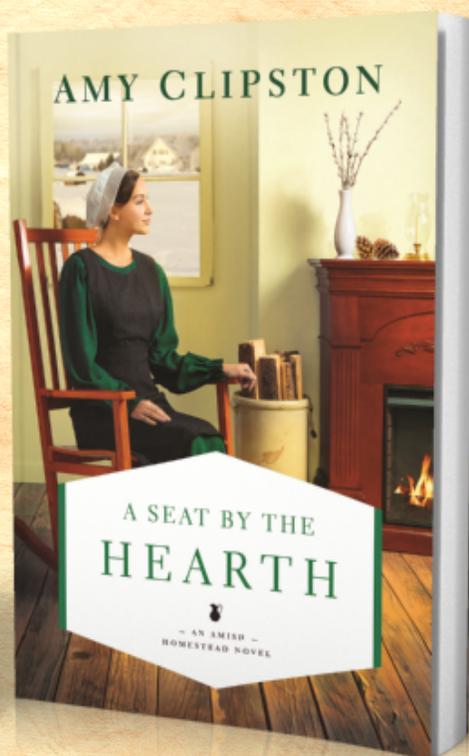
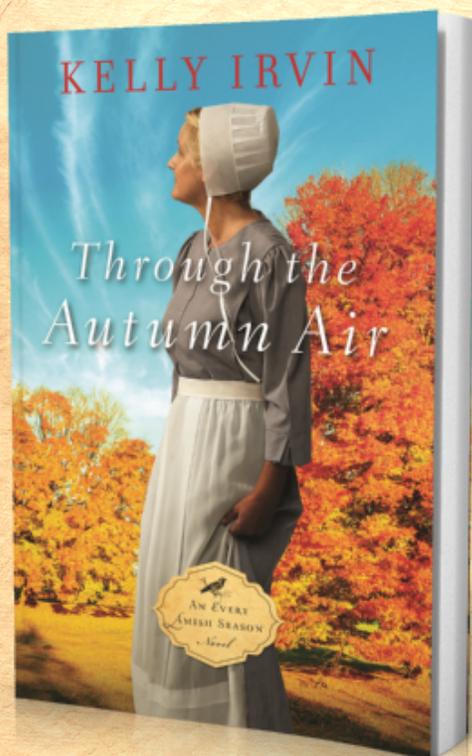


# Amish Fall 2018 Sampler



THROUGH THE AUTUMN AIR • A SEAT BY THE HEARTH • AN AMISH HOMECOMING



*Through the  
Autumn Air*

KELLY IRVIN



ZONDERVAN

*Through the Autumn Air*

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This title is also available as a Zondervan e-book.

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**Publisher's Note:** This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. All characters are fictional, and any similarity to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

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*Dedicated to my mother, Janice Elliott Lyne.  
You were a stay-at-home mom before it was called that.  
You know how to feed a family of seven with fifty recipes  
featuring hamburger, twenty-five recipes that start with Jell-O,  
and fifteen recipes for disguising eggplant. Love always.*

 ZONDERVAN®

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:7

# DEUTSCH VOCABULARY\*

*ach*: oh

*aenti*: aunt

*bopli, boplin*: baby, babies

*bruder*: brother

*daed*: father

*danki*: thank you

*dawdy haus*: grandparents' house

*dochder*: daughter

*doplich*: clumsy

*eck*: married couple's corner table at wedding reception

*Englisch, Englischer*: English or non-Amish

*fraa*: wife

*Gelassenheit*: yielding to God's will; forsaking all selfishness

*Gmay*: church district

*Gott*: God

*groosdaadi*: grandpa

*groosmammi*: grandma

*guder mariye*: good morning

*gut*: good

DEUTSCH VOCABULARY

*hund*: dog

*jah*: yes

*kaffi*: coffee

*kapp*: head covering worn by Amish women

*kinner*: children

*lieb*: love

*mann*: husband

*mudder*: mother

*nee*: no

*Ordnung*: written and unwritten rules in an Amish district

*rumspringa*: period of running around

*schweschder*: sister

*suh*: son

*wunderbarr*: wonderful

\*THE GERMAN DIALECT SPOKEN BY THE AMISH IS not a written language and varies depending on the location and origin of the settlement. These spellings are approximations. Most Amish children learn English after they start school. They also learn high German, which is used in their Sunday services.

# JAMESPORT, MISSOURI, FEATURED FAMILIES

## THE ROPPS:

Mary Katherine (widow,  
husband was Moses)

Thomas and Joanna—six  
children

Dylan and Samantha—four  
children

Dinah and Nathan Plank—four  
children

Mary and Robert Shrock—four  
children

Elijah and Nyla—three children

Ellen and Luke Hostetler—three  
children

Josiah and Hannah—two  
children

Angus and Rebecca—one child

Beulah and Jacob Burkholder

Barbara and Joseph Beachy

## THE MILLERS:

Ezekiel (widower, wife was  
Lucy)

Leah and William Gingerich—  
Kenneth, 7; Caleb, 3; and  
Liliana, 18 months

Carlene and Samuel Raber—  
three children

John and Nora Miller—two  
children

Andrew and Emma Miller—one  
child

JAMESPORT, MISSOURI, FEATURED FAMILIES

THE KAUFFMANS:

Laura (widow, husband was Eli)  
*Children all grown*

THE GRABERS:

Leo and Jennie  
Matthew Troyer  
Celia Troyer  
Micah Troyer  
Cynthia Troyer  
Mark Troyer  
Elizabeth Troyer  
Francis Troyer  
Aidan and Bess Graber  
Joshua Weaver  
Leyla Graber

OTHER FAMILIES:

Freeman (bishop) and Dorothy  
Borntreger  
Cyrus (deacon) and Josephina  
Beachy–Iris, Joseph, Rueben,  
Samuel, Carl, Louella, Abigail

THE WEAVERS:

Solomon (minister) and Diana  
Elijah  
Luke and Jane–William  
Ruth and Dan Byler  
Sophie and Obediah Stultz–  
    Esther, Lewis, Martin, and  
    Angela  
Hazel and Isaac Plank–Rachel,  
    Sarah, Levi, Gracie, Jonah

# ONE

AT WHAT POINT DID A PERSON REALIZE THAT THE special moments in life streak by in a flash, distilled into memories before they could be truly lived? Mary Katherine Ropp stood motionless in the middle of her kitchen, a platter holding a two-layer German chocolate cake covered in whipped cream cheese frosting nestled in her hands.

The other women bustled in and out, serving two hundred wedding guests seated at tables set up in all the other rooms and spilling out across the broad expanse of the front yard. Serving spoons clinked on bowls. Pots banged. The fire in the wood-burning stove sizzled. Mary Katherine closed her eyes and inhaled the mingled scents of roasted chicken and dressing, gravy, coleslaw, freshly baked cookies, cakes, and bread.

Like every mother, she'd imagined her daughter Barbara's wedding day since the night of her birth, nineteen years earlier. She imagined the blue dress Barbara would don. The crispness of her white *kapp*. The way her eyes would tear up when the bishop took her hand and put it in her husband's for the final blessing.

A lump lodged in Mary Katherine's throat. She breathed and

wiped at her eyes. *Oh, Moses, if only you could see this. Your youngest daughter is a bride today. She's only a passable cook, she hates to sew, and she never knows when to stop talking, but Joseph loves her anyway.*

*I'm here, Fraa. I see her. She sounds a lot like the girl I married. Gott has blessed us.*

Mary Katherine sighed at the imagined deep, always amused voice in her ear. Of course he was here. Even after seven years of widowhood, she could depend on Moses to be at her side. He would never forsake her.

She needed to write these thoughts down. Her notebook lay on the counter, splashes of lemonade and chocolate frosting on the outside. She took two steps toward it.

"What are you doing, *Mudder*?" Beulah's voice sounded irked—which was nothing new.

Mary Katherine turned to find daughter number four standing in the doorway. Her hands were full of dirty dishes and her face beet red with exertion. "You're in my way, and Thomas is looking for you."

"Just taking a second to breathe." Mary Katherine cleared her throat and edged away from the counter. Her habit of taking notes in the middle of life's events baffled some of her loved ones. "Your *bruder* will have to wait until after the wedding to boss me around."

As her oldest son, Thomas considered himself the head of the house, even if he hadn't lived in Mary Katherine's house in many years. When it came to bossiness, he was much more like her than his easygoing father. Her other sons, being more like Moses, let him do the bossing. For the most part.

"You know he only wants what's best." With her slightly rounded body, sandy-blond hair, and blue eyes, Beulah was the spitting image of Mary Katherine when she was younger. "You're always

tired. If you moved into the *dawdy haus*, you'd have him and Joanna nearby. Do you really want to be alone in this big house? You know you don't."

Everyone seemed to know what she wanted and what she needed, except Mary Katherine. If she was tired, it was only because of the wedding preparations, not because she needed to be put out to pasture at the mere age of sixty. During the two weeks since the wedding announcement for Barbara and Joseph Beachy at the church service, she had worked nonstop. Writing wedding invitations, cleaning and scrubbing the entire house, borrowing extra tables and chairs, stoves and refrigerators, pots and pans, buying groceries and baked goods they didn't have time to make from scratch. Lining up the cooks and the servers. Praying that September's fall weather would hold, allowing them to serve people outdoors.

Plain weddings were simple, without adornment, but the receptions were mammoth in the sheer amount of food needed to serve all the guests who'd come to Jamesport, Missouri, from Ohio, Indiana, and as far away as Texas. It might make a much younger woman tired, but Mary Katherine only felt invigorated.

That was her story and she was sticking to it. "I'm fine. Take this cake out to the tables outside."

"Fraidy cat!" Beulah deposited the dirty dishes on the counter but made no move to take the cake. "You can't hide from him forever."

"Who are you hiding from?" Laura Kauffman trudged through the door with empty serving dishes in both hands. She might be seventy-two and a little hard of hearing in one ear, but she had avoided the pasture as well. She served as not only a good friend but an excellent example of how to live and grow after losing a husband. "Dottie? Why would you be hiding from Dottie? She's looking for you."

Dottie Manchester, the Jamesport Branch Library's only librarian and Mary Katherine's closest *Englisch* friend, meant well, but she had a one-track mind and a penchant for taking the long road to make a short point. As much as Mary Katherine enjoyed a good chat, she didn't have time right now. "I've got a lot on my plate at the moment."

Beulah snorted and Laura chuckled.

"So to speak. You could eat the cake instead of serving it." That bit of wisdom came from Jennie Graber, who stood at the sink washing dishes in an enormous plastic tub. She, too, had been a widow until she remarried a few months earlier. That she was exceedingly happy was apparent in the smile on her heart-shaped face and the sparkle in her pale-blue eyes. "You should pay attention. There might be someone else looking for you. Weddings make minds turn to romance."

The women giggled in a chorus that made them sound like young girls at their first singing, not mature women from every stage of life—from just married to a widowed great-grandmother. Mary Katherine couldn't help herself. She rolled her eyes. "The last thing an old Plain woman thinks about is romance."

Not so. If memories of Moses' sweet kisses rushing through her like a warm summer breeze could be called romantic, she was guilty. But she would never admit such foolishness, not even to her dearest friends.

"Speak for yourself." Laura plucked a roll from an overflowing basket with knuckles swollen with arthritis. "Besides, I think I spied a certain old Plain man staring at you during the service."

"You're talking about Ezekiel, aren't you?" Jennie was eager for her friends to find marital bliss again. "He did look distracted during Solomon's message."

"You're dreaming. Ezekiel thinks of nothing but his *kinner* and

his restaurant.” Hoping her own distraction during the minister’s message hadn’t shown as well, Mary Katherine wiped tiny drops of sweat from her warm forehead with the back of her sleeve. Ezekiel had been a widower for about ten years. He was a kind man with a generous laugh. He always refilled her tea glass when she ate at the Purple Martin Café and always asked about her day—but then, he did that with everyone he served. “Anyway, I have too much to do to worry about such silliness.”

A smirk on her face, Beulah swiped a dollop of frosting from Mary Katherine’s cake and stuck it in her mouth. She smacked her lips. “If you think marriage consists only of silliness, you’ve been a widow far too long!”

This from her own daughter. Another round of giggles rippled through the kitchen.

“I reckon I’m better off out there than I am in here.” Mary Katherine headed for the door, dodging Beulah’s outstretched fingers. “I’ll deliver the cake myself. I’ll be back. In one minute. In one piece.”

God willing.

She strode through the doorway and into the fray. The front room was filled wall to wall with tables covered with white tablecloths and chairs occupied by friends and family—some she hadn’t seen in years. No time to visit now. She edged through, cake platter held high.

“Mary Kay! Mary Kay!” Dottie’s high voice carried over the dozens of conversations that created a low-pitched, continuous roar. She squeezed through the narrow aisle between tables, her husband, Walt, right behind her. His portly figure struggled with the tight fit much more than Dottie’s skinny frame. “Congratulations, my friend. You did it! You married off number ten. You’re done.”

“Yep, thanks for inviting us. It’s a joy to watch all your kids get

married. You must be relieved to marry off the last one.” Walt laughed and his belly—which reflected his love for his wife’s pecan pie—shook. “And you know they’ll stay married. Not like us Englisch folks with a 50 percent divorce rate.”

They were the only Englishers invited to those weddings. Their friendship stretched back years to the first time Mary Katherine ventured into the library to do research on covered wagons on the Oregon Trail. Dottie had helped her find sources and quickly. A mother with ten children waiting at home didn’t have time to dally. Dottie approached research like she did everything else—full steam ahead. A friendship had blossomed.

“*Danki*. Right now, I’m up to my kapp in food.”

“Joseph and Barbara look so happy. I always cry at weddings.” Dottie dabbed at her smooth pink cheeks with an embroidered hankie. “They’re a perfect couple.”

At times Mary Katherine had despaired that any man in his right mind would consider Barbara a good catch. It would take another man like Moses, and those were few and far between. Finally, Joseph had accepted the challenge. Love truly was blind. An occasion to be celebrated to be sure. A strange void bloomed in Mary Katherine’s midsection, like a hole that seemed to grow deeper and darker as the day progressed. Forcing a smile, she shifted the platter to one hand and waved. “I don’t know about perfect, but they’ll do.”

Dottie wore a flowing, dark-purple broomstick skirt and a white, long-sleeved, Western-style blouse with pearl snap buttons. It matched Walt’s purple Western shirt with its white piping. He wore blue jeans pressed with a seam down the middle and black cowboy boots. Why a librarian and an accountant chose to dress like cowboys remained a mystery to Mary Katherine.

“I need to talk to you. Bob Sampson put his building on Grant Street up for sale yesterday.” Dottie’s voice rose with uncontained excitement. Her turquoise chandelier earrings shook. “It would be perfect for our bookstore. He’s including the furniture—a bunch of wooden shelves and tables and that wooden counter he had by the front door.”

*Our* bookstore. The words had a sweet ring to them—sweet and bitter like life itself. “I told you, I’m not able to commit to another store yet.”

It had only been a year since Amish Treasures caught fire right before local businessman Lazarus Dudley took over its lease. Jennie and Leo Graber wanted her to help with their newly opened Combination Store. Everyone wanted something from her. Cake held high, she dodged a gaggle of toddlers and zigzagged around two teenagers who stopped to talk in the middle of the aisle.

Dottie and Walt stuck to her like bubble gum on the sole of her favorite sneaker. “I love the idea of a bookstore, don’t get me wrong, and working with you would be wonderful. It’s just not possible right now.”

Maybe ever. It had taken years to save the money to join three other families in opening Amish Treasures. Their investment went up in smoke and flame six months later. She didn’t have the funds to share in ownership of the Combination Store, but she could contribute goods for sale there as a start. It was finding the time to sew that was the problem.

“It would be more than wonderful.” One hand patting the jewel-encrusted comb that held back her shoulder-length silver hair, Dottie took Walt’s hand as if to anchor her to the floor in her euphoria. The two wore matching plain silver wedding bands. “I mean, me with you. I have savings. Tourists and local folks alike will flock to a store with

Amish fiction, romances, mysteries, and travel books and cookbooks and cards and such. We'll earn back our investment in no time. I have a business plan. A good one."

They'd said the same thing about Amish Treasures.

"It's a good investment." Walt removed his black cowboy hat, revealing his shiny, perfectly round, bald pate. "I've run the numbers several times. The square footage is perfect for a bookstore, and Bill's asking price is decent. Not a steal, by any means, but fair."

A bookstore was more problematic than a craft store. Tourists loved Amish quilts and toys and jams and jellies. They came to Jamesport seeking Amish-made products. People didn't read as much as they used to. Plain folks didn't often read the fiction written by Englisch authors about them. It was hard to believe readers found their simple lives that interesting. "Can we talk about this later?"

"Meet us there Saturday afternoon to see the space." Dottie stopped short of saying "pretty please with sugar on top," but her thrust-out lower lip and puppy-dog eyes said it for her. "Just look at it, okay? For me?"

"I have a quilting frolic Saturday. When does Bill need an answer?"

"He says he has a couple of other offers. He'll wait one week for us, but then he'll have to consider them."

"It can't hurt to look at the space, but not Saturday morning." It couldn't hurt, could it?

"You'll come with us, won't you, Walt, after your appointments?"

"Anything for you, sweets."

"We're set, then." Dottie stretched on tiptoe and gave her husband a big smooch on the cheek, leaving pink lipstick behind. "You can skip out of your quilting frolic by two. We'll see you at three."

"I want some more chicken and stuffing." Walt swiped at his

cheek with an abashed look on his face. “I think the wife needs another plate—she’s gotten so skinny she might blow away. She worries too much about her girlish figure. The more of her I see, the better I like it, personally.”

“Oh, you.” Dottie blushed as she turned back to Mary Katherine. “We’ll talk to you later. If you need any help cleaning up, let me know. I’ll drag Walt over here.”

“We have it covered. I’ll talk to you later, though.”

“*Jah*, you will, because right now you need to talk to me.” Thomas, who looked so like his mountain of a father, Moses, blocked the doorway. He kept his voice low as he glanced around, but his scowl said he meant business. At thirty-six and the father of six himself, he took his role as head of the house seriously. “Have you started packing yet?”

“Let’s get another plate.” Still hand in hand, Dottie and Walt melted into the crowd. Dottie knew all about this skirmish, and she also would surmise that Mary Katherine wouldn’t want an audience. She would be right.

Mary Katherine stepped closer to her son. “*Nee*.”

“Mudder,” he grumbled, but at least he didn’t raise his voice. “We’ve talked about this.”

He talked about it. “*Suh*.”

“Don’t get your dander up with me.” Shaking his head so hard his blond beard swayed, Thomas sighed. “You cannot live alone in this house. It’s not right. It’s time you moved into the dawdy haus at my place. The kinner love having their *groossmammi* around, and you know Joanna likes your company.”

It would also open up her house for son number two, Dylan, and his wife, Samantha, and their four children, and Samantha’s parents,

who lived with them. They needed a bigger place. Besides, Dylan worked the farm. It would save him time and effort to live on the homestead. It all made sense, but her heart simply refused to acquiesce. The empty nest loomed in front of Mary Katherine yet again. Besides, Thomas's wife, Joanna—she'd never told a soul this—rubbed her the wrong way more often than not. Mary Katherine didn't want to live with her. She had ten children. Did it have to be Thomas? Not something a mother said aloud.

She tightened her grip on the cake platter and lowered her head, preparing to bulldoze her way past her son. "I've lived in our house my entire adult life."

"You lived here with *Daed*." Thomas had his father's deep voice, his blond hair and blue eyes, but his personality was all Mary Katherine's. Stubborn as the flu. "But that time has passed. You can tell your stories to the kinner like you did us when we were little."

His smile said he remembered story time sitting on his daed's lap in the rocking chair next to the fireplace with the same tenderness she did. It seemed eons ago, but at the same time, only yesterday.

"We'll talk about this later." She edged forward. Thomas's expression turned stony. His feet were planted, his arms crossed. Mary Katherine stared back at him, refusing to waver. "This isn't the time or the place. You don't want to spoil your *schweschder*'s wedding, do you?"

"I don't think that's possible." His scowl deepened. Mary Katherine tugged at his arm and tried to squeeze past him. They did a two-step dance through the door and onto the porch. Thomas leaned into her. "Mudder, this conversation isn't over."

She kept moving. Thomas took her arm. She tried to shrug him off. At that moment he must've realized how this looked to their

guests because his stance shifted and he let go of her. She stumbled forward, gaining momentum fast. The cake flew from her hands.

“Nee, nee!” She flailed, trying to regain her grip, then fell into the open space. In that split second she caught the look of surprise on Ezekiel Miller’s face. He had one boot on the top porch step, the other in midair.

His eyes, the color of caramel candy, widened behind black-rimmed glasses. His mouth dropped open. His arms came up. The cake hit him square in the face and slopped down his long, brown beard spun through with silver threads.

Mary Katherine toppled into his open arms. They teetered on the steps for a split second. White frosting glopped onto the front of his pale-green shirt. The dark chocolate of the cake clung to the frosting. Its silky texture slid across her cheeks. She tasted the sweetness of powdered sugar and butter, then chocolate—until that moment her favorite.

Together, they tumbled down the steps and landed in the grass. Stunned, Mary Katherine gasped for breath and coughed. Cake spewed from her mouth. Into Ezekiel’s face. His good black hat tumbled back, revealing a bald pate fringed by dark, curly hair with those same silver highlights.

She lay on top of his sprawling body.

# A SEAT BY THE HEARTH

An Amish Homestead Novel

AMY CLIPSTON



ZONDERVAN

*A Seat by the Hearth*

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*For editor Jean Bloom with love and appreciation.  
Thank you for using your amazing talent to polish my books and  
keep my characters and timelines straight. You're a blessing!*

 ZONDERVAN®

## GLOSSARY

*ach*: oh

*aenti*: aunt

*appetitlich*: delicious

*Ausbund*: Amish hymnal

*bedauerlich*: sad

*boppli*: baby

*bopplin*: babies

*brot*: bread

*bruder*: brother

*bruderskind*: niece/nephew

*bruderskinner*: nieces/nephews

*bu*: boy

*buwe*: boys

*daadi*: granddad

*daadihaus*: a small house built onto or near the main house for  
grandparents to live in

*daed*: father

*danki*: thank you

*dat*: dad

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

*dochder*: daughter

*dochdern*: daughters

*Dumme!*: Hurry!

GLOSSARY

*Englischer*: a non-Amish person  
*faul*: lazy  
*faulenzler*: lazy person  
*fraa*: wife  
*freind*: friend  
*freinden*: friends  
*froh*: happy  
*gegisch*: silly  
*gern gsehne*: you're welcome  
*grossdaadi*: grandfather  
*grossdochter*: granddaughter  
*grossdochtern*: granddaughters  
*grossmammi*: grandmother  
*gross-sohn*: grandson  
*Gude mariye*: Good morning  
*gut*: good  
*Gut nacht*: Good night  
*haus*: house  
*Ich liebe dich*: I love you  
*kaffi*: coffee  
*kapp*: prayer covering or cap  
*kichli*: cookie  
*kichlin*: cookies  
*kind*: child  
*kinner*: children  
*krank*: sick  
*kuche*: cake  
*kumm*: come  
*lieue*: love, a term of endearment  
*maed*: young women, girls  
*maedel*: young woman  
*mamm*: mom

*mammi*: grandma

*mei*: my

*Meiding*: shunning

*mutter*: mother

*naerfich*: nervous

*narrisch*: crazy

*onkel*: uncle

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

*schee*: pretty

*schmaert*: smart

*schtupp*: family room

*schweschder*: sister

*schweschdere*: sisters

*sohn*: son

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

*Willkumm*: Welcome

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

*wunderbaar*: wonderful

*ya*: yes

*zwillingbopplin*: twins

AMISH HOMESTEAD  
SERIES FAMILY TREES

**Edna m. Yonnie Allgyer**

|  
Priscilla

**Marilyn m. Willie Dienner**

|  
Simeon (deceased)  
Kayla m. James “Jamie” Riehl  
Nathan

**Eva m. Simeon (deceased)**

**Dienner**  
|  
Simeon Jr. (“Junior”)

**Nellie m. Walter Esh**

|  
Judah  
Naaman

**Laura m. Allen Lambert**

|  
Mollie Faith (mother—Savilla—  
deceased)

**Irma Mae m. Milton Lapp**

|  
Savilla

**Florence m. Vernon Riehl**

|  
James (“Jamie”) Riehl (mother—  
Dorothy—deceased)  
Walter Esh (father—Alphus  
Esh—deceased)  
Mark Riehl (Laura’s twin)  
(mother—Dorothy—deceased)  
Laura (Mark’s twin) m. Allen  
Lambert (mother—Dorothy—  
deceased)  
Roy Esh (father—Alphus Esh—  
deceased)  
Sarah Jane Esh (father—Alphus  
Esh—deceased)  
Cindy Riehl (mother—  
Dorothy—deceased)

**Kayla m. James “Jamie” Riehl**

|  
Calvin

**Elsie m. Noah Zook**

|  
Christian  
Lily Rose

## NOTE TO THE READER

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

# ONE

PRISCILLA ALLGYER'S HANDS TREMBLED AS HER TAXI sped down the two-lane road. When the Allgyer's Belgian and Dutch Harness Horses sign came into view, her stomach seemed to twist.

She turned to her son, who'd nodded off in the booster seat beside her.

"Ethan." She nudged him. "Ethan, wake up. We're here."

"Already?" His honey-brown eyes fluttered open as he yawned. "But I just fell asleep." He peered out the window as the Prius steered up the winding rock driveway.

When they reached the top, she could see her father's line of red barns and stables. She'd been away for eight years, but all the buildings looked as pristine as if they'd just been painted. Perhaps they had. The white split-rail fence lining the enormous, lush, rolling green pasture where his beautiful horses frolicked looked the same. The large, two-story whitewashed house where she was born and raised seemed just as immaculate. Every building, every blade of grass on her father's horse farm was as impeccable as she remembered.

If only her childhood had been as perfect.

"This is where you grew up, Mom?"

“Yes.” Her chest constricted as the taxi bumped over the rocks. She cleared her throat and tried to shake off the apprehension coiling through her. When she left all those years ago, she promised she’d never return.

But here she was with nothing but a few dollars to her name and a child she’d had out of wedlock.

“It’s nice.” Ethan pointed to the row of barns after unbuckling himself. “It’s a horse farm?”

She nodded. Ethan lowered his window, and the humid July air mixed with the familiar aroma of moist earth and horses permeated the taxi and overpowered her senses.

“I can touch the horses?”

She shrugged. “I imagine so.” *If my father even allows us to stay.*

She shoved that thought away. Aside from a few nights in a motel and then a homeless shelter, her parents were her only hope. Priscilla would do anything to give her son a safe home.

When she noticed movement in the corner of her vision, she turned toward her father’s largest barn. The door had swung open, and a man stood with his back to the driveway. He looked taller than Robert Yoder, the farmhand who had worked for her father since she was a teenager. His shoulders seemed broader too.

The taxi came to a halt in front of the house, and Priscilla’s attention was drawn to her childhood home. Her palms began to sweat as she studied the wraparound porch. Her father’s harsh voice and biting criticisms echoed in her mind, and when she closed her eyes and rubbed her temples against a coming headache, she could still see his disappointed face.

This was a mistake. Her father would never forgive her. Maybe they should have stayed in Baltimore with Trent. Her left hand moved to her right bicep, hidden by the three-quarter sleeve of her purple shirt. The situation there might have improved if she’d tried harder to keep Trent happy.

But it wasn't safe to keep Ethan in that environment! It was her duty to protect her son.

"Miss?" The taxi driver turned to face her. "I think we're here."

Priscilla had just opened her mouth to respond when a tap near Ethan's open window startled her. She spun toward it and was surprised to find Mark Riehl peering in.

"Can I help—" He stopped, recognition sparkling in his bright-blue eyes. "Priscilla?"

"Mark. Hi." She tried to force a smile, but it felt more like a grimace.

"Your *dat* didn't mention you were coming home today." He glanced toward the house and then back at her.

"I didn't tell either of my parents I was coming." Her throat suddenly felt bone-dry.

"Oh." He smiled. "They're going to be surprised."

That was an understatement. "Yes, they sure are."

Mark turned his attention to Ethan and smiled. "Hi. I'm Mark." He extended his arm through the open window, and Ethan shook his hand.

"Hi. I'm Ethan. I'm six and a half. We're here to visit my grandparents."

"It's nice to meet you." Mark grinned as his eyes flickered back to Priscilla.

She swallowed a groan. Why did Mark Riehl, one of her schoolmates and an acquaintance from her youth group, have to be at her father's farm when she arrived? Coming home was difficult enough. Facing a peer from her past made it even more painful. News of her arrival would rage through the community like wildfire, and she was certain that judgment would follow.

"Miss?" The driver faced her again. "Are you going to get out of the car? Or do you want me to take you somewhere else?"

Priscilla hesitated as anxiety gushed through her. If she told

the driver to take her to the nearest motel, she and Ethan could try this again tomorrow. But Mark had already seen her and—

“Let’s go, Mom!” Ethan’s insistence broke through her thoughts.

Mark stepped back from the door as Ethan wrenched it open, climbed out of the taxi, and started for the front porch. Mark bent down and leaned inside. “Do you have any luggage?”

“Yes, I do.” She pointed toward the trunk. “We have two big suitcases.”

“I’ll get them for you.” Mark tapped the roof to signal the driver to open the trunk, pushed the door closed, and then disappeared around the back of the car.

Priscilla paid the fare and thanked the driver before getting out. The stifling heat slammed into her like a brick wall as she turned to where Mark had both suitcases already sitting on the driveway.

“Ethan,” Mark called as he closed the trunk, “why don’t you come pull one of these suitcases to the bottom of those steps for me?”

“Okay!” Ethan jogged back down the porch steps and grabbed the handle of one of the suitcases before bumping it along the rock path.

Priscilla fingered the strap of her purse as the yellow taxi steered back down the driveway. She should have asked the driver to take them to a motel. Her mother might welcome her, but her father would most likely slam the door in her face.

“Priscilla?”

She looked up and found Mark studying her. He seemed taller than she remembered. While he’d always been taller than she was, as were most of her peers, he looked as if he towered over her five-foot-two stature by at least eight inches. Not only were his shoulders broader than she recalled, but his striking blue eyes seemed even

more intelligent. He was more handsome than she remembered, too, with his light-brown hair, strong jaw, and electric smile.

He had an easy demeanor as well, and she bit back a frown. Mark Riehl had always been aware of just how attractive he was, and he enjoyed the attention of all the young women who followed him around, waiting for him to choose one of them to be his girlfriend.

Mark's twin sister, Laura, had been one of her best friends, but Mark had never seemed to notice Priscilla. No one did. She'd always felt as if she faded into the background with all the young men in their youth group. They noticed Laura and the other, prettier young women instead.

A smile turned up the corners of Mark's lips. "Are you ready to go into the *haus*?" He nodded toward the front porch. "Your *dat* walked inside a few minutes ago. I think your *mamm* is making supper."

"Mom!" Ethan's voice held a thread of whining as he called from the porch steps. "I'm hungry, and I need to use the bathroom."

"I'm coming." She started up the path with Mark at her side, and an awkward silence fell between them.

"What's that house for?" Ethan pointed toward the small cottage behind her parents' large farmhouse.

"That's called the *daadihaus*."

Ethan snickered. "The *what* house?"

"It's where my grandparents lived when I was little." Her heart felt heavy at the memory of her father's mother, who was widowed when Priscilla was still just a toddler. If only *Mammi* were still alive. She would've welcomed her and her son home. "My father's farmhand, Robert Yoder, lives there."

"He doesn't live there anymore." Mark lifted the suitcase he'd been pulling and carried it up the porch steps. "He quit a little over a year ago and moved to Ohio with his new *fraa*."

“What’s a *fraw*?” Ethan scrunched his nose.

“*Fraa* means wife.” Priscilla turned back to Mark. “Robert moved to Ohio?”

“*Ya*.” He set down the suitcase. “He met a woman who was here visiting relatives, and they fell in love. They married, and he moved to Ohio, where she was from.” He went back down the steps for the second suitcase.

“Who’s working for my father, then?”

“I am.” When Mark reached the porch again, he opened the screen door and set each suitcase inside the family room. Then he held the door open for her and Ethan.

Questions swirled through her mind. Why would Mark work for her father when his own father owned a dairy farm? Wouldn’t he be expected to help run the family business?

As she followed Ethan into the house, memories mixed with the smell of fried chicken wafted over her. She scanned the family room. It was just as she remembered. The two brown sofas her parents purchased before she was born still sat in the middle of the room, flanked by their favorite tan wing chairs. The two propane lamps and the matching oak end tables and coffee table were the same too.

The doorway at the far side of the room led to a hallway that led to her parents’ bedroom and a bathroom. The staircase to the four upstairs bedrooms and another bathroom sat to her left. The stairs seemed to beckon her to venture to the second floor to see if her old room was still decorated the way it was when she’d snuck out of the house that night, leaving a note promising to never return.

Ethan took her hand in his and tugged. “Where are my grandparents?”

“Your grandmother is probably through there.” Priscilla pointed to the doorway to her right.

Taking a deep breath, she steered Ethan into the large kitchen. Her mother stood at the stove, her back to the doorway, turning over pieces of chicken with a pair of metal tongs.

“Yonnie, I told you I would call you when supper was ready.” She lowered the flame and half turned around. When her eyes focused on Priscilla and Ethan, she gasped and whirled. The tongs dropped to the floor with a clatter. “Priscilla?”

“Hi, *Mamm*.” Tears stung Priscilla’s eyes.

*Mamm*’s mouth worked, but no words escaped.

“Hi.” Ethan skipped over to her. “I’m Ethan, your grandson.” He looked back at Priscilla over his shoulder. “How do you say grandson in Dutch?”

“*Gross-sohn*,” Priscilla responded, her voice thick with raging emotion.

*Mamm* made a strangled noise and pulled Ethan into her arms. “My prayers have been answered!”

Priscilla wiped her eyes as guilt, hot and biting, nearly overcame her.

Mark leaned against the doorframe and folded his arms over his chest. “You haven’t taught him Dutch.” It was a statement, not a question.

“No.” She shook her head. “His father didn’t like me to speak it.”

“Huh.” Mark rubbed his clean-shaven chin.

“Priscilla.” *Mamm* closed the distance between them and pulled her into a crushing hug, forcing the air from Priscilla’s lungs. Then she stepped back and touched Priscilla’s face. “You look tired.”

“It’s been a long day.” Priscilla looked up at her mother, taking in her affectionate, dark-brown eyes and pretty face. Lines reflected the eight years that had passed.

“I can’t believe you’re here.” A sheen of tears glistened in

her eyes as she caressed the thick ponytail that cascaded past Priscilla's shoulders to the middle of her back. "Why didn't you call or write so I could prepare? I would have had your favorite meal ready for you."

"This wasn't planned. I mean, I had been hoping to come visit, but I . . . Well, I wasn't sure when I was going to be able to . . ." Her hand fluttered to her right bicep again.

There was so much she wanted to share with her mother, but she couldn't hurt her that way. Besides, they had an audience. Not only was Ethan there, but Mark Riehl, a man she'd never trust with her deepest secrets, was still watching them.

"I wanted to surprise you." Priscilla tried to smile, but her mother's eyes were assessing her. *Mamm* could probably sense she wasn't telling the truth.

"Are you back for *gut*?" *Mamm* touched Priscilla's cheek again.

"Possibly. Would that be okay?" Priscilla could hear the humiliating thread of supplication in her voice. She cleared her throat and glanced at Ethan, who had taken a seat at the long kitchen table where Priscilla had eaten all her meals while growing up.

"Of course it will be okay." *Mamm* nodded with emphasis. "This is still your home."

*Will Dat agree with that?* Priscilla felt her lips press together with apprehension.

"Would you like me to carry the suitcases upstairs for you?" Mark asked.

Priscilla spun toward the doorway. Mark shifted his weight on his feet as if he were eager to leave.

"No, I think I can handle them, but thanks for offering."

Mark lifted an eyebrow. "They're pretty heavy. I don't mind carrying them up for you before I go." He gestured toward the suitcases. "Just let me know where you want them."

"It's fine. Really," Priscilla said, insisting.

Mark nodded. "All right. It was nice seeing you. I'll head home now." He nodded at her mother. "I'll see you tomorrow, Edna. *Gut nacht.*" He turned to go.

"No, wait," *Mamm* called after him. "Stay for supper."

Priscilla studied her mother. Why would her mother invite Mark to stay? Did she think his presence might keep her father from lashing out?

"*Danki*, but I need to get home." He jammed his thumb toward the front door. "*Mei schwescheder* and her family are coming over for supper tonight."

"Laura?" Priscilla asked, her heart swelling with affection for her best friend. How she'd missed both Laura and their mutual best friend, Savilla Lapp, over the years. Leaving them behind had been almost as difficult as leaving her mother.

"Ya." Mark smiled. "She'll be *froh* to hear you're back."

"Oh. Tell her I said hello." Would Laura accept her back into the community after learning she'd had a child out of wedlock?

"I will."

A door clicked shut somewhere in the house, and then Mark looked toward the far end of the family room. "Hi, Yonnie. I was just getting ready to leave."

"Where did these suitcases come from? Is someone here visiting? Why didn't I know about this?"

Priscilla trembled at the sound of *Dat's* voice. The moment had arrived. Her father might tell her and Ethan to leave. She held her breath and sent a silent prayer to God.

*Please let him take pity on Ethan and me. I need to stay until I can earn enough money to rent a safe place for us. Please help me be the mother Ethan deserves.*

"Yonnie!" *Mamm* called. "You have to see who's here! It's a miracle."

“Ethan.” Priscilla held out her hand. “Come here and meet your grandfather.”

Ethan crossed the kitchen to stand next to her, a smile spreading across his face. Surely her father wouldn’t break her son’s heart.

*Dat* appeared in the kitchen doorway, and although his dark-brown hair was now threaded with gray, he was the same tall, wide, overbearing man she remembered.

“Priscilla?” He seemed surprised, but then the look in his dark eyes turned fierce. “What are you wearing?” His eyes moved up and down her attire.

Her cheeks heated as she brushed her sweaty palms over her worn jeans.

*Dat*’s face transformed into a deep scowl as his eyes trained on hers again. “Why isn’t your head covered?”

His words seemed to punch her in the stomach.

“I’ll get you a headscarf.” *Mamm* hurried into the utility room off the kitchen.

“Yonnie,” Mark called from behind her father. “I’m going to leave.”

Priscilla had forgotten Mark was standing there until he spoke, and she longed to run and hide under the table. Why did he have to witness this painful and embarrassing conversation? When her father didn’t respond, Mark stayed put. Why didn’t he just leave? He’d already said good-bye.

“Who is this?” *Dat* pointed to Ethan.

“My son.” Priscilla’s voice was soft and shaky. Why did she allow her father to steal her confidence? She forced herself to stand a little taller as she addressed him. Then she turned to Ethan. She had to shield him from her father’s festering anger and disapproval.

“Why don’t you go use the bathroom in the hallway?” She pointed toward the family room. “Just walk through there. You’ll see the door to the bathroom down on the right.”

Ethan hesitated, dividing a look between Priscilla and her father. Then he nodded and hurried off.

“Didn’t *Mamm* tell you about him? We exchanged letters.”

*Dat* looked toward the utility room. “Your *mamm* didn’t tell me she wrote to you. I told her any contact with you is forbidden because you’re shunned.” His icy voice seemed to bounce off the cabinets before seeping through her skin.

“Here you go.” *Mamm* appeared beside her with a light-blue scarf. “Put this over your hair. I kept your dresses, so you can put one on tomorrow.” She gave Priscilla a smile that seemed more forced than genuine.

“*Danki*,” Priscilla whispered as she covered her hair with the scarf before tying it under her ponytail.

*Dat* frowned at her mother. “Why didn’t you tell me our *dochter* had a *bu*?”

*Mamm* fingered her apron and looked between Priscilla and *Dat* as she’d always done when *Dat* criticized her. Couldn’t *Mamm* ever stand up to him? It was obvious nothing had changed in this house. Anger, hot and explosive, heated her from the inside.

“I knew it would upset you,” *Mamm* finally said.

“And you continued to write to Priscilla after I told you not to.”

To Priscilla’s surprise, *Mamm* lifted her chin. “*Ya*, I did. She’s our *dochter*, and Ethan is our *gross-sohn*,” she said. “They’re our family.”

“She’s shunned,” he repeated before turning his glare back to Priscilla. “Where’s your husband?”

“I don’t have one, and I left his father.” Priscilla folded her arms over her waist, trying to calm her shaking body.

*Dat*’s eyes widened, and she braced herself, awaiting the explosion.

Priscilla’s gaze flickered to Mark, and she found his eyes

focused on her. Trepidation detonated in her gut. If only her father had waited to have this conversation until Mark was gone. Now before the next Sunday church service the entire community would buzz with the juicy gossip that Priscilla Allgyer had not only returned, but with a child born out of wedlock.

Mark nodded at her, adjusted his straw hat on his head, and slipped into the family room. She heard the front door shut behind him.

"You came back to *mei haus* with a *kind*, and you're not married?" *Dat's* voice rose.

"Yonnie," *Mamm* began, her voice trembling. "Please—"

"It's all right, *Mamm*. This was a bad idea." She ran to the front door and yanked it open, hoping she could catch Mark. When she spotted him walking toward one of the barns, she ran to the edge of the porch and leaned on the railing. "Mark!"

He spun and faced her. "*Ya?*"

"Would you please take Ethan and me to a motel?"

He hesitated, but only for a moment. "*Ya*, sure." He pointed toward the barn. "I just need to hitch up my horse."

"Thank you."

"No!" *Mamm* appeared on the porch, her eyes glistening. "Please don't go." She folded her hands as if she were praying. "I just got you back and met Ethan. My heart can't take losing you again."

"I can't stay here if *Dat* is going to criticize Ethan and me." Priscilla pointed to the open door behind her mother as her eyes filled with threatening tears. "I need a healthy and safe environment for my son."

"I understand, but please give me a chance to talk to your *dat*." *Mamm* touched her shoulder.

Ethan appeared in the doorway. "I'm hungry."

*Mamm* gave Priscilla a hopeful look. "Will you please stay for supper?"

Priscilla hesitated as she glanced toward where Mark stood hitching his horse to his buggy.

“Please,” *Mamm* said.

Priscilla glanced at Ethan in the doorway, taking in his sweet face. He looked confused at the idea that they might not be staying. She was grateful he hadn’t heard her father’s horrible words, but there might be times when she wouldn’t be able to shield him. Could she risk that? And could she tolerate her father for the sake of both her mother and her son?

“Just give me a chance to talk to him,” *Mamm* whispered. “I’ll smooth things over with him, and everything will be fine.”

“I’ll give him one night,” Priscilla said, lowering her own voice. “If he doesn’t treat me better, especially in front of Ethan, we’re leaving.”

“*Danki.*” *Mamm* smiled as she took Priscilla’s hands in hers. “I’m so *froh* you’re here.” Then she turned toward Ethan. “Do you like fried chicken?”

Ethan’s face brightened, and he clapped his hands. “Yeah!”

“Will you help me set the table?” *Mamm* asked as she started toward the door.

“Yes,” Ethan said.

*Mamm* touched his shoulder as they walked into the house together.

Priscilla turned toward the barn again.

“Priscilla?” *Mamm* stopped in the doorway. “Are you coming inside?”

“*Ya,*” she said, easily slipping into the language she now realized she’d missed. “In a few minutes. I need to tell Mark we’re staying.”

After her mother and Ethan disappeared inside the house, Priscilla descended the steps and folded her arms over her middle as she approached Mark. “Thank you for agreeing to help, but I’ve decided we’re staying for now.”

AMY CLIPSTON

“Okay.” Mark gave her a little smile. “I guess I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“*Ya.*” She motioned toward the house as heat pricked at her cheeks and humiliation curled through her. “I’m sorry you had to witness all that back in the *haus.*”

He waved it off. “Don’t worry about it.” He pulled open his buggy door. “Have a good night.”

“You too. Be sure to tell Laura hello for me.”

“I will.”

As Mark’s buggy disappeared down the lane, Priscilla wondered just how fast the rest of the church district would find out she’d come back to the community unmarried and with a child.

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*Amy: For my amazing, handsome,  
super-cool sons, Zac and Matt, with love*

*Beth: TK*

*Shelley: TK*

*Kathleen: TK*

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# GLOSSARY

*ach* (also *ack*): oh

*aenti*: aunt

*appeditlich*: delicious

*bedauerlich*: sad

*boppli*: baby

*brot*: bread

*bruder, bruders*: brother, brothers

*bruderskinner*: nieces and nephews

*bu, buwe*: boy, boys

*Budget, The*: a weekly newspaper serving Amish and Mennonite communities everywhere

*daadi*: grandfather

*daadihaus* (also *daadi haus, dawdi haus*): grandparents' house, usually a smaller dwelling on the same property

*danki*: thank you

*daed* (also *dat*): dad

GLOSSARY

*Die Botschaft*: a weekly correspondent newspaper that includes reports from scribes in many Amish settlements across the nation

*dochder*: daughter

*English, Englisher* (also *Englisch, Englischer*): non-Amish

*familiye, families*: family, families

*fraa* (also *frau*): wife

*freind, freinden*: friend, friends

*froh*: happy

*gegisch*: silly

*geh*: go

*gern gschehne*: you're welcome

*Gott*: God

*grossmutter*: grandmother

*Gude mariye*: Good morning

*gut*: good

*Gut nacht* (also *Gute nacht*): Good night

*haus*: house

*Ich liebe dich*: I love you

*jah*: yes

*kaffi* (also *kaffee*): coffee

*kapp*: prayer covering or cap

*kichli, kichlin*: cookie, cookies

*kind, kinner*: child, children

GLOSSARY

*lieb*: love

*lieuwe*: love, a term of endearment

*maedel, maed*: young woman or girl, young women or girls

*mamm*: mom

*mammi*: grandmother

*mann*: husband or man

*mei*: my

*mudder*: mother

*naut*: night

*nee*: no

*nix*: nothing

*nohma*: name

*onkel*: uncle

*Ordnung*: the written and unwritten rules of the Amish; the understood behavior by which the Amish are expected to live, passed down from generation to generation. Most Amish know the rules by heart.

*Pennsylvania Deutsch*: the language most commonly used by the Amish. Although widely known as Pennsylvania Dutch, the language is actually a form of German (Deutsch).

*Plain*: the Amish way of life

*rumschpringe* (also *rumspringa*): running-around period when a teenager turns sixteen years old

*schee*: pretty

*schmaert*: smart

GLOSSARY

*schtupp*: family room

*schwester*: sister

*sohn*: son

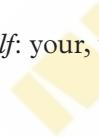
*vatter*: father

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

*wunderbaar*: wonderful

*ya*: yes

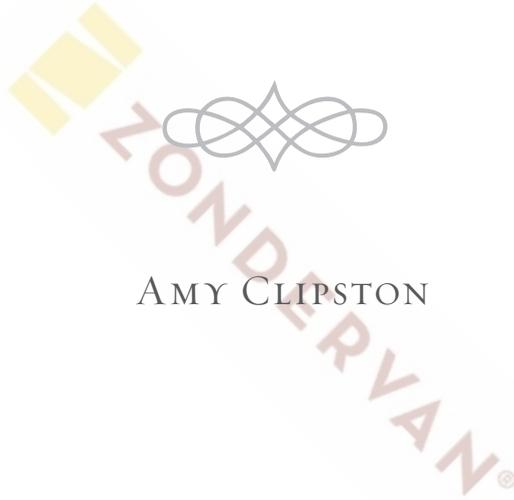
*yer, yerself*: your, yourself

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Kayla Dienner Riehl

Nathan

*Eva m. Simeon (deceased) Dienner*

Simeon Jr. (“Junior”)

*Miriam Faye m. Joel Stoltzfoos*

Hannah

*Kayla m. James (“Jamie”) Riehl*

## CHAPTER 1

Eva Dienner sniffed as she stared at the letter in her trembling hands. Grief, hot and unexpected, poured from her eyes in the form of tears as she studied her mother's beautiful handwriting. She missed her parents as memories of them pricked her heart.

She glanced around the small apartment she once shared with her beloved husband. Six years ago, she left her parents in Western Pennsylvania to marry Simeon Dienner and live with him and his family here in Ronks, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, nearly a five-hour bus ride away. Then Simeon died while on duty as a volunteer firefighter more than four years ago, leaving her and their unborn child behind. Heaviness settled in the center of her chest. Oh, how she missed him.

"*Mamm?*" Simeon Jr. entered the apartment from the main house where her in-laws and brother-in-law lived. "Are you crying?"

"I'm fine." She shook her head and wiped her eyes.

"Don't cry." He crawled up on the sofa beside her and took her hand in his. At almost four years old, he resembled his handsome father with his shock of blond hair and cornflower-blue eyes. "I'm here."

“*Danki*.” She smiled down at him. He also had his father’s kind heart.

“Why are you *bedauerlich*?”

“I was just thinking about *mei mamm* and *dat*.” She held up the letter, the first she’d received from her mother in nearly four months. “*Mei mamm* wrote a letter and told me my best *freind*, Miriam Faye, stopped by the other day and asked about me.” She sniffed again as memories of her old friends tumbled through her mind.

“Your *mamm*?” He tilted his head.

“Right. She’s your other *mammi*.”

He pointed toward the door leading to her mother-in-law’s kitchen. “I have another *mammi*?”

“*Ya*.” Eva cleared her throat. “You have another *mammi* and *daadi* who live in New Wilmington, where I grew up.”

“Can we go there so I can meet them?” His eyes sparkled.

Stunned by the question, she swallowed.

“Please?” he begged.

“I—I don’t know.” Her heart raced at the thought of seeing her parents again. Would they even *want* to see her? Her mother’s letters always seemed so . . . reserved.

He folded his hands as if praying. “Pleeease?”

How could she say no?

“Let me write *mei mamm* and ask her.”

“I’m going to tell *Mammi* and *Daadi* we’re going on a trip!” As Junior jumped off the sofa and ran to the door, Eva wondered if her parents would be as excited to meet him.



## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

A barrage of new memories nearly overcame Eva as she prepared to get off the bus two weeks later. She wiped at the wetness forming under her eyes and worked to control her emotions. Before she left six years ago, she had a terrible argument with her mother. Was coming back now a mistake, even though her mother had readily agreed to this visit? Could she and her mother ever recover from the rift between them?

Apprehension chewed on her stomach as she swung her purse over one shoulder and took Junior's hand in hers.

"*Mamm*, your hand is wet."

"Just go." She nodded toward the bus exit.

They climbed off the bus, and she retrieved their duffel bag from the luggage compartment. After hefting it onto her other shoulder, they made their way through the knot of people in the terminal.

A familiar face emerged.

"Ian. Hi." Eva's throat tightened as she looked up at Ian Miller—a man she'd known for half her life. She hadn't expected to see him, at least not here.

"It's nice to see you again." Ian's smile was warm as his brown eyes flickered to Junior. "You must be Simeon. I'm Ian. It's *wunderbaar* to meet you." He held out his hand for a shake.

"Hi." Junior grinned as he shook Ian's hand. "I'm Junior."

"Junior." Ian reached for the strap of the heavy duffel bag digging into Eva's shoulder. "Let me take that for you."

"*Danki*." Eva swiveled slightly, allowing Ian to take the bag as she searched the crowd behind him. "Are my parents outside?"

"No." Ian hefted the bag onto his broad shoulder and then

pulled on the brim of the straw hat sitting atop his dark hair. “They should be home by the time we get there.”

“I thought they’d meet us at the bus station.” She felt her brow furrow as she met his gaze. “They’ve known we were arriving this afternoon for over a week.”

“They had an appointment.” He nodded toward the exit. “The van is waiting. We should get on the road.” He started toward the door.

Anxiety twisted a tight knot in her stomach. “Wait.” She grabbed his hand and pulled him back. She felt a fluttering in her chest at the touch of his warm skin against hers. She swallowed a gasp. Where had that come from . . . after all these years?

He raised his eyebrows. “Did you forget something?”

“No.” She cleared her throat as her cheeks heated with embarrassment. “What kind of appointment did my parents have?”

“Your *dat* had a doctor’s appointment that’s been scheduled for a month.”

Alarm filled Eva as she swallowed another gasp. “Is he okay?”

Ian nodded. “*Ya*. He’s fine.”

Eva studied his face. Was he telling her the truth? She took a trembling breath as various illnesses came to her mind. Did her father have cancer? Or maybe heart trouble? Why didn’t she know he was ill? Her mother never mentioned it in her letters. Did *Mamm* assume she wouldn’t care?

“*Mamm?*” Junior tugged on her hand. “*Was iss letz?*”

Eva swallowed her fears as she looked down into her son’s

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blue eyes. She couldn't allow herself to get upset in front of Junior.

"Really. Your *dat* is fine." Ian's voice was warm. "It was just a follow-up appointment. Your *mamm* wanted to be sure he asked the right questions, so she went with him."

"Oh." Her shoulders loosened, but doubt continued to poke at her, as well as regret at the thought her mother might think she wouldn't care about their health.

"Your parents felt terrible about not being here to pick you up," Ian continued, "but I insisted on taking care of it for them so they wouldn't miss that appointment. You know how hard it is to reschedule them."

"Are we going to see *Mammi* and *Daadi* now?" Excitement bubbled in Junior's voice.

Eva forced her lips into a smile. "Ya."

"I can't wait to meet them," Junior said as they started toward the exit. "It's been so long since you said we could come to their *haus*."

Eva bit her lower lip to conceal her amusement. When she glanced at Ian beside her, his lips twitched.

"How old are you, Junior?" Ian held open the door. "Ten?"

"No, I'm almost four." Junior's smile widened as he started outside.

"Really?" Ian grinned at Eva, and she looked down at the worn cement floor to avoid his eyes. "I thought for certain you were ten."

"I'm not." Junior turned and puffed out his chest, reminding her of the peacocks they'd seen during a recent trip to a farm near their house.

"You could've fooled me."

“*Mei mammi* back in Ronks says I’m tall for my age,” Junior continued as they made their way to the parking lot.

“Don’t brag,” Eva cautioned as the warm June afternoon sun kissed her cheeks. “Wait!” She grabbed his hand before he reached the edge of the sidewalk. “Don’t step into the street.”

Ian pointed. “The van is over there. Ted is waiting for us.”

“Ted Jenkins?” she asked, and Ian nodded. “He’s still driving for my parents?”

“That’s right.”

Eva smiled as she approached another man she’d known for many years. While Ted’s dark hair had turned gray, his warm smile and brown eyes were the same. “How are you?” She shook his hand.

“Eva. It’s so good to see you.” He looked down at Junior. “You must be Simeon Jr. Your grandparents can’t wait to meet you.”

Now a knot of guilt formed in her belly as Junior’s face lit up with a wide grin. “I can’t wait to meet them too.” Maybe she’d been wrong not to make this trip earlier.

A door slammed, and Eva jumped. As she turned toward the back of the van where Ian had loaded her bag, he met her gaze. Unnerved, she turned her attention back to Junior and Ted. She wrenched open one of the rear doors, climbed into the van, and sat down on the other side of the car seat that drivers for the Amish carried for passengers Junior’s size. Ian helped Junior hop into it, and Eva buckled him in.

“*Danki*,” she muttered before Ian closed the door, and then he settled in the front passenger seat.

“How have you been?” Ted glanced at her in the rearview mirror before steering the van out of the parking lot.

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“Fine, thank you.” Eva folded her hands in her lap. “How’s your family?”

“They’re great. I have five grandchildren now.”

As Ted talked about his grandchildren, Eva glanced out the window from time to time. Familiar sights rushed by in a blur, and a fresh tangle of emotions washed over her all at once—guilt, regret, anxiety, and melancholy, but excitement too.

“Eva?”

“What?” She turned to face Ian, who eyed her with suspicion as he looked back at her from the front seat. “I’m sorry. I was lost in thought.”

“I can see that.” Ian’s intelligent dark eyes seemed to assess her, causing her to shift in her seat. “Ted asked you how long you were going to stay.”

“Oh. I haven’t decided that yet.”

Ian tilted his head to the side. “Don’t your in-laws need your help at their restaurant?”

“No. I’ve been working at home doing quilting and sewing ever since Junior got too big to go to the restaurant with me. My in-laws hired a couple of young women from our community to wait tables.”

“Oh,” Ian said. An awkward silence wafted over the car for a few moments. Then Ian cleared his throat before turning back toward Ted. “Looks like it’s going to be another dry weekend.”

“Yeah, that’s what I heard on the news this morning,” Ted said, his eyes trained on the road ahead.

Eva settled into her seat as the men discussed the threat of an unusually hot summer in New Wilmington. After several minutes, she turned toward her son and was greeted by the

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back of his blond head. He seemed mesmerized as he stared out his window.

Swallowing a shuddering breath, Eva silently asked God to help her parents love and cherish Junior despite their differences with her—the way grandparents should.

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