

The Amish Clockmaker

MINDY STARNS CLARK
SUSAN MEISSNER



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Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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The quote by William Andrews on page 7 is from an article titled "The Shadow Knows" by Dava Sobel, dated January 2007, and can be found at this link: www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-shadow-knows-142866936/#yjYbSu5vM7pkQQJc.99.

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*In loving memory of
Mariette Smith,
1970 – 2013.
Precious friend,
sister in Christ,
fantastic mother,
adoring wife,
avid reader,
amazing woman,
missed beyond all measure.*

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To be a clockmaker is to work not just for yourself or your client, but also for someone else far in the future, someone who knows enough to judge your work and who will look at something you've made someday and—you hope—say, “That was done right.”

William Andrewes, Curator
Harvard University Collection of
Historical Scientific Instruments



PART ONE
Matthew



ONE

Standing at the edge of the grassy lot, I squinted my eyes in the predawn darkness and envisioned the future. Construction hadn't even started yet, but I had pictured this place so many times in my mind that it was nearly real to me already, from the sweep of the roofline to the span of the side walls to the stretch of the covered walkway that would connect it to the barn. Once completed, the remodeled building wouldn't be fancy or showy, but it would be big—twice as big, in fact, as what we had now.

The expansion of Zook's Feed and Tack, my family's store, was set to begin in just two hours, not a minute too soon as far as I was concerned. My parents didn't exactly see it that way, but in the end it had been my decision. They would come around eventually—at least I hoped they would—but I didn't have time to wait. If I was going to save this company, I had to keep things moving forward. God had blessed us with some exciting opportunities, but taking advantage of them meant first doubling our space and our inventory.

God willing, we'd end up doubling our revenue as well.

Such a thought should have left me feeling excited and eager to get started. Instead, my emotions were mixed. On the one hand, I was thrilled to be breaking ground today and confident this expansion was the right move for us to take. On the other hand, I was frustrated with my father, with how he could not—*would* not—understand or embrace my vision. He and I had

always gotten on so well, and he was a kind and godly man, but this situation had created a rift between us I feared we'd never be able to mend.

To make matters worse, a deep ache of loss had been rising up inside of me for days. That feeling came from the knowledge that my beloved grandfather—my kindred spirit in so many ways—wasn't here to share in this day with me. At least *Grossdaadi* had been in on the early planning, I told myself as I began walking across the dewy grass. He'd known and approved of my intentions before he died—and that was some consolation.

Then again, he had passed away more than three months ago, before the final plans were drawn up, before the crew was hired, before we were even certain we'd be able to pull this off. Now that it was finally happening, I missed him with an intensity that hadn't felt so piercing since the day of his funeral.

I came to a stop at the center of the scruffy, unused piece of land that stretched out beside and behind the current building and would be the site of today's construction. The last thing added to our property was a little cottage up by the house that had been put in a few years ago, when one of my older brothers was getting married. Amanda and I were living there now, but ultimately it would become my parents' home, their *daadi haus*, and Amanda and I would shift over to the main house.

This homestead sat on a hill, low at the front and higher at the back. Heading up our driveway, which ran along the right side of the property, one would encounter first the parking lot, then the tack store, the feed store, a horse barn, the main house, the cottage, and a small fenced-in field out back. At five acres total, this place wasn't big enough to call a farm, though we did own two horses and enough pastureland to keep them fed. Beyond that, we lived more like city folk than our friends and fellow church members, many of whom were farmers.

Standing now between the tack shop and the driveway next door, I glanced toward the eastern horizon and gauged the time. The sky had grown brighter in just the past few minutes, and I knew the sun would soon emerge above the trees. But there was still no one in sight at the moment, and the road that ran in front of the shop—the main thoroughfare of Ridgeview, Pennsylvania—was quiet and empty, several hours away from the busy commerce and congestion of the coming day.

Thus alone and unobserved, I lowered myself to my knees on the grass, removed my hat, bowed my head, and began to pray. My intention was to ask,

yet again, that God's will, not mine, be done in this entire matter. But after a few minutes, I found my mind again returning to thoughts of *Grossdaadi*.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to still my thoughts and simply listen for the voice of God, so that His peace could flow through me. And though the frustration over the situation with my father did not abate, the grief over the loss of my grandfather did begin to lessen noticeably, almost as if the Lord's healing spirit was spreading a cooling salve over a painful burn.

Finally, my mind moved back into prayer, and I asked God for the safety and health of our workers over the coming days, not to mention the patience and good will of our customers. It wasn't going to be easy to get through this period of construction, I knew, but in the end it should be worth it, especially if Zook's became the number one source for feed and tack in all of Lancaster County, which was the idea.

Though only if that's Your plan, Lord. Show me how to see Your will clearly. Open doors You want me to go through and close those You do not.

Before a final "amen," I thanked Him for easing my sorrow and asked Him to soften my heart toward my father. *May I live in a way that honors Daed's authority while also rescuing Grossdaadi's legacy. Thank You for Your love and grace. Amen.*

Feeling much more at peace, I opened my eyes and got to my feet. As I was brushing wet grass from my knees, I heard a gentle, familiar voice behind me.

"Matthew?"

I turned to see my wife, Amanda, standing not too far away and gazing at me with a sweet smile.

"I thought I might find you here," she said softly, coming a few steps closer. "I'm not interrupting, am I?"

"Nope. All done," I replied, smoothing my unruly hair and then plopping my hat onto my head.

"I always love it when I catch you in prayer," she said, coming to a stop in front of me.

She tilted her head to look up at me, but as she studied my face, her smile began to fade. "You're not still thinking about what your *daed* said to you last night, are you?"

I shrugged and looked away. "I was praying about the expansion."

"Praying what, exactly? That God would convict you if this really is about 'your own personal ambitions?'" There was a mocking tone to her voice as she

repeated the words my *daed* had said to me just last night. She'd found the whole conversation very upsetting, though she'd managed to hold her tongue until we were alone and she could vent in private.

I slid my thumbs under my suspenders. "*Daed* made some good points. Like how this whole project needs to be in God's hands. The expansion, the growth, the profit projections—all of that has to fit His plan, not mine. It doesn't hurt to be reminded."

"But you've known that—you've *done* that—all along, every step of the way. I can't imagine anyone following the Lord's leading more obediently than you have in this matter."

I closed my eyes, feeling something shift inside, a little piece that my father's words had broken in me last night being restored now by my wife's loving reassurance.

"Besides, your *daed* is the main reason you're having to do this expansion in the first place. I'm just glad you were able to come up with an idea to save the store before it was too late."

She tried to meet my eyes, but I looked away as she continued. "Matthew, you know very well that your father doesn't have the skills to manage this place, but you do. Your actions here aren't unwise or self-serving, no matter what he says. They're smart. You're just being a good steward of the family's business."

I slipped an arm about her shoulders and pulled her close before she could see the hint of tears her words brought to my eyes. I blinked the wetness away as I rested my chin on the top of her head, glad I was so much taller than she. As usual, she'd spoken to the exact issue weighing on my heart. The family discord over this expansion had been bothering me more than I'd been willing to admit.

"Your *daed* just needs a little time to adjust." Amanda wrapped her arms more tightly around my waist, and I could feel the amazing shape of her hard, round belly between us, the child that she would be bringing into the world in just two more months, God willing. "Once he sees so many new customers start pouring in, he'll come around."

"Maybe. Then again, maybe I should have—"

"Don't."

"But what if—"

"Shhh," she replied, pulling back to place a finger against my lips. "Matthew, look, I don't mean to sound disrespectful, really I don't. He may have

nearly run this place into the ground, but just because your *daed* is bad at business doesn't mean he's a bad person. Quite the opposite, in fact. Harlan Zook is a good, good man. Faithful and patient and kind. As loving to me as my own father."

"*Ya*. He is."

She gazed up at me, her eyes pleading, her expression earnest. "But you know and I know that he did not belong at the helm of this company. Your grandfather knew it more than anyone—which is why he finally put you in charge. Once the profits start rolling in and your *daed* sees what a good move this was..." She reached for my arm and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "He'll be fine. I promise. Just tell me one thing."

"*Ya?*"

"Are there any questions in *your* mind about the necessity and wisdom of this expansion? Any doubts or concerns about it at all?"

I thought long and hard, and then I shook my head slowly from side to side. "I've never been more sure of a decision in my life."

She hesitated. "Never?"

It took me a moment to notice the teasing glint in her eye, and then I smiled.

"I'll try that again," I amended. "Except for the decision to marry you—"

"That's more like it." She grinned.

"—I've never been more sure of anything in my life." As the words came out of my mouth, I knew they were true. I was certain about this.

"There you go," she said with finality. "That's all that really matters, now isn't it?"

I gave her a nod and turned and looked out across the grassy area that would soon be full of men with stakes and mallets and framing squares. Standing there taking it in, a snip of a proverb came to mind, the one about a prudent wife being from the Lord.

I couldn't have agreed more.

Feeling much better, I shifted my gaze to a completely different construction site, the one right next door where a big, fancy resort hotel was slowly being put in. The place was still idle at this early hour, but the sun was fully up now, and its rays glinted off the shiny metal of the huge machinery there, trucks and tractors and backhoes that were lying dormant all about the property. By eight or nine the place would be crawling with activity as usual, the construction progressing in the typical *Englisch* manner. Meanwhile, we'd

have our own kind of activity starting over here, though our methods would be decidedly more Amish.

“Are you hungry?” Amanda asked, gesturing toward the house.

I nodded, but just as she was about to turn and go, I grabbed her wrist, pulled her back toward me, and leaned down to bring my lips to hers.

She returned my kiss with enthusiasm. When we pulled apart, she gazed up at me.

“I love you, Matthew,” she whispered. “And I believe in you. God will take care of everything, including your father.”

I slipped a hand into hers, and together we walked toward the house, where I knew she would already have a warm breakfast on the stove. My stomach growled at the thought and I smiled, feeling much more at peace now than I had when first coming out here.

“What are these?” Amanda asked as we walked past a grouping of stakes I’d hammered into the ground the day before.

“They’re markers for when the guys start putting in the foundation. They’ll need to accommodate for some old footings.”

“Footings?”

“For a post and pier.”

Amanda came to a stop at the nearest stake and dropped my hand.

“A what and what?”

I smiled. “Post and pier. It’s a type of foundation that uses concrete with wood beams and joists, supported by wood posts. The ones here are hidden down in the grass. They’re quite old, as though they’ve been here forever.”

Amanda knelt to study the ground next to the stake, seeing what I was talking about, footings that had been so overgrown for so long that she’d never even realized they were there. “Are there many of these things out here?” she asked.

“No, just the four. Which will be no problem as long as the men get them fully encased in the concrete. They already know about them. I just came out yesterday and marked the locations to make it easier for them to see exactly where the things are.”

Amanda ran her hand over the concrete square, which was about a foot across and flush to the ground. “So are you saying there was a house out here at one time?”

I shrugged. “Too small to be a house. Maybe a toolshed or some other kind of farm building.”

“What does the writing on it mean?”

“Writing?” I knelt down to get a closer look as she brushed away some grass clippings.

Sure enough, though the grooves had worn shallow over time, at the center of the square were some letters and numbers that someone had carved into the cement long ago:

MMCR

MK 1:35

“I don’t know,” I said, rising back to a standing position. “I never noticed it before. Must be some sort of notation for the builder.”

Amanda glanced up at me from the ground, a twinkle in her eye. “That, or some secret message from the past.”

I smiled. “Well, here’s my message for the future. If this man doesn’t get some biscuits and ham soon, he’s going to end up one very hungry fellow.”

I helped her to her feet, and with a smile of her own she said, “I’d better get you fed, then.”

She took my hand and together we headed for home.