

Neighbors of LANCASTER COUNTY
• BOOK ONE •

AMISH PROMISES



LESLIE GOULD



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Leslie Gould, *Amish Promises*
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*For my friend Marietta Couch,
and for my friend Marilyn Weisenburg*



*And in loving memory of
David J. Weisenburg,
May 2, 1978–September 13, 2004*

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October 2004
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Aenti! The baby needs you!” Daniel’s high-pitched voice carried to the back bedroom of their neighbor’s farmhouse as Eve Lehman tucked the corner of the quilt under the mattress.

“Give her to Lila,” Eve called out to her eleven-year-old nephew as she stepped around the side of the bed. “I’ll be right there.”

Trying to ignore Trudy’s cries, she stood back and admired the shadow quilt. Abra had made it years ago and gave it to Eve for her marriage bed someday. That would never happen now. She was the old *Maidel*. The spinster Aenti.

The pine trees out the window cast shadows across the walls of the room as the late afternoon *Licht* waned. She hated to see it go. She stepped to the doorway, pulled the bedroom door shut, and started down the hallway.

The home had been vacant since old Mr. Williams died four months before. Earlier in the week his son had left a message on the phone in the barn, asking if Eve would tidy up the place. He said

his daughter and son-in-law, who'd been injured in the war, were moving into the house. They needed a quiet place to "regroup."

As Eve turned the corner into the kitchen, her red-faced niece began to scream even louder. Trudy was fair, like Daniel and Lila. "There, there," Eve said as she reached for the baby. The little one lunged toward her—she could hardly bear to have Eve out of her sight. It was no wonder, considering everything the baby had been through in her short eight months of life.

"It's getting dark." Daniel stepped toward the back door.

"Turn on the light," Eve responded as she cradled Trudy in her arms. The baby gulped for air and let out another cry, but this one was halfhearted.

Lila stepped into the kitchen from the living room, carrying a handful of rags. She'd grown taller than her twin in the last year, much to Daniel's horror. He'd seemed skeptical when Eve assured him he'd soon catch up to and then pass his sister.

"Did you two finish the dusting?" Eve asked.

"Jah." Daniel's face was solemn as he inched toward the back door. "I need to go help *Dat* and Simon with the chores."

"In a minute," she said. "Carry the buckets back to the house first. Go grab the ones in the living room."

Daniel obeyed without hesitating. Lila started rinsing the rags in the sink. Trudy hiccupped and grasped Eve around the neck, her chubby hands holding on for dear life, her soft breath against Eve's skin.

"Does the Englisch family have any kids?" Lila asked.

Eve nodded. "They have a twelve-year-old son." She hadn't told her brother, Tim, that part of the news. He'd be leery of an Englisch boy a year older than the twins, not to mention a military family, living so close to his farm.

Trudy began to fuss again, so Eve turned on the ceiling fan, a trick she'd found effective earlier in the afternoon. The baby put her head back, mesmerized again by the movement of the blades. When Eve had been on her *Rumschpringe*, sure she'd leave the Amish for good, she'd been just as enthralled with the Englisch

world as Trudy was now. It was more than just the electricity, cars, and independence for Eve. It was the hope of a marriage different than what her parents had. A good marriage, with her Englisch boyfriend. A home with children—all loved and cherished. And perhaps even a career for herself, in teaching.

But none of that was meant to be. She'd ended up joining the church after all, twelve years ago. And she was still paying for having led Abra astray.

Footsteps fell on the back porch. Eve had planned to be long gone before the new family arrived. But she hadn't heard a car.

"Eve?" It was her brother's voice.

"Jah!" Balancing the weight of the baby on her hip, she hurried toward the door and opened it quickly. He stood with his hat in his hands on the top step.

"You startled me," she said.

"We've finished the plowing," Tim said. "We need Daniel's help with the chores."

Simon waited at the bottom of the steps beside his father, his straw hat in his hand and an impish grin on his face. He was two years younger than the twins and full of mischief.

"We're almost done here." Eve bounced the baby. "Daniel will be back by the time you get the horses unhitched."

Tim preferred to have Simon work with him instead of Daniel. The younger boy put his hat back on his head and then grinned at Eve, his chestnut curls poking out from under the brim. He was the spitting image of his father, but his personality was the exact opposite. Tim was serious, while Simon was full of fun, like his mother had been.

Tim had favored Simon over Daniel since the boy was born, even though Abra had discouraged it. Once she passed away, Tim stopped trying to hide it.

"Where's Rose?" Eve asked as she looked around. Her middle niece had gone out to the field with Simon and Tim.

"She was tired," Tim said. "I sent her back to the house." She'd been the baby of the family for six years until Trudy came along—and it showed in the girl's *kintish* ways.

Lila had finished rinsing the rags and joined them at the door, followed by Daniel.

“I’ll just go with Dat now,” the boy said.

Eve shook her head. “Grab the broom and mops.”

Tim ignored Daniel and spoke to Eve. “The rain’s coming, and your wash is still on the line.” He tugged on his beard. “I trust you’ve already started our supper.”

“Jah,” Eve answered. “I fixed a roast.” She knew Tim wasn’t happy with her housekeeping and cooking, but she did the best she could. “We’ll meet you back at the house.”

The baby began to cry again. Tim pushed his hat back on his head and then turned and strode down the steps. Simon fell in step behind his father, doing a little jig as they walked away from the house.

Eve wiggled into her cape with Trudy on her hip. Then she took the baby’s blanket from the counter and covered her. “We’ll go out the front.” She pushed the back door tight and locked it. Lila picked up the bucket with the rags, and Daniel carried the other two, along with the broom and mop. The twins followed Eve through the kitchen and across the worn hardwood of the dining room and living room.

Eve ushered the children onto the porch and closed and locked the front door, saying a silent prayer that the new family would find peace and comfort in their new home. Things hadn’t always been easy with Old Man Williams, but they’d appreciated him all the same. Hopefully things would go more smoothly with his granddaughter. Perhaps, if Tim didn’t mind, she’d run over a pan of sticky buns sometime tomorrow.

She knew how hard a move could be. It had been nearly a year since she came to her brother’s home on Juneberry Lane, right after Abra had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Her sister-in-law had been four months pregnant with Trudy at the time.

It wasn’t an easy transition for Eve, but there were more important things to worry about. A sick *Mamm*. A baby on the way. And four terrified children.

Now she had five grieving children to care for, to love the way she'd always longed to love her own.

Daniel bumped the bucket against the railing on the way down the steps, causing the wood to shift. Eve stopped and pushed against the rail. It wasn't secure, but it didn't give way either. She would mention it to the new family the next morning.

They hurried to the lane, crunching through the layers of red and orange maple leaves. A light rain began to fall as they passed the tallest cedar tree. Eve breathed in the spicy scent and pulled the baby closer to her chest.

"Is Simon going to work with Dat tomorrow?" Daniel's voice held a hint of jealousy.

"Probably," Eve answered. In the dark shadows of the lane, it seemed dusk was already falling. They walked in silence until they reached the big oak tree, halfway home.

Lila asked to climb it.

"Ach," Eve said. "You're too old for that sort of thing."

But when Daniel, who'd been in such a hurry, put down his buckets and stared up at the tree, Eve changed her mind. They both deserved some fun.

"Oh, bother," she said. "Be quick." She stepped under the canopy of the remaining leaves, seeking cover from the rain. "And climb like a young lady," she said to Lila, smiling after she said it. As if that were possible.

The baby snuggled against Eve and let out a sigh, her body giving way to sleep. Fearing the little one would be up half the night if she slept now, Eve tickled Trudy under her chin, but the baby didn't stir.

Daniel scampered up the tree, propelled by his bare feet. Lila followed him but settled on the bottom branch, tucking her skirt beneath her.

"Not too far," Eve called out to Daniel, thinking of the twins when they were newborns. So tiny and life changing for their Mamm—and for her too.

In the distance she heard the team of horses making their way toward the barn.

“I can see them from here,” Daniel called down. “Simon’s laughing. And Dat’s smiling.”

“Shh,” Eve responded. Daniel’s jealousy only made it worse. He climbed higher. She called up to him, “We need to get going.”

Daniel didn’t respond.

“Come on,” she called.

In a defiant tone, he responded, “What if I don’t?”

Lila gasped.

Eve took a deep breath. It wasn’t like Daniel to be disobedient. She hardly ever had to discipline him with more than a scolding. “Come down now,” she said.

He shook his head.

She couldn’t climb up after Daniel, not even if she put Trudy down. She could have a decade ago, when she was still a teenager, but not now. And even if she could, what would she do once she reached him?

It wouldn’t do any good to send Lila up either.

She decided to ignore Daniel, hoping he’d soon be over his obstinacy. She needed to get home before the wash got so wet she had to run it through the wringer again.