

→ THREE AMISH NOVELLAS →

An
Amish Wedding

BETH WISEMAN,
KATHLEEN FULLER,
& KELLY LONG



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—*Library Journal* review of *An Amish Gathering*

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An Amish Wedding



KELLY LONG
KATHLEEN FULLER
BETH WISEMAN



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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KELLY: For my girl, Gracie

KATHLEEN: To my family

BETH: To Pat Mackey, my fabulous mother-in-law

GLOSSARY

ab im kopp—off in the head, crazy

ach—oh

aenti—aunt

appetitlich—delicious

bensel—hard to handle; a handful

bruder—brother

daadi haus—a small house built onto or near the main house for grandparents to live in

daag—day

daed—dad

danki—thanks

Derr Herr—God

dochder—daughter

dumm—dumb

dummkopf—dummy

eck—special place for bride and groom at the corner of the wedding table

Englisch—non-Amish

Englischer—a non-Amish person

familiye—family

frau—wife

freind—friend

geh—go

gut—good

haus—house

hiya—hello

kaffee—coffee

kapp—prayer covering or cap

kinn, kinner—child, children

kumme—come

lieb—love

maedel or *maed*—girl or girls

mamm—mom

mann—man, men

mei—my

milch—milk

mudder—mother

narrisch—crazy

nee—no

nix—nothing

onkel—uncle

roascht—bread stuffing and chicken baked in a casserole

rumschpringe—running-around period when a teenager turns sixteen years old

schee—handsome

schwester—sister

seltsam—weird

sohn—son

was in der welt—what in the world

wunderbaar—wonderful

ya—yes

Yankee—non-Amish person, term used in Middlefield, Ohio

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A PERFECT
SECRET



KELLY LONG

In Hebrew, perfect means “whole or complete.” It is God’s desire for our lives that we become perfect or whole in Him. He is slowly revealing His perfect secret for each of our lives.

Prologue

“THAT’S IT? THAT’S MY WEDDING PROPOSAL?” NINETEEN-year-old Rose Bender stared at her best friend in the waning light of the cool summer evening.

Luke Lantz’s dark blue eyes held steady as always. “*Ya*, what more do you expect?”

Rose half bounced in the buggy seat, trying not to let Luke’s typical calmness rile her into a temper that would match the unruly black curls tucked beneath her *kapp*. What more did she expect? It was a fair question.

She’d known Luke for all of her young life, and he was right—a marriage was something that would please both of their families and have the strong foundation of their friendship at its base. It would also unite two lands, the rich soil that ran parallel in property. And, perhaps most importantly, it would bring a woman’s touch to the motherless Lantz household. But it might have helped if Luke could have conjured up a few romantic words to add to the moment. Yet, at twenty-three, he was who he was: Placid. Faithful. Secure. And when Rose was with him, it was rather like skating on a pond that had been deep-frozen for months—no chance for a crack in the ice. Perfectly safe. Not that she should desire anything more.

“I accept,” she said with determination and not a little defiance. She wanted to silence the doubt that echoed inside—that suggested she knew him too well to have a romantic marriage. And the realistic fears that she could never live up to the legacy of domesticity and kindness his mother had left behind just two short years ago. She told herself that it had to be more than enough to fulfill the expectations of Luke’s father and her parents and to find a strong base in a wealth of memories—school days, sledding and ice-skating together, long walks and throwing horse chestnuts into the pond—and serious conversations about life—though not necessarily about love.

“*Gut*. I thank you, Rose. I believe, with *Derr Herr*’s blessing, that it will be a successful match.”

She nodded, then slid closer to his lean form, reaching to trail her fingers in the brown hair at the nape of his neck. She felt him tense, but she ignored it.

“Luke,” she whispered, “now that we’re engaged, maybe we could kiss a bit more?”

His strong jaw tightened, and he turned to peck neatly at her lips, moving away before she could even close her eyes. He disentangled her hand from his hair and gave it a cool squeeze, then picked up the reins. “We’d best move on,” he said. “It’s getting late.”

And *that’s that*, she thought ruefully, comforting herself with the knowledge that he would be too dutiful to maintain such distance once the marriage ceremony was over. She stifled a sigh at the unusually irreverent thought and focused on the dim road ahead.

Chapter One

TWO MONTHS LATER . . .

THE SUNLIGHT OF EARLY AUTUMN FILTERED THROUGH the clear windowpanes and made passing shadows on the wide fir floor of the Bender farmhouse. The family was gathered for a hearty meal, and the good smells of cooking mingled with robust conversation.

“I tell you that it’s downright odd, that’s what.” Rose’s father gestured with his fork to the lunch table at large. “Two of our hens—our best layers, mind you—a goat from the Lamberts’, and the sheets from old Esther Mast’s clothesline. All of it missing, and dozens of other things from the community over the past few months. I say there’s a thief hereabouts, and that’s the truth.”

Rose’s mother calmly passed the platter of sauerkraut and kielbasa to Rose’s two older brothers and took seconds. Then she offered the fresh platter of airy biscuits to *Aenti* Tabitha, Father’s sister, and nodded her head as her husband sputtered himself out.

“Maybe it’s a Robin Hood type of thief,” *Aenti* Tabitha ventured, her brown eyes shining. At fifty, she often seemed as young as a girl to Rose with all of her romantic ideas and flights of fancy. Yet her suggestion stilled Rose’s hand for a moment over the saltshaker. What would it be like to meet such a romantic figure of a man? Dark and mysterious in nature . . .

Abram Bender shook his head at *Aenti* Tabitha. “Tabby, you always have had a heart of gold—looking for the best in others. But Rob in the Hood, like the *Englisch* folktale? Taking from the rich to give to the poor? Who’s poor in our community? Don’t we all see to each other? *Nee*, this is just a thief, plain and simple. And I don’t like it one bit.”

“The weather’ll change over the next month or so,” Ben remarked over a forkful of boiled potatoes. “Any thief is likely to drop off in his ways once there’s snow on the ground to track him.”

“Or her,” Rose said, for some reason wanting to provoke.

“What?” her father asked.

“I said *her*. Your thief could be a female, *Daed*.” She didn’t really think the thief was female, yet she had a strange urge to enter the suggestion into her father’s mind.

Her *daed* gave a shout of laughter, then resumed eating. Ben turned to her with a smile while her other brother, James, just rolled his eyes.

“Rose, no woman in her right mind is going to go thieving about,” *Daed* said. “It’s a *gut* thing you’re marrying Luke come December. Maybe he’ll settle down some of your wild ideas.”

“Perhaps.” She smiled, her green eyes flashing heat for a brief second.

“Well,” Ben interjected, “Rose’s *narrisch* thoughts aside—there’s a storm due tonight, supposed to be a doozy.”

“Ya, I heard.” Father rose from the table and hitched up his suspenders. “Come on, boys. We’d better tighten down a few things.” He bent to pat *Mamm*’s shoulder. “*Danki* for lunch.” Then he pinched Rose’s cheek fondly. “And no more foolish thoughts from you, my miss. Remember, you’re to be a married woman soon.”

Rose didn’t respond. She toyed with her fork instead, making a mash of the potato as an idea began to take shape in her head.



AS ROSE CLEARED THE LUNCH TABLE MECHANICALLY, SHE avoided her *aenti*'s eagle eyes. Ever since she'd been little, she'd felt as though *Aenti* Tabby could see the subdued thoughts churning inside her head, and just for a moment she wanted to debate the merits of her plan undisturbed. Still, she knew the intent look on her aunt's face and had to admit that the older woman's intuition had fended off trouble for her many a time. But today—something was different. Today Rose *wanted* trouble. She drew a sharp breath at the hazardous thought, but the idea fit with her nature of late. It seemed as though her spirit had grown more restless, less satisfied with life, ever since she'd accepted Luke's proposal. She'd tried to pray about it, stretching her feelings out before the Lord for guidance, but nothing had come to her.

Aenti Tabby caught her eye in an unguarded moment as they washed and wiped the dishes. "I'd like to see you in my room, Rose, after we clean up a bit. If you don't mind?"

"Um . . . sure, *Aenti* Tabby, but I have to hurry. I'm going to bake some pies this afternoon."

"Bake? Pies?" Her aunt and *mamm* uttered the questions in unison, and Rose concentrated on dabbling at a nonexistent spot on a dish. The whole family knew that she was a hard worker, to be sure, but baking was not a skill that she possessed or an activity she particularly enjoyed.

"*Ya*." She nodded vigorously, forcing a soft curl to spring loose from the back of her *kapp*. "I need to practice, you know? Luke likes a *gut* apple pie, or perhaps blueberry." She stretched to put the plate away in the cupboard. "But I'll be glad to come and talk with you before I start."



AUNT TABBY, WHO HAD NEVER MARRIED, LIVED WITH THE Benders and was a cherished part of the household and family. Rose and her brothers often sought the sanctuary of their aunt's room for advice, comfort, or a smuggled sweet long after supper. But Rose knew that she had been distinctly absent lately from any visits with her beloved *aenti* and mentally prepared to face what might be some pointed, but truthfully provoking, questions about herself and Luke.

Aunt Tabby sank down onto the comfortable maple bed with its patchwork quilt and patted a space next to her. "*Kumme* and sit, Rosie."

Rose blew out a breath, then came forward to relax into the age-old comfort of the well-turned mattress. She half smiled at her *aenti*, remembering times she'd jumped on the same bed and had once taken a header that nearly landed her in the windowsill. But that was childhood past—long past, or so it seemed to her heart.

"I'll not keep you long, Rose, but I want to ask—why did you agree to marry Luke?"

"What?"

The question was even more probing than she'd braced for, and a thousand answers swirled in her mind.

"Luke. Why did you accept his proposal?"

"Well . . . because he's . . . we're . . . we've always been best friends."

Aunt Tabby frowned. "I've never married, child, but I do wonder if that is reason enough to build a life together."

Rose said, "It's made both of the families happy."

“That’s true, but what about you? Are you happy?”

There was a long, disconsolate silence that wrung Rose’s heart as her aunt touched her shoulder.

“I’m supposed to be happy,” Rose said, thinking hard.

“Ya, that’s true.”

“I just—I expect too much, I guess. Like wanting some kind of—I don’t know.”

“Like wanting someone mysterious and romantic?”

Rose gazed in surprise at her *aenti*, who laughed out loud.

“I was young once too, and I think it’s perfectly normal to want more from a relationship than just friendship. But maybe—maybe there’s more to Luke Lantz than meets the eye. Have you thought about that?”

Rose shrugged as her aunt cleared her throat. “Luke’s father—well, we courted some. He was always shy, but then . . . well. He had it in him to do some fine kissing now and then.”

Rose stared at her *aenti*’s flushed face. “You and Matthew Lantz? *Aenti* Tabby—I never knew you dated him. Why didn’t you marry him?”

“It wasn’t what the Lord wanted for me.”

Rose marveled at the simple statement. She knew her people lived by the will of *Derr Herr*, but to give up a relationship because of faith was difficult for her to comprehend. She knew she had spiritual miles to go before she would make a decision like that.

“Haven’t you ever regretted it? Not even when—well, when Laura Lantz died of the influenza. You’re still young, *Aenti* Tabby. Maybe you and Mr. Lantz could—”

“*Nee*,” the older woman gently contradicted. “I’ve never regretted it, not even when Laura died. In truth, I believe I would have regretted more if I had not obeyed what I felt was the Lord’s leading. And just think—had I married Matthew, there would be no Luke for you.”

Rose frowned. “Ya, you’re right.”

“So, you will try, Rosie? To see all there is of him?” Her aunt gave her a hug.

“Ya, *Aenti* Tabby—all that there is.”

Chapter Two

A HAWK GAVE A KEENING CRY AS IT BEGAN ITS TWILIGHT hunt while the evening shadows stretched across the grass to wend through the windows of the Lantz woodworking shop. Luke closed the heavy ledger and glanced at his watch. Six o'clock. He was done tussling with another day's accounts for his family's furniture-making business, and his head ached from the numbers and the customers. But his father wouldn't trust an outsider with the books, and although Luke was as skilled as any of his brothers in woodworking, he was the only one "with a head for business," as his *daed* liked to say. So he sat in the stuffy office and dutifully did his job, though he would much rather let his hands run down the fine smoothness of a wood grain than the tally of a day's earnings.

He leaned back in the chair, letting himself drift for a moment until the familiar pleasure of imagining Rose came to mind. In truth, he couldn't believe she'd accepted his proposal so readily. He wasn't always the most persuasive of persons, and Rose could be headstrong.

He didn't jump when his father clapped him on the back.

"Dreaming of your bride, *sohn*?"

Luke smiled, looking over his shoulder. "She's worth the dreaming, *Daed*."

"To be sure. But now's the time to see what Joshua's managed for supper. *Kumme*."

He followed his father into the old farmhouse and stifled the urge to look about for his mother as she came through the door. It was difficult for him to believe that she was gone, even after two years. She'd been what the Bible called a "gentle and quiet spirit," but she'd been a vigorous light to each of them as well. He knew that part of what he loved about Rose was her own light and sweetness, and that her spirit was a balm to his grieving soul. He knew she'd bring that comfort to the whole house once they married, and he mentally charged himself once again with making sure that she wasn't overtaxed physically or emotionally with the inherent burden of taking on a household of men.

His brother Joshua looked up rather sheepishly from the stove when *Daed* asked what was for supper. "Fried potatoes and bacon."

Luke stifled a groan. He longed for variety—vegetables, pie, anything. Even when kindly members of the community brought them hot meals, it wasn't the same as having someone cook for them with love. And there had been no one to maintain a kitchen garden since *Mamm* passed, so they were restricted to more plain fare. Still, he knew it was food in his belly, and he was grateful for it. And so he told the Lord when *Daed* bowed for silent grace.



ROSE SQUELCHED A SUDDEN CRY AS THE BLUEBERRY JUICE from the bubbling pie dripped over onto her hand. She hastily deposited the pie onto a rack and ran to soak the burn in the bowl of cool milk and vinegar she'd used in making the crusts. She glanced at the kitchen clock as she blew a loose tendril of hair away from her damp forehead and was glad to see that it was only just past seven. Her family was relaxing in the adjoining room after supper, and she'd volunteered to clean up alone so that she could finish her pies in peace. Now, if she could just keep Ben and James from wanting a taste . . .

She lifted her hand from the milk and gazed ruefully at the half-inch-long red mark on the back of her hand. But it gave her an idea. Taking a scrap of dough, she opened the woodstove and threw the

pastry piece inside. Within seconds, the smell of burning piecrust filled the air. She smiled and scooped up the pies, this time carefully holding a dish towel around each pan as she bumped open the back screen door with her hip.

She ignored the groans of her brothers as the burning smell hung in the early evening air, then set the pies on the porch rail. Now, if only no animal would take a nibble before she caught her real prey.

..

“Rose!” Her *mamm*’s voice echoed, and Rose flew back inside, closing the door carefully behind her. The unpleasant smell had wafted throughout the house.

“Mercy, child! What are you doing? Where are your pies?”

Rose sighed. “Outside.”

“Burned that badly?” her mother asked as she fiddled with the damper on the stove and waved a damp dish towel through the air.

Rose said a quick prayer for forgiveness as she delayed her response. She wasn’t used to withholding the truth.

“Well, open the window then, so we can get some more fresh air in,” *Mamm* urged.

“Ya, *Mamm*—open the window!” Ben bawled from the other room.

“And teach Rosie to bake before she kills poor Luke and the whole Lantz clan!” James’s voice joined in the banter.

But Rose simply smiled as she wrestled with the heavy window; she had put her plan into action.

Chapter Three

IN THE CROWDED CONFINES OF THE WELL-CONCEALED tent, oil lamps held the encroaching night at a cheerful distance. A hodgepodge of gathered furniture, dishes, quilts, and other small items filled the contours of the vinyl walls, while a thick, hand-braided rug covered the bulk of the pine-needled floor.

“It’s too much, really. You have to stop.” The *Englisch* woman’s tone was torn between gratitude and remorse as she balanced a blueberry pie in her outstretched hand and a fussy toddler on her left hip.

Her benefactor shrugged as another child, slightly older, clung to his leg in a familiar game.

“Mommy! His shirt’s all dirty. Wash it!”

He laughed and brushed at the blueberry juice stain on the front of his sweatshirt.

“Never mind, Ally.” He glanced around the tent, then back to the woman. “There’s a storm coming tonight. Supposed to be bad. I don’t like the idea of leaving you here.”

She smiled. “The Lord will protect us. You staked the tent so well, and I doubt anything can shake this stand of pines.”

“Have you had any word—I mean—do you know when?” He stared with intent into her eyes.

“No—nothing.”

He nodded. “All right. I’d better go.” He set the other pie down on the washstand near the quilt-covered cot and noted that he’d need to bring more blankets soon. He disengaged the little girl from his leg, then bent to receive her sweet kiss. “Good-bye,” he whispered.

She clung to his neck. “Thank you for the pies. Tell the lady thank you too.”

“The lady?”

“Who made the pies.”

He smiled. “Maybe I will.”



ROSE WAITED UNTIL THE HOUSE HAD BEEN ASLEEP FOR more than half an hour before she crept from her room, avoiding the third step from the bottom of the back staircase and its telltale squeak. She almost giggled to herself as she maneuvered, remembering a time she’d sneaked out to see Luke when they were young. They thought they could catch the biggest bullfrog from the local pond, the one with the baritone that soothed the locals to sleep on summer nights, if they could only get there late at night. They’d ended up with no frog, muddy clothes, and stiff reprimands from frustrated mothers the next morning. It had been fun, but that was a long time ago.

Rose told herself that she wasn’t a child anymore, looking for grandfather frogs on moonlit nights. No—she was a woman who wanted to hunt for something, someone—whose very nature seemed to call to her. Rob in the Hood, as some of her people called him from the old German rendition of the tale. She tiptoed across the kitchen floor and then gained the back porch. She switched on a flashlight and caught her breath, then smiled; both pies were gone without a trace. Of course, she told herself, she stole into the wind-whipped air, a possum could have gotten them, but an animal would have left an overturned plate, a trail, a mess. A thief more likely would not . . .

She glanced without concern to the moon and dark gathering clouds overhead; the incoming storm suited her mood. She passed the kitchen garden, still sprawled with the bulging shadows of pumpkins yet to be harvested, then broke into a light run toward the forest that encircled the back of the farmhouse. She knew nearly every inch of the woods between her family's home and the Lantzes'—though she had to admit she hadn't been walking there in the months since her engagement. It seemed that courting, as well as the usual influx of work of the farm during harvest, had kept her too busy. But now she trod the pine-needled ground with secret delight. She could tell from the air that the rain would hold off for a while, and she pressed more deeply into the trees, certain that the best place for a would-be thief to hide would be the woods.

After an hour of actually navigating the rocks and root systems of the dark forest, she began to question if she truly had her wits about her. What had she expected? That the thief would just pop out and introduce himself? Suppose he really was dangerous and much more than a thief? She thought of the comfort and safety of her narrow bed and shivered, deciding she'd go hunting for the mystery man some other time. Then she stifled a scream as the beam of her light gave out, and a voice spoke to her from the dark path ahead.

"You're an Amish girl, aren't you? Why are you out in these woods so late and in this kind of weather?"

The voice was a strained whisper. Rose peered into the darkness, trying to see the speaker, when a helpful flash of lightning gave her a brief glimpse.

He was taller than she, clothed in blue jeans and a gray sweatshirt, its hood shrouding his face. Another white streak of light, and the breadth of his shoulders and a dark stain on the front of his shirt were emblazoned in her mind.

"You're the thief," she stated.

"What?"

"The thief who's been taking from hereabouts the past weeks. I put those two blueberry pies out on the back porch. I see the blueberry stain on your front."

He laughed, and she almost gasped in disbelief as the realization hit her with full force. *It was Luke*. Even as a confusion of thoughts rushed past her like the waters of a swollen creek, one instinctual idea took control of her brain—she would not let him know that she recognized him.

"Very smart," he said. "My compliments. But you'd better get home to your husband. These woods are no place for a lady."

Chapter Four

"I'VE RUN ABOUT THIS LAND SINCE I WAS A CHILD," SHE announced, trying for normalcy in her tone. "And why do you assume I'm married?"

Was in der welt was he doing—dressed as an Englischer and stealing pies from her porch? He didn't seem to recognize her in the dark . . . but then why was he out talking about marriage with a strange girl in the woods?

"Aren't most Amish girls married young?" he asked in the same husky whisper that seemed to tickle at her shoulder bones in a way that his normal voice didn't do.

"Ya . . . Yes, I mean—some are. I'm just engaged." She almost clapped her hand over her mouth at the word *just*.

"Just?"

She wet her lips in the dark and tried to infuse her voice with warmth. "I'm going to marry my best friend in a few months."

"And does your . . . er . . . best friend realize how enthused you are about the whole affair?"

He does now, she thought, trying to keep a rein on her emotions. "I *am* happy," she asserted finally, then swallowed, finding herself voicing to the supposed stranger the concern that had haunted her for weeks. "It's just that—he—my betrothed—doesn't notice anything—not about me anyway. He's very practical and smart."

She felt a palpable silence between them, then sensed him step toward her. She lifted her chin, wondering what he would do next.

"Smart or not, he's a fool—not to notice you," he muttered.

"How can you say that? You can't even see me properly," she said.

"You saw me, at least enough to know my—secret. And I saw you, like meeting destiny in a strike of lightning. White sparks and moonlight—they suit your beauty, Amish girl."

In the cascading roll of thunder that followed, she heard the deafening sound of her own heartbeat as his words penetrated. They were so unlike him. And proof that he did see her in the waxing light. Beguiled and bewildered, Rose held her breath, waiting.

Then he reached out one hand to stroke her cheek in a slow caress. She wanted to lean into that mysterious yet familiar hand, its strong warmth coupled with a heavy tenderness that transmitted every delicate nerve ending the flush that she felt burning her skin.

"You don't even know me," she said, trying to keep her voice level. "Maybe I'm too wild, or a pet shrew, or just plain . . . boring." She found herself citing all of the things she thought she might see to him at times.

He laughed again, then backed away. "Go home," he said roughly.

She knew she should do as he said to keep up the charade, but there was a mystery here . . . a mystery man whom she had thought she knew so well. And for the first time in weeks she unburdened herself to someone, and it exhilarated her.

"I'll go when I'm ready."

"Suit yourself. Oh, and by the way, thank you for the pies."

She heard him step through a layer of dried leaves. "Wait!" she called.

“What?”

“I—do you—do you need some more?” She could have bitten her tongue at the desperation in the inane question, but he replied with seriousness.

“Apple. Any time.”

Of course, apple . . . his favorite.

“All right. Do you . . .” She broke off when she sensed that she was alone, and only the sound of the wind through the trees touched her. She shivered in the dark before turning back toward home, wondering who in the world this man was that she was to marry.

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