."

Peter nodded.

"Today, I am blessed. I have a beautiful, loving wife, a home, a business, good friends, and a baby on the way."

"Praise be to Gott," Peter said as he shook Abram's hand.

Abram agreed, "Praise be to Gott."

Dawn's mother, Ruby, opened the bedroom door and looked at Abram.

Abram walked toward her. "Do we have a baby?"

"Not yet," Ruby said. "But Dawn wanted me to assure you that everything is fine. It will just be a while longer."

Abram nodded, and Ruby went back into the bedroom.

Abram sat down.

Peter cleared his throat. “Hey, did I tell you who was in my baptism class?”

Abram looked at Peter and squeezed his eyebrows together. “What do you mean? Who?”

“Daniel.”

Abram’s eyes grew big. “Daniel Smucker?”

“Sure thing. He shared his testimony, so now I finally know what happened. He asked for forgiveness.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Abram said.

“Do you think you’ll ever forgive Daniel for using you and stealing from you?”

Abram rubbed his hands on his pant leg. “Yes, I already have.”

“He said he wants to talk to you. Are you open to that?”

Abram thought about it. “Yes, I am. You can tell him to come see me.”

There was a knock on the door. Abram opened it and saw Daniel standing there with some flowers.

“Daniel. Peter was just telling me you were back.”

Daniel lowered his head. “Yes, I wanted to come by and extend my best wishes to you and Dawn.” He held the flowers out to Abram.

“Dawn is indisposed right now.”

Peter shouted from the room, “She’s having their baby!”

Daniel’s face lifted. “She is? Wow, I had no idea. Well, I’ll come back at a better time.”

“It’s all right, Daniel,” Abram said. “No hard feelings.” Abram held out his hand.

Daniel shook it. “Thank you, Mr. Lantz.”

“You can call me Abram now that I’m not your boss.”

“Speaking of that ... I’m looking for a woodworker job,” Daniel said.

Abram laughed. “One step at a time, my friend.”

Daniel laughed with him. “Fair enough.”

Abram took the flowers and put them in a vase in the kitchen.

Daniel sat in the living room next to Peter. “Seriously, Abram, I’m very happy for you and Dawn. You deserve each other.”

Abram smiled. “Thank you, Daniel.”

Ruby opened the bedroom door once again, and all three men looked toward her. She was holding a baby all bundled up in a blanket.

“Abram, meet your little boy.”

Abram stood slowly. His heart melted as he opened his arms and held his baby. “Hello, Matthew. I’m your daed.”

Abram’s body filled with warmth. He had been blessed to love two women with his whole heart and had never believed he could love anyone more. But holding this precious child in his arms, he began to understand a father’s love for his child, and there was no way he could have imagined its depth.

“Can I see Dawn?” Abram asked.

Ruby nodded and walked into the bedroom.

Abram saw Dawn’s smile, and his heart leaped for joy. He sat next to her and gave her Matthew to hold.

“Is Matthew your father’s name, Abram?” Ruby asked.

“No, we chose it because the name Matthew means ‘gift of Gott.’”

Abram held Dawn’s hand. He gestured for Peter and Daniel to join them, and they circled around the bed.

“When I moved to Elkhart County two years ago, my heart was troubled, and I didn’t even want to go on with life. But Gott gave me a second chance at a family.”

Abram looked at Daniel. “And now I will give others a second chance, because I have seen the blessing that can come from our heavenly father.”

Daniel nodded at Abram.

Abram continued. “Dawn and Matthew are my immediate family, but you all are my spiritual family, and I’m grateful to have you in our lives.”

Abram held Dawn’s hand with his right hand and lifted his left hand to Peter. Peter took it and offered his other hand to Daniel, and Daniel accepted it and held Ruby’s hand. Abram led them in a prayer of thanksgiving, and they all sang the words of the doxology of praise together.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him all creatures here below,

Praise Him above Ye, heavenly hosts,

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

The End