

THE BISHOP'S FAMILY #2

THE
QUIETING
—*—*
A Novel

SUZANNE
WOODS
FISHER


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*To my dear friend Kathy Jenke,
who shares much of David Stoltzfus's wisdom, kindness,
and thoughtfulness in her leadership.
She's the best listener I know.*



A “Quieting” is a rare occurrence among the Amish. It is a method of church discipline that revokes the ordination of a minister, deacon, or bishop. It is meant to act as a thunder-clap to an individual who hears only what he wants to hear.



Cast of Characters

David Stoltzfus—in his early 40s, widowed minister, father to six children: Katrina, Jesse, Ruthie, Molly, Lydie, and Emily. Owner of the Bent N’ Dent store in Stoney Ridge.

Abigail Stoltzfus—niece to David, visiting from Ohio.

Tillie Yoder Stoltzfus—62 years old, privately referred to as Mammi the Meddler, mother of David Stoltzfus, visiting as a long-term houseguest from Ohio.

Laura Stoltzfus—niece to David, sister to Abigail, visiting from Ohio.

Katrina Stoltzfus—19 years old, oldest daughter in the family. Lives at Moss Hill, where oil traps have been discovered.

Jesse Stoltzfus—16 years old, oldest son. Lives at Windmill Farm and works as a buggy repairman.

Ruthie Stoltzfus—14 years old, in the eighth grade, has a bit of an attitude.

Molly Stoltzfus—11 years old.

Lydie and Emily Stoltzfus—8-year-old twins.

Freeman Glick—in his 50s, bishop of Stoney Ridge.

Levi Glick—late 40s, minister of Stoney Ridge, brother of Freeman Glick.

Birdy Glick—32 years old, only sister to Freeman Glick. Lives at Moss Hill and teaches school.

Thelma Beiler—(touchy about her age), elderly widow of former bishop Elmo Beiler. Runs a farm called Moss Hill.

Andy Miller—20-something, farmhand for Thelma Beiler on Moss Hill.

Hank Lapp—60ish, uncle to Amos Lapp of Windmill Farm. Made his first appearance in *The Keeper*.

Fern Lapp—50ish, wife to Amos Lapp of Windmill Farm. Arrived in Stoney Ridge in *The Keeper*.

Luke Schrock—14 years old, in the eighth grade. If trouble or vandalism occurs in Stoney Ridge, most everyone looks to Luke as the cause.

Noah (Yardstick) Yoder—14 years old, in the eighth grade. Fastest boy in town.

Ruth Stoltzfus—David's sister, who left the Amish church behind to pursue higher education. Became a doctor and worked at the local hospital.

1

“Men, I believe I have just met my future bride!”

David Stoltzfus hurried out of his storeroom office to see who had just burst into the store to deliver such a bold announcement. Dane Glick stood at the open door with a delighted look on his face. The handful of graybeards, settled into rockers that circled the woodstove in the front of the Bent N’ Dent store, turned from an endless discussion of the weather to consider Dane.

“BOY,” Hank Lapp called out. “Matrimony is nothing you should rush into. Trust me on that. You know what my wife Edith has to say on the topic.”

“What does Edith have to say?” one of the men asked.

“Wer heiert dutt gut; wer leddich bleibt, dutt so viel besser.” *He who marrieth doth well, but he who marrieth not, better.*

“Hank,” David said in the warning tone usually reserved for his children.

“It’s high time I marry,” Dane said. “I can’t stand my own

cooking and my own company for one more day. I'm starting to talk to my buggy horse."

Dane had left the door open behind him, and cold air came into the store on a gust of wind. David walked around him to shut the door. "Lots of folks talk to their horses."

Dane turned to him with frustration. "Today she answered back."

"THEN, SON, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE," Hank Lapp boomed. "Sit down and let's hear all about your future missus. Es is ken Heffel so grumm as net en Deckel druffbast." *No pot is so crooked that you can't find a lid for it.*

The graybeards all shuffled over to make room for Dane as he plunked down in the rocker next to Hank.

Community, David realized. He was all about building and strengthening community—and that was happening, right here, right now, in the Bent N' Dent store. A woodstove community, and it pleased him to his core.

Until this moment, watching the men surround Dane, David hadn't been convinced that his son Jesse's improvements to the store were all that beneficial—at least to the bottom line. Even more concerning was that Hank Lapp was a part of the improvement project. Hank Lapp and Jesse had started to sell premade sandwiches, made by his daughter Molly, who was just learning to cook. Happily, the graybeards weren't particularly fussy about the quality of the sandwiches, especially with the frequent-sandwich punch cards that Jesse had implemented.

Jesse and Hank also added rocking chairs by the woodstove in the store, and had plans for picnic benches out front, come springtime. The outcome was such that quite a few retired men gathered around the stove during the afternoons. In

a good way, the store was filled with customers, and that was a change from a few months back. In a bad way, these particular customers rarely bought much other than Molly's dry sandwiches.

Hank Lapp was there every day. Newly married, his wife Edith shooed him out the door each morning, with orders not to return until sunset.

David shook his head. Never would he have thought he'd see the day when anyone would go to Hank Lapp for match-making advice. It was like asking an elephant to tie your shoe, but if Dane Glick wanted to put his fate in the hands of Hank Lapp and his cronies, then who was he to interfere? Besides, David had enough troubles on his plate. The church of Stoney Ridge, for one.

Maybe helping Dane find a wife would be a good thing. David did worry about the young man, fairly new to Stoney Ridge and all alone on that neglected hillside property. But who could handle a fellow like Dane Glick?

He thought of a news article he had just read this morning about the training of service dogs. Some dogs were dropped from the program because they were "too much dog." Too exuberant, too enthusiastic, too distractable, too much to handle.

That, David realized, described Dane Glick to a T: "Too much man."

Unpolished, rough around the edges, Dane was like a gust of wind blowing through an open window, somewhat oblivious to the effect he had on others. But, David thought, he had a kind heart and a way with animals. Maybe Hank was right. Es is en Deckel fer alle Haffe. *There's a lid for every pot.*

Suddenly, all of the graybeards' eyes turned toward him. "David's niece?" Hank said.

"My *niece*?"

Hank nodded. "That's who Dane has picked out for his future missus."

Dane slapped his palm against his forehead, knocking his hat off. "I forgot to mention, David. I dropped two of your nieces off at your house." He bent down to pick up his hat. "Not to worry. Ruthie was home to tend to them."

"Which nieces? What were their names?"

Dane's face went blank. "Come to think of it, I don't know. I was a little dazzled by their beauty and forgot to ask." He lit up and lifted a finger in the air. "Ohio! They said they were from Ohio."

That narrowed it down to all of David's nieces—sixteen at last count.

Well, as long as his daughter Ruthie was tending to the visiting nieces, he would wait to head home after he closed the store for the day. Without any actual paying customers in the store, David went back to his office to set his mind on this letter to Isaac Bender, a nearby bishop. He sat in his chair with the pen poised in his hands . . . stuck. How to put into words the dilemma facing the church?

His mind traveled to Dane's uncle, Freeman Glick, as it often did, and he said a prayer for the unrepentant, stubborn man. Freeman was—*is*—the bishop for Stoney Ridge.

But the church was facing an impossible, improbable, heartbreaking situation, a problem created by Freeman Glick. Switching the lots in the hymnals during the choosing of a minister or bishop was a serious sin, a sign of grave arrogance. Even more heinous was the knowledge that this lot switch-

ing had begun with former bishop Elmo Beiler, a man who was beloved. He had modeled the behavior to Freeman, who followed suit, doing what he thought was right.

So he said.

Freeman refused to believe he had done anything wrong. He was adamant that switching the lots was in the best interest of the church. David was still stunned by Freeman's response when he asked him why he had switched the lots. "I knew that God was calling me to be bishop."

But it wasn't up to an individual to determine whether God was calling him to the position. It was the voice of the church that constituted the call. Freeman *knew* that.

It weighed heavily on David's heart and conscience to help navigate the church through these troubled waters, and he knew that God alone could guide it safely through to the other side. It was a situation beyond his own limited supply of earthly wisdom. What was there to do when a good bishop goes bad?

Just as the dam broke and words started to flow, David heard the door to the store open and the voices around the woodstove quiet, like the hush before a storm.

"Oh no. No, no, no. This will never do. It all has to be changed."

Instantly, David recognized the high, loud, tinny voice and felt a shiver run down his spine, the way he used to feel when he was a boy and was found with his hand in the cookie jar.

"The layout is all wrong. The lighting is far too dim. The cooler should be in the back. And why is there a group of old men loitering by the stove? Have they no place to be? No, no, no . . . this simply will not do."

David took a deep breath, sent up a prayer for strength, and went to greet his mother.



Abigail Stoltzfus was perplexed by the astonished look on her redheaded cousins' freckled faces as they opened the door. She expected them to be pleased, but they didn't seem at all happy to see them, especially Ruthie, who blocked the door as Molly, Lydie, and Emma peeked out around her. Abigail noticed they all had the same shade of light brown eyes that ran in the blood of this family—the color of brown eggshells.

Ruthie looked them up and down. “Gabby. Laura. What are you two doing here?”

“Mother sent us to fix your problems,” Abigail said.

Laura stepped in front of her. “Mother told us about Katrina, poor dear, and about your father's . . . situation at church. We're here to lend moral support.”

“I don't see why,” Ruthie replied in a flat voice. “We don't need help.”

That's exactly what Abigail had thought! “Excellent.” It was unfortunate that the young man, who had happily offered a ride from town, had already left. Though, on second thought, she doubted she could tolerate a return bus ride all the way back to Ohio today. But after a good meal and a decent night's sleep, she would be fortified and ready to go. “We'll head home first thing in the morning.”

Laura frowned at her. “No, we won't. We'll stay as long as we're wanted and needed.” She smiled sweetly at Ruthie. “May we come in?”

“We're just coming in from school,” Ruthie said. “Dad's

still at the store.” But she did open the door wide to let them in.

Laura oohed and aahed at how tall the twins had grown, asked Molly about her cooking, and questioned Ruthie about how it felt to be in her last year of school. It was Laura’s way with people, something Abigail admired but had trouble understanding how it worked. And it did work. “You catch more flies with honey than vinegar,” Laura would often say. Abigail being more of the vinegar type, obviously.

Successfully thawed out, Ruthie offered to show them upstairs to the bedroom where they would be staying. Jesse’s room, quite recently vacated, with a lingering scent of musty sneakers. Even the wrinkled bed was left unmade.

Abigail let Laura take care of unpacking their suitcases while she set out her manila file folders on the bureau top. For the last few years, she had worked alongside her father in his small side business of helping people map out their genealogies. Most of the research was easy work for her—she had developed stellar skills as a volunteer librarian in her county’s bookmobile. Her father had been working on a client’s genealogy when a bout of melancholia made it impossible for him to continue, and Abigail had felt it was her duty to finish what he had started. She picked up where he left off and started to correspond with the client, a young woman who lived in Stoney Ridge. Abigail was absolutely confident that finishing up the completion of this family tree would spur her father to return to his old self.

There was a tiny glitch in this plan. Abigail had posed as her father in the letters with the client. She hadn’t intended to mislead the client. Her intention was only to honor her

father by completing the genealogy. Plus, her father's handwriting was atrocious.

But then she hit a brick wall that proved unpassable, insurmountable, a dead end. An entire piece of family history was missing! Amazing.

Despite the brick wall, letters kept passing between this client and Abigail, continuing with increased frequency and depth. They wandered off genealogy and on to other topics. Why was it easier to get to know a stranger, on paper, than it was the people Abigail knew her entire life? A conundrum.

Well, this unexpected mission to Stoney Ridge might have thrown her life into chaos, but it would provide an opportunity to right this wrong. She would find a way to break through the client's brick wall . . . and then admit that she had been posing as her father. She hoped the client was the forgiving type. From her letters, the woman seemed to be lighthearted and easygoing, with a good sense of humor.

Possibly, they might even become friends.

For some reason, Abigail had never had many friends, apart from her sister Laura. It turned out that she wasn't very good at making friends. Other girls didn't seem to like her. Laura thought the art of making friends was a weak muscle for Abigail and that she should keep practicing, try to work it and strengthen it. Abigail doubted she even had that particular muscle.

She had trouble understanding the subtleties of female friendship. Just last Sunday, a clump of young women were gathered together, questioning what it meant when Eddie Bender had winked at Sarah Hochstetler during church. Abigail had inched into their exclusive circle to offer the very logical possibility that Eddie Bender might have a facial tic,

indicating the presence of a brain tumor. Or a serious illness. The girls gaped at her, exchanged looks with each other, and closed their ranks once again. Laura whispered that Abigail shouldn't take everything so seriously.

That seemed like poor advice. A brain tumor could be a very serious matter.

However, Eddie Bender's facial tic was not her top priority. She wondered what the hours of the Stoney Ridge library might be. She hoped hours extended into evening. Tonight, perhaps? It was possible that a Lancaster County library might have better resources at their disposal than the one in Ohio. After all, Lancaster County was the second original settlement of the Amish. Berks County was the first. In fact, a side trip to Berks County might be an even better option. Just as she was trying to calculate the distance to Berks County, she heard Laura gasp in horror.

"Gabby, come quick!" Laura was at the window, peering down with a look of astonishment on her face. Abigail hurried over to the window and saw a horse and buggy come to a stop by the front door. Her uncle David climbed out of the buggy. "Why, he looks to be in excellent health." Not sad or troubled or nearing a nervous breakdown, the way her mother painted him out to be.

"Gabby, you always overlook the obvious. Look more closely."

And then she saw someone else emerge out of the other side of the buggy. "Oh no."

"Yes."

Please, please, please, no. Not her.

But it *was* her. The most vexing woman on this earth.

Tillie Yoder Stoltzfus. Privately referred to by her children

and grandchildren as Mammi die Nasiche. *Mammi the Meddler*. A woman who felt she knew best how to run everyone's life. Their grandmother.

All of Abigail's splendid plans to locate her client and spend hours completing the family genealogy in a quiet library together disappeared like the wisp of vapor from a teacup.



Jesse Stoltzfus heard his overeager puppy run to greet someone, but from where he was, lying underneath a buggy with a manual at his side, trying to figure out if he was working on an axle or a rod, he could only see four large black paws and a pair of women's shoes—feet that belonged to his landlady and chief hover-er, Fern Lapp.

Fern was the second wife of Amos Lapp, a gentle man who was born and raised on Windmill Farm and left Jesse, for the most part, alone to do his work. Not so with Fern. Her face, etched with lines of an undetermined age, rarely smiled, and her ears never missed a word that was said on Windmill Farm—whether or not the words were meant to be heard. But she came with the farm and took care of everybody and everything, Jesse included. That gave her the right—in her own mind, at least—to a great many opinions, none of which were left unspoken.

Jesse, whose own mother had passed, held Fern in a mixture of fear and reverence. He had been charmed by her immediately, although he was never quite sure whether the sentiment was returned. Probably not.

From underneath the buggy, he saw Fern's hands drop down to pat the puppy.

That *dog*. Mim Schrock had given him a black Labrador puppy for his birthday last week. She said he seemed lonely, especially now that he was no longer living with his family but in an apartment above the buggy shop at Windmill Farm, and she thought a canine companion would cheer him up. This was extremely awkward because, in truth, he was thoroughly content to be living alone—completely, deliriously, utterly happy!—and he did not want a dog. But Mim placed this young puppy into his arms without any suspicion that it might be the last thing in the world that Jesse wanted. It was a pity gift, Jesse was convinced, as Mim had jilted him in favor of Danny Riehl. The puppy was a consolation prize. One that chewed everything Jesse owned, relieved itself frequently and indiscriminately, and had a unique talent for selective deafness whenever he issued commands.

Jesse's cool indifference seemed to make the pup all the more passionate about him. Sometimes he thought he would never enjoy a moment alone for the rest of his life. Being alone was a slice of heaven! He came from a family of all girls; his sisters never stopped talking. For the first time in his life, he could complete a thought without being interrupted. Use the bathroom without first waiting in a long line. Take a shower without fear of running out of hot water. Sheer bliss. Until this puppy arrived. It woke as Fern's annoying rooster gave its first loud crow, and it made sure Jesse was up too by licking his face. An odious way to start the day.

Worst of all, the puppy served as a continual reminder of Mim, to whom many of Jesse's thoughts kept returning, like birds roosting in trees at nightfall. All in all, he would much rather spend time thinking of ways to woo her back

than manage this unmanageable dog, which he had named C.P., short for Consolation Prize.

“Your father called from the store and left a phone message for you.”

Jesse pushed himself out from underneath the buggy to answer Fern and immediately blocked his face from a tackle by the puppy. “Anything important?”

Fern pursed her lips in that disapproving way she had. “Only if you consider a visit from your grandmother and cousins to be important.”

“Which grandmother?” He hoped it would be his mother’s mother, who was sweet and kind and not at all nosy. His father’s mother . . . well, there was something about Tillie Yoder Stoltzfus that made nearly everyone stand up straight and throw their shoulders back. “And which cousins? I have dozens.” Girls, all girls. Family gatherings were a sore trial to Jesse.

“No idea. The message is that you are due home for dinner.” Fern was watching him, wearing her I-know-what-you’re-thinking look. “Tonight.”

That was rather disconcerting news to Jesse. As much as he enjoyed his family, he tried to circumvent any visit home during mealtimes. His sister Molly’s cooking was *that* bad. And Fern’s cooking was *that* good. He had only lived at Windmill Farm for a short time, but he was feeling very settled in. The puzzle of buggy repairs held a certain intellectual complexity that appealed to his restless mind. And the customers of Stoney Ridge, which included each and every family, were overjoyed at Jesse’s generally speedy completion of repairs. His predecessor, Hank Lapp, did not concern himself with matters of timeliness.

Another plus was that buggy repair work allowed Jesse time to pursue other interests, such as helping his father's store, the Bent N' Dent, attain new levels of customer service and satisfaction. The All-in-One Bent N' Dent, he envisioned. His father had been remarkably open (perhaps nonresistant was a more apt description) to improvements, though Jesse suspected that was only because he was thoroughly distracted with the church ruckus. And, of course, there was also the Birdy diversion.

Strange, Jesse thought, to think of his father with a girlfriend. Fortunately, Jesse was fond of Birdy. Everyone was. It was regrettable that she happened to be the sister of Freeman Glick, but you couldn't help the family you were born into.

Fern sighed, pulling Jesse out of his musings and into the present. An uncomfortable vision suddenly shot across his mind. His grandmother . . . encountering his sister Katrina in her . . . condition. A ripple of dread blew over him.

He'd better get home, fast. First, though, he should fortify himself at Fern's supper table.