

A Plain & Simple Heart



—
LORI COPELAND
VIRGINIA SMITH



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Scripture verses are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com; from the King James Version of the Bible; and from Die Bibel, Die heilige Schrift, nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers, in der revidierten Fassung von 1912 (The Bible: The Holy Scriptures, as translated by Martin Luther in the revised edition of 1912.)

Cover by *Left Coast Design, Portland, Oregon*

Cover photos © *Chris Garborg; Jim Feliciano/Shutterstock*

Published in association with the Books & Such Literary Agency, 52 Mission Circle, Suite 122, PMB 170, Santa Rosa, CA 95409-5370, www.booksandsuch.biz

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

A PLAIN AND SIMPLE HEART

Copyright © 2012 by Copeland, Inc. and Virginia Smith

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Copeland, Lori.

A plain and simple heart / Lori Copeland and Virginia Smith.

p. cm. ~ (The Amish of Apple Grove ; bk. 2)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4755-8 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4756-5 (eBook)

1. Young women-Fiction 2. Sheriffs-Fiction 3. Amish-Kansas-Fiction. I. Smith, Virginia, 1960- II. Title.

PS3553.O6336P56 2012

813'.54-dc23

2012002227

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 /LB-CD/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11-12



ONE

Apple Grove, Kansas
May 1885

Rebecca! The laundry will not hang itself. ‘An idle brain is the devil’s workshop.’”

Rebecca jerked upright, pulled from her daydream by her grandmother’s sharp voice. She cast a guilty glance toward the house, where *Maummi* stood in the open doorway, black skirts billowing around her ankles, her arms folded across her crisp white apron. Her stern expression was visible all the way across the yard.

“Sorry, *Maummi*.” The automatic apology came with half-hearted sincerity. It seemed as though she was always apologizing for something lately.

Wet clothing swayed on the half-empty clothesline that stretched between the barn and the well house. Rebecca stooped and selected a black dress from the basket at her feet. She shook the garment with a snap before hanging it on the line beside Papa’s trousers, aware that her grandmother had not returned to her chores in the kitchen but stood watching from the doorway. A

breeze rustled the leaves of a nearby apple tree and blew the sweet scent of blossoms Rebecca's way. The strings of her *kapp* lifted in the wind and danced around her shoulders as the full wet skirt blew into her face. Quickly, she clipped the dress onto the line before it could blow away. If a clean garment touched the ground, *Maummi* would make her wash it again.

"When you are finished there, come and help me in the kitchen," her grandmother called. "I want you to make *snitz* pie for Emma's table. A treat for the little one."

The reminder of their plans to visit her sister and brother-in-law's farm for the midday meal brightened Rebecca's mood considerably. The day was warm enough that she could romp outdoors with her nephew after the meal. At nearly three years old, little Lucas was a precocious bundle of energy, and Emma, who was expecting another child in a few months, was only too happy to turn him over to Aunt Rebecca for a spell.

One day I'll have children of my own.

Her daydream returned with the thought. She lifted Papa's shirt from the basket, but in her mind it belonged to a tall, handsome man whose dark eyes lit up when he came in from the fields at the end of the day. She could see him there, just rounding the barn, his gaze searching for hers. He would catch sight of her, and his stride would lengthen as he hurried across grass that waved gently in the Kansas breeze. When he reached her, he would thrust aside the laundry, gather her in his arms, and—

"Rebecca!"

With a jerk, she tossed the shirt across the line. "I'm hurrying, *Maummi*."

She brushed a crease out of the shirt, her hand lingering on the damp fabric. If only her one true love were more than a memory.

She could see him so clearly in her mind's eye, sitting tall atop his horse, the brim of his oblong, *Englisch* hat shading his eyes from the glaring sun. Four years had passed since she last saw Jesse, and yet she remembered every detail. Not a single day had gone by that she hadn't thought of him.

A clean apron followed the shirt on the line. Of course, the Jesse in her mind was a little different from the real one. Hers was dressed in Amish trousers, suspenders, and a proper round-brimmed straw hat. Jesse becoming Amish was a matter of expediency because she could only marry an Amish man. Papa had already lost one daughter to the *Englisch*, and he wouldn't stand for the second one to leave the church as well. Once Jesse understood that, he wouldn't mind becoming Amish.

The sweet-smelling breeze whisked away a wistful sigh as Rebecca clipped a pair of *Maummi's* bloomers on the line. Sometimes she worried her dreams were nothing but fancy. What if Jesse had forgotten all about her in the four years since their adventure on the cattle trail, the one where Emma had met her husband, Luke? After all, Rebecca had been little more than a child then, and Jesse a handsome cowboy, a man.

And oh, what a man!

A familiar tickle fluttered in her belly. She had given her heart to that drover, and time had not diminished the strength of her affections. If only he would return to Apple Grove and see that she was now a full-grown woman of seventeen. One look at her, and he would realize God had made them for each other, of that she was certain. He would join the church and they would marry, and he would help Papa on the farm until the day Papa decided to hand the reins over to him.

That's what true love did.

Rebecca turned and gazed at the house, the place where she had been born and lived her entire life. One day it would be hers and Jesse's, and they would fill it with children. They would build a *dawdi haus* for Papa right next door so she could care for him in his old age.

She hung the last apron on the line and picked up the empty basket. The hem of her black dress brushed the grass as she crossed the yard toward the house. Her plans had been laid in painstaking detail over four years of wishing and hoping and straining her eyes toward every *Englisch* stranger on horseback who passed by on the road.

But Jesse did not come. Fact was, no one had heard from him since he returned to Texas a few weeks after Emma's wedding. Even Luke, who had been his best friend, hadn't heard from him in years.

A wave of desolation threatened, but Rebecca brushed it aside. From the first time she laid eyes on him, she had known Jesse was hers. God would not give her a love this strong if He didn't mean for them to be life mates. One day Jesse would come to her. But how much longer would he make her wait?

With the empty basket balanced on her hip, she skipped up the stairs and into the house.



"What about Daniel Burkholder?" asked Emma. She handed a basket of warm biscuits to Rebecca and nodded toward the laden table, where fragrant ribbons of steam wisped from bowls heaped with food. "Katie Miller told me he fancies you."

Rebecca stood at Emma's kitchen window, admiring the

sunlight-drenched green grass in the well-kept yard surrounding her sister's house. Poppy mallows dotted the untended field between the house and the road, their purple blooms swaying in the ever-present breeze. She located the men in the opposite direction, standing near the back fence, their heads turned toward a herd of cattle that grazed in the field beyond. Luke was saying something to Papa, whose round-brimmed straw hat bobbed as he listened. At their feet, Lucas squatted in close inspection of something on the ground.

Wishing she could be outside with the men instead of inside the hot kitchen, she turned her back to the window and arranged her features in a scowl. "He smells constantly of onions. I can't bear him."

"You like onions," *Maummi* said. Her sharp knife sliced through a plump red tomato on the cutting board.

"To eat, yes, but not to smell. When he brought me home in that tiny buggy of his after church one Sunday, I nearly choked." She set the biscuits on the table and stood back to examine the spread, her hands on her hips. "Emma, you have enough food for a barn raising."

Turning from the high work counter, *Maummi* paused a moment to run a hand lovingly over the giant hutch that dominated the room, and then she focused on the table. "'The path to a man's heart winds through his stomach,'" she quoted with an approving nod. She fixed her gaze on Rebecca and gave a little sniff. "You would do well to take this to heart, granddaughter."

Rebecca turned away before her grandmother could see her eyes rise to the ceiling. She'd never enjoyed kitchen work the way Emma did. The pie resting on the corner of the second work counter bore evidence of her lack of cooking skill. The top crust

bubbled unevenly because she hadn't properly slit the crust to vent the steam, and the rim around the crust had browned nearly black because she forgot to watch it in the oven. However, *Maummi* had stood at her elbow to direct the mixing of every ingredient, so she hoped the taste would make up for its appearance.

"Emma already has Luke's heart. They are married, aren't they?"

"Catching a man's heart is only the beginning." *Maummi* slid thick tomato slices onto a plate with the edge of her knife. "Keeping him happy is where a dull wife fails."

Rebecca chose to ignore the veiled reference to her as dull and instead dropped her gaze toward her sister's bulging belly. "Luke appears to be happy."

A blush colored Emma's cheeks as her hand cupped her stomach in a gesture common to every pregnant woman Rebecca had ever seen. Her time was at least three months off, but already she looked nearly as big as she was when Lucas was born. Even so, she was beautiful as always in her loose-fitting blue gown and with her braided hair wrapped around her head.

Rebecca ran a hand down her own black skirt and battled a surge of envy. When Emma left the church to marry Luke, she had left behind the prescribed Amish black dresses and *kapps*. Though Rebecca tried not to begrudge her sister the ability to wear beautiful colors, she couldn't help wondering what it would be like to don a pretty dress and maybe a matching bonnet like those she saw ladies wear on the infrequent times when Papa allowed her to accompany him into Hays City for supplies.

The thought flooded her with guilt. Bishop Miller would accuse her of vanity.

And he would be right.

“We were talking about you, not me,” Emma chided. “So Daniel smells of onions. What of Samuel Schrock?”

“He’s too young. He’s barely past his sixteenth birthday.” Rebecca avoided her sister’s gaze by adjusting the placement of a plate at the long table. “Besides, he’s taken with Amy Bender. I saw them walking together after church last Sunday.”

“There’s always Amos Beiler,” *Maummi* said as she set the plate of tomatoes on the table.

Rebecca didn’t bother to hide her eye-roll this time, nor did she suppress a loud groan, which made *Maummi* cackle.

Emma’s brow creased with compassion. “Poor Amos, raising those children on his own. They need a mother, and he needs a wife.”

“He isn’t raising them on his own. Mrs. Keim tends them while he works the farm, and his sister-in-law is teaching the girls to cook and keep house.” Truth be told, the oldest Beiler girl at nine years old was a better cook than Rebecca, but she saw no reason to say so.

“I know, but that’s not the same as having a mother.” Emma’s gaze slid toward *Maummi*. “Or a grandmother.”

Their mother had died when Rebecca was a baby. *Maummi* was already living with them, having moved to Apple Grove with Papa and Mama and young Emma to help establish the farm in a new Amish district. Rebecca tried for a moment to imagine what her life would have been like without *Maummi*. The idea wasn’t worth considering. With a rush of emotion, she crossed the room to stand beside the older woman, and she smiled as she touched her grandmother’s sleeve with a gentle gesture.

“You’re right. It’s not the same.”

Maummi’s lips turned up slightly in acknowledgement of the

rare display of affection. As a rule, the Amish showed their care for one another through hard work and service, not through physical gestures, but *Maummi* prolonged the contact by lingering a moment before moving away to pick up a bowl of sauerkraut salad from the counter.

"Well, perhaps Amos will find a wife soon." Emma cast an anxious eye over the table. "Everything is ready. I hope Papa will favor my beef-and-noodle casserole."

Emma tried so hard to please Papa, as though food could overcome the pain of having his older daughter leave the Amish way of life. Not that he ever said a word, but Rebecca had seen the hurt in his eyes when he watched his grandson at play, and she knew he deeply regretted the fact that Lucas was being raised in a different faith.

"At least they are Christian," *Maummi* had said more than once.

And they are happy. Anyone can see that in Emma's face when she looks at Luke.

"I'm sure he will love it," Rebecca assured her. "Do you want me to call them in?"

Emma nodded as she bent over the table to lift the cover from the butter dish. "Oh, *Maummi*, I am supposed to pass along a greeting. Mr. McCann stopped by last week."

Rebecca stopped halfway to the door. McCann was the cook on the cattle drive where Emma had met Luke and she had met Jesse.

"Him. He didn't know a spice from a weed until I taught him." *Maummi* waved a hand in feigned dismissal, though Rebecca saw a spark of interest in her hooded eyes. "Happened to be nearby, did he?"

“He was on his way south to join a cattle drive. He’d been cooking for a restaurant over in Abilene, but he said he missed the trail. And the way things are going, with ranchers fencing the open ranges, he said he didn’t think there would be too many more cattle drives for a cowboy to take advantage of.” Emma removed another lid, this one covering a dish of apple butter. “He stayed for supper and entertained us with tales of life in town and news of some of the old team. Remember Charlie? He married and bought a place in Arizona territory last year. Griff moved down there to help him get set up.”

Excitement raced along Rebecca’s spine. These men were all friends of Jesse’s.

She adopted a casual expression. “Did he mention anyone else? Like...” She swallowed, and schooled her voice. “Like Jesse Montgomery, maybe?”

Emma glanced up. “Yes, he did. Luke asked, of course, and Mr. McCann said he’d heard that Jesse had settled over near Lawrence. He wasn’t sure what he was doing there.” She shook her head. “Luke could hardly believe it. He thought Jesse would never leave the trail as long as there was a trail to drive a herd across.”

Lawrence! Rebecca’s pulse kicked into a gallop and her head went light. Jesse, her one true love, was in Kansas. On the other side of the state from Apple Grove, true, but Lawrence was a far sight closer than Texas.

A nagging thought tugged at her soaring heart. If he lived in the same state as she, then why hadn’t he come to her? He knew where she lived. She set her jaw and tilted her chin. Perhaps he needed a reminder.

“Rebecca?”

Emma’s voice drew her from her ruminations. She realized

her sister and grandmother were both watching her with curious expressions.

“Are you going to call the men in?”

“Yes. I will.”

Rebecca turned toward the door, a plan—devious to be sure—already forming in her mind.

If the cow would not come to the water, she would herd him there.



TWO



Lawrence, Kansas

Colin Maddox stepped out of the Lawrence post office and onto Massachusetts Street with the letter he'd been waiting for. It had been all he could do to casually tuck the missive in his vest pocket, but postmistress Betsy Lanham's prying eyes saw far too much, and her tongue wagged like a rattler's tail. If the news was bad, she'd see it in his face, and if the letter said what he hoped it did, he'd have a hard time not shouting. The town would know the letter's contents soon enough and a few brows would lift.

He started across the dusty street, pausing to let a wagon pass by. Across the way an elderly woman exited the general store, a basket swinging from her arm.

"Afternoon, Sheriff." She greeted him with a regal dip of her head.

Colin tipped his hat with a smile. "You're looking mighty fetching today, Miz Watkins. Is that a new bonnet you're wearing?"

"Why, yes. Yes, it is, Sheriff." A weathered hand rose to hover around the feathers topping a narrow-brimmed hat while her eyelashes fluttered. "Do you like it?"

“I do indeed. Allow me to assist you with that.” He took the parcel-filled basket from her and escorted her a few steps to her small wagon. He set the basket in the back and helped her up onto the bench.

“Thank you. It’s good to know there are still gentlemen in Lawrence. Not many young men these days are mindful of an old lady.” A hard glint sparked in her eyes. “They are taken by the drink and given over to slovenly living.”

Colin didn’t have the time or the inclination to enter into what was sure to become another heated conversation. The emerging temperance movement had the women in town worked into a lather. If they had their way, there was bound to be a war on liquor, and the men in town didn’t cotton to the idea.

“Old lady?” He gave her his most charming smile. “I don’t know who you might be referring to, ma’am. The only lady I see here is as spry as a young prairie rabbit.”

The glint became a sparkle, and Mrs. Watkins raised a gloved hand to cover a giggle. “Sheriff Maddox. I do declare, you are a charmer.”

He tipped his hat again and took a backward step. “You have a nice afternoon, now. Be careful going home. The town is bustling with business today.”

A wagon rolled past, followed by two strangers on horseback. With another girlish giggle, Mrs. Watkins flicked her reins and the wagon rattled off. Colin watched for a moment and then continued on his way, nodding pleasantly at the townspeople he passed. The letter felt like a boulder in his pocket. His future lay inside that envelope.

He reached the jailhouse without further delay, and the noise of the busy street dimmed when he closed the door behind him. With a glance toward the three empty cells, he rounded the desk

and lowered himself into his chair. Pulling the letter out of his pocket, he stared at his name in a slanted scrawl across the front.

Sheriff Colin Maddox

Lawrence, Kansas

He turned the envelope over. It was sealed by an uneven blob of wax with no imprint. Unbroken, he noted, though he wouldn't have been surprised to find that the letter had been opened and read. At times Betsy wasn't able to corral her curiosity and had been known to announce pertinent facts when she handed a piece of mail to the owner. She would have done the same with this one if he hadn't made a point of meeting the train and following the mailbag to the post office.

He realized he was stalling. *Open the letter, Maddox. It's no big deal. The letter will either confirm or deny your dream.*

He shook his head to dislodge the thought. The Lord had confirmed his dream a dozen times over. This letter would only establish the timing.

Slipping a finger beneath the paper's edge, he broke the wax seal and unfolded the single sheet of paper.

Sheriff Maddox,

I am pleased to accept the town's offer of employment at the terms specified in your letter. I will arrive on 24 May on the five twenty train from Chicago.

Regards,

Patrick Mulhaney

Colin leaned back in his chair and let the news sink in. Mulhaney had accepted the offer to become the new sheriff of Lawrence. Colin's days in the job were numbered.

He fingered the badge pinned to his leather vest while his gaze circled the empty jailhouse. For more than two years this job had consumed every minute of his life. The small room containing his bed and the few possessions he'd accumulated lay just through the doorway on the other side of the far cell. His deputies all had homes to go to, but something had always stopped him from putting down roots in this town. Something or Someone.

Well, Lord. I guess this seals it. In a few weeks I'll be working solely for You.

In eighteen days, Colin would hand over his badge, pack his bags, and put the town of Lawrence and all of its problems behind him. He would head west until he felt the Lord nudging him to stop.

And then his real life's work could begin.

An uncontrollable grin took possession of his lips. Before he could stop himself, he launched out of the chair, snatched his hat off his head, and tossed it high in the air.

"Waaaaahooooo!"

His joyful cheer rang in the room as his hat fluttered to the floor. Stepping lightly enough that a passerby peeking through the window might accuse him of dancing, he rounded the desk and stooped to pick it up. All he had to do was make it through the next eighteen days without anything major happening. No gun-fights. No robberies. No horse thieves to track down.

Lord, I'd sure take it as a favorable sign if You could see Your way to making sure things go smooth from here on out. The people in this town are good folks, by and large. They can behave themselves for a few weeks, with a little help.

Surely eighteen uneventful days wasn't too much to ask, was it?



Rebecca rolled the handcart to a smooth stop and set the handles down softly. Nestled on a pile of straw inside, Lucas had fallen asleep with the suddenness common to young children. An afternoon spent romping with Aunt Rebecca had tired the little boy out.

She glanced toward the chairs they had placed beneath a huge shade tree after the meal, where *Maummi* sat with her chin on her chest. The gentle buzz of her snore bore evidence that Lucas wasn't the only one who could use a nap this lazy afternoon.

Emma heaved herself heavily out of her chair and crossed the grass toward them, her gait bearing signs of the expectant mother waddle.

"I expected this would happen. He was too excited to nap this morning." She bent over to pluck a piece of straw out of the boy's silky hair.

The tenderness of Emma's smile stirred up a longing deep in Rebecca's breast. Someday she would look down on her own child with that same love shining in her eyes. She closed her eyes for a moment, imagining what her and Jesse's son would look like. Dark hair with a touch of curl, like hers. Blue eyes and strong jaw, like his.

She opened her eyes and turned a glance on her sister. "You are so fortunate, Emma."

"Why do you say that?"

Rebecca spread her hands wide to indicate their surroundings: the house, the nearby fields, Lucas. "Your life is perfect."

Emma shook her head. "From the outside it may look so, but life is definitely not perfect. I love our home, and the Lord has blessed us with plenty. We have food and warmth and a beautiful home." Her expression became wistful when her gaze strayed toward the barn, where Papa and Luke had disappeared after the

meal to work on a broken piece of farm equipment. "But ours is an isolated life. We have few neighbors. The nearest church is in Hays City, and most of the people there live in town. No one comes calling with a pie or a basket of apples to share over a cup of coffee. Not like at home."

By home, she meant Apple Grove. Rebecca had to admit that the friendliness of neighbors was one thing she loved about the Amish community in which she'd lived her entire life. Though the farms were spread out, there seemed to always be someone to visit, someone to lend a hand when needed.

She peered closely at her sister's face. "Are you not happy, then?"

Emma's eyes lit with joy. "Oh, yes! I would prefer having a family or two nearby, but I wouldn't trade what Luke and I have for anything in the world." Her gaze flew again toward the barn, and a tiny smile played at the corners of her mouth. "Our home is built on love. It is all I ever dreamed of."

Gazing at her sister's face, a sense of longing bloomed in Rebecca. Was anything in life more needed than love? She stooped and plucked a wildflower out of the grass at her feet. "You asked earlier if I fancied anyone. Well, there is someone."

Though she didn't care to look Emma in the face, from the corner of her eye she saw her sister's smile widen.

"I knew it! You're in love. I could tell by the way you found fault with Daniel and Samuel. Who is it? Do I know him?"

"Yes, you know him." The flower's tiny purple petals rested like silk between Rebecca's fingers. "You've met him."

"I have?" The smile wavered. "What is his name?"

She pulled a petal off and let it flutter to the grass. "I'd rather not say."

The flower was snatched out of her hand. Startled, Rebecca looked up into Emma's grinning face.

"Playing coy, are you? Very well, then. At least tell me if this boy returns your affections."

"He's not a boy," Rebecca said. "He's a man. And I...I don't know." Her gaze fell away. "I hope he does."

I hope he remembers me at all.

"He has not given any indication of his feelings?"

Reluctantly, Rebecca shook her head.

"Hmm." Emma's eyes narrowed. "Well, if you truly love him—"

"I do," she hurried to say. "With all my heart."

Emma's gaze softened. "Then you must go to him, Rebecca, and find out if he loves you in return."

Rebecca risked an upward glance. "Do you really think so?"

Her sister rested clasped hands on her bulging belly and turned a tender glance toward the little boy sleeping in the handcart. "Never let true love pass, dear sister."

The certainty in Emma's tone strengthened Rebecca's resolve. A smile emerged. Find him and tell him of her love. She was old enough now. He was far older, but age didn't matter.

Her resolve strengthened, Rebecca smiled. "Thank you, Emma. You have helped."

Emma reached out to give her a brief hug. "Isn't that what big sisters are for?"

"It is," Rebecca admitted. "Thank you again."

She just hoped Emma would feel the same when she learned that Jesse Montgomery was the man who held her heart.