

An Amish Christmas

DECEMBER IN LANCASTER COUNTY

Four Amish Christmas Novellas

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

- Beth:* To my husband, Patrick . . . my forever love.
- Kathy:* To my family: my husband, James; my son, Mathew; and my daughters, Sydney and Zoie. I love you all very much.
- Barbara:* For Sarah and my family.
- Kelly:* For Anna and Sam Locksley.



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Glossary

- ab im kopp* – off in the head, crazy
aenti – aunt
baremlisch – terrible
bauchduch – napkin
boppli – baby or babies
bruder – brother
daadi – grandfather
daed – dad
danki – thanks
demut – humility
dippy eggs – eggs cooked over easy
Derr Herr – God
dochder – daughter
du bischt wilkumm – you're welcome
dummkopf – dummy
Englisch or *Englischer* – a non-Amish person
fraa or *frau* – wife
Frehlicher Grischtdaag – Merry Christmas
gebet – prayer
gern schöna – so willingly done
glay hotsli – little heart (endearment)
grossmammi – grandmother
guder mariye – good morning
guten nacht – good night
gut-n-owed – good evening
gutguckich – good-looking
gut – good
halt – stop
haus – house
hatt – hard

herr – mister
hochmut – pride
in lieb – in love
kaffi – coffee
kapp – prayer covering or cap
kind, kinder, kinner – children or grandchildren
liebschen – dearest
maedel or *maed* – girl or girls
mamm – mom
mammi – grandmother
mann – man
mei – my
mudder – mother
naerfich – nervous
narrisch – crazy
nee – no
onkel – uncle
ordnung – the written and unwritten rules of the Amish; the understood behavior by which the Amish are expected to live, passed down from generation to generation. Most Amish know the rules by heart.
Pennsylvania *Deitsch* – Pennsylvania German, the language most commonly used by the Amish
recht – right
redd-up – clean up
rumschpringe – running-around period when a teenager turns sixteen years old
sehr gut – very good
seltsam – weird
sohn – son
wunderbaar – wonderful
ya – yes

A CHOICE TO
FORGIVE



By Beth Wiseman

Chapter One

Lydia opened the front door, expecting her friend Sarah or one of the children's friends. Instead, a ghost stood in her doorway, a vision from her past—*Englisch* in appearance, Amish in her recollection of him. A man long buried in her heart and in her mind, he couldn't possibly be real. But his chest heaved in and out, and his breath clouded the air in front of him, proof that he was no apparition. He was real. *He* was Daniel Smucker.

Up till this moment, Lydia was having a routine day, busying herself with baking and household chores. On this Thursday afternoon she was enjoying some solitude while her children visited her sister Miriam for a couple of hours. Chilly November winds whipped around the farmhouse, hinting of a hard winter to come, but a cozy fire warmed the inside of the hundred-year-old structure. Aromas of freshly baked pies and cookies wafted through the house—shoofly pie and oatmeal raisin cookies—just like her mother used to bake when Lydia was a child.

Lydia smoothed the wrinkles in her black apron, tucked strands of dark-brown hair beneath her white prayer covering, and headed to the front door, thankful to God for all that she'd been blessed with. Three beautiful children, a lovely home, and a church community that encouraged her to be the best Amish woman she could be, especially since the death of her husband two years ago.

Elam's fatal heart attack shocked everyone, especially since

there was no family history of heart problems. After he died, Lydia had struggled to get out of bed each morning, but with the help of the Old Order district, she and the children were doing much better.

Today she was trying to keep her thoughts in a happy place, one filled with hope for the future, the promise of good times with friends and family during the upcoming holiday season, and a blessed Christmas to celebrate the birth of their Savior.

Then she opened the door, and this man's presence threatened to steal all that she'd been working toward.

"Hello, Lydia."

He stood tall before her in black breeches and a black coat buttoned to his neck. His half smile was enough to produce the boyish dimples she remembered from their youth. His sandy-brown hair, now tinged with gray at the temples, reminded her how much time had passed since she had seen him—eighteen years.

His voice was deeper than she remembered. But his slate blue eyes were unmistakably the eyes of her first true love, tender and kind, gentle and protective, reflective of a man she'd known as a nineteen-year-old girl. And now he stood shivering on her doorstep, clearly waiting for an invitation to come in out of the cold.

But Lydia couldn't speak. She couldn't move. And she didn't want to ask this man into her home—this man who had once promised to marry her, then disappeared from her community and her life in the middle of the night. And on Christmas Eve, no less.

But that was a long time ago, and she'd gone on to marry

his brother. Thank goodness Elam had been there to comfort her after Daniel's desertion. Elam, the man she was meant to be with, whom she'd married and shared fifteen wonderful years with.

"Do you think I could come in for a minute?" Daniel finally asked, teeth chattering. "My ears are frozen." His smile broadened.

Lydia swallowed hard and took a deep breath. She was trembling, but not from the frigid air blowing in from behind him. Had he come to ask for forgiveness after all these years? Curiosity compelled her to motion him through the threshold.

As he brushed past her, he began to unbutton his coat and then hung it from a peg on the coatrack near the door—the coatrack *Elam* built. She scowled as she reached for the garment to move it, but stopped herself when she realized there was nowhere else to hang it up. Her arm fell slowly back to her side, and she watched Daniel walk toward the fireplace as he scanned the room—a room filled with memories of the life she'd lived with Elam.

Daniel warmed his palms above the flames for a moment and then focused on her husband's collection of books on the mantel. He gingerly ran his finger along each one, studying the titles. Lydia cringed. *Those are Elam's things.*

"You've made a fine home, Lydia." He pulled his attention from the books and turned to face her.

His striped *Englisch* shirt reminded her that his Amish roots were long gone.

"You are more beautiful than I remember."

Lydia couldn't recall the last time she'd thought about

Daniel, but suddenly old wounds were gaping open. “What are you doing here, Daniel?”

He walked toward her as if he might extend his arms for a hug. She backed away and walked to the other side of the room.

He raked his hand through his shaggy hair, hair not fit for an Amish man. He wasn’t Amish, she reminded herself, and hadn’t been for many years. What length he chose to wear his hair was of no concern to her.

“I just thought you should know that I have talked to my family, and also to Bishop Ebersol. I’ll be baptized back into the community two Sundays from now.”

Lydia’s heart was thudding against her chest. Had she heard him correctly?

“I’m back for good,” he went on. “I’ll be making my home at the old Kauffman farm up the road, eventually. Right now, I’m staying with my parents.” He smiled again.

“*Ach*, I see.” She nodded, then turned away from him and took a few steps. She folded her arms across her chest and tried to steady the quiver that ran from her toes to the tip of her head. “What made you decide to come back?”

She heard his footsteps close the space between them, and as he hovered behind her, she recognized his scent. Oddly, it was as though he still used the same body soap, toothpaste, and whatever else made him smell the way he did. She breathed him in, closed her eyes, and imagined his arms wrapped snugly around her waist, his lips nuzzling her neck, the way he’d done so many times back behind the barn following the Sunday singings.

Lydia silently chastised herself for having such thoughts. She blinked away any signs of distress and turned to face him.

Daniel shrugged. "It's time. My family is here. My roots. I want to live out the rest of my life here."

He sounded like an old man on a course with death, not a man of a mere thirty-eight years.

"But you can't just go be *Englisch* for eighteen years, come back, and expect to just—to just be welcomed back into the community. You've been shunned, for goodness' sake." She shook her head. "I don't understand."

"You know as well as I do that if I seek forgiveness from the bishop—which I have—and commit myself to the *Ordnung*, then I can be rebaptized into the community. And that is what I choose to do."

This can't be happening, Lydia thought, as she soaked in what he was telling her.

"I'm hoping you'll forgive me too," he said softly, with pleading eyes.

Lydia knew that forgiveness freed the soul of an unwelcome burden, and she'd forgiven Daniel many years ago. So what were these resentful feelings spewing to the surface now?

"If God can forgive me, if the bishop can forgive me . . . maybe you can too."

"I forgave you a long time ago, Daniel." *Even though you left me one night without a word.*

Daniel breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm so glad to hear that. I know that leaving a note wasn't the best way to handle things."

It was a terrible way to handle things. Lydia recalled Daniel's hand-scribbled missive. He'd left a similar letter for his parents,

telling them all that he could no longer adhere to the strict guidelines of the Old Order district and that he would be heading out into the *Englisch* world.

She quickly reminded herself what a wonderful life she'd had with Elam for fifteen years, a life she wouldn't have known if she had married Daniel. Nor would she have Anna Marie, now sixteen; Jacob, who'd just turned twelve; or nine-year-old John. "I suppose everything turned out as it should."

Daniel's brows drew together in an agonized expression, but he didn't say anything.

Lydia studied him for a moment, wondering exactly how much his being here would affect her and her family. Quite a bit, she decided. And she knew that to harbor any bad will toward Daniel was not only wrong in the eyes of God, but it would also hurt her more than anyone else. She would need to pray hard to keep any bitterness away.

"I just thought you would want to hear the news from me," Daniel finally said.

Lydia nodded, then walked toward the door, hoping he would follow.

Daniel reached for his coat on the rack. He looked like he had more to say, but Lydia didn't want to hear any more. His presence was enough of an upset for now. As she reached toward the doorknob, the door bolted open, almost hitting her in the head. She jumped back and bumped right into Daniel, whose hands landed on her hips. She slid sideways and out of his grasp instantly.

"*Aenti* Miriam sent this lemon pie," Anna Marie said. She handed Lydia a pie as Jacob and John bounced in behind her.

John closed the door behind him, and all three of her children stood barely inside the doorway, waiting for an introduction. And Lydia realized that Daniel's return was going to complicate her life in more ways than one. Her children had a right to know their uncle, but did Daniel really deserve to know her children? He hadn't even shown up for Elam's funeral. His only brother. But her children were waiting, and so was Daniel.

"Children, this is Daniel, your *daed's bruder*."

Lydia watched as Anna Marie, Jacob, and John in turn extended a hand to Daniel, who smiled with each introduction. Lydia wondered if maybe she was dreaming all of this. A disturbing dream, one she hoped to wake up from any minute.

"Very nice to meet you all," Daniel said.

"Your *Onkel* Daniel will be making his home here in Paradise, at the old Kauffman place," Lydia said. Not even a half mile down the road. "Right now, he is staying with your *mammi* and *daadi*." Lydia steadied her voice and tried to appear casual in the presence of her children. "He is being rebaptized into the faith."

Lydia's sons nodded, then excused themselves. But Anna Marie eyed Daniel with suspicion. "You are dressed *Englisch*," she said.

Daniel shifted his weight. "Uh, yes, I am. I haven't been in town long, but I'll be stocking up on the traditional clothes."

Anna Marie narrowed her eyes into a scrutinizing gaze. "Where've you been?" She paused, but before Daniel could answer, she added, "Why weren't you at *mei daed's* funeral?"

Good question, Lydia thought, as she waited to hear Daniel's answer. Elam had told the children that their uncle chose a life

with the *Englisch*, and that he was shunned for doing so after baptism. But he never told them that their mother almost married his older brother before she married him.

Daniel rubbed his forehead, and Lydia could see the regret in his expression. "It's a long story," he said.

Anna Marie, a spirited girl in the midst of her *rumschpringe*, questioned everything around her. Daniel's return was no exception. "I have time," she said. She edged one brow upward and lifted her chin a tad.

Lydia cupped her hand over her own mouth to hide the grin on her face. Anna Marie reminded her so much of herself at that age. She glanced at Daniel, who seemed rattled by the inquisition.

"I'm sure I'll be seeing lots of you. We can talk later," he said to Anna Marie. His eyes shifted to Lydia.

Lydia pulled from his gaze, and his words echoed in her mind. *I'll be seeing lots of you.*

She and the children had remained close to Elam's parents and his two sisters and their families. Of course, his family would be including Daniel in all of their activities from now on, which would indeed mean that Lydia and her children would see him often. It wouldn't be fair to the rest of the family to keep away just because Daniel was in the picture now. Lena and Gideon had been wonderful to their grandchildren, and to Lydia, since Elam's death. So had the rest of the family. But they all had to realize how strange this was going to be for her.

"Fine." Anna Marie responded flatly to Daniel's offer to talk later. "*Mamm*, I'm going to go finish sewing Jacob's shirt upstairs." She studied Daniel hard for a moment. "Nice to meet you." And she headed up the stairs.

“They’re beautiful children,” Daniel said when Anna Marie was out of earshot. His tone was laced with regret.

“*Ya*, they are.” Lydia pulled on the doorknob and swung the door wide, allowing the chilling wind to coast inward. She had no parting words.

Daniel pulled his coat from the rack and slipped it on. When the last button was secure, he looked down at her, towering over her five-foot-five frame. “I know this is a shock for you,” he said.

“It’s fine.” She tried to sound convincing, unaffected. There was a time when Daniel knew her better than anyone. She wondered if he could see past her words now and into her heart, where everything was anything but fine.

He walked out the door, then turned to face her.

Lydia started to close the door, but Daniel put his hand out, blocking her effort. “Lydia . . .”

Her cheeks stung from the wind, but she waited for him to speak.

“I’ve come home to start a new life.” He paused, fused his eyes with hers. “Thank you for forgiving me.”

Lydia forced a smile, then pushed the door closed. She stood still and faced the door, not moving, as an angry tear rolled down her cheek.

Had she really forgiven him?