

His Love Endures Forever

A Land of Canaan Novel

Beth Wiseman



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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To CBW



Pennsylvania Dutch Glossary

ab im kopp—crazy or off in the head

ach—oh

aentis—aunts

baremlich—terrible

boppli—baby

bruder—brother

danki—thank you

daed—dad

dochder—daughter

dummkopp—dunce

dumm—dumb

Englisch—non-Amish

Englischers—non-Amish people

es dutt mir leed—I am sorry

fraa—wife

guder mariye—good morning

gut—good

hatt—hard

haus—house

BETH WISEMAN

kaffi—coffee

kapp—prayer covering or cap

kinner—children or grandchildren

kumm—come

lieb—love

maedel—girl

mamm—mom

mammi—grandmother

mei—my

mudder—mother

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

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

schee—pretty

sohn—son

wedder—weather

wie bischt?—how are you?

ya—yes



One

DANIELLE PERCHED ON THE EDGE OF THE TUB. SHE looked at her watch, then at the pregnancy test in her trembling hand. In two minutes, she'd know if she was going to have a baby.

She bit her bottom lip as she tapped a foot against the white tile floor, her heart beating faster than normal. *Please be a blue minus sign.*

But it was barely a minute later when a positive, pink cross began to appear. She squeezed her eyes closed and tried to will it to blue. *Please, please . . . I can't be pregnant.*

She'd been seeing Matthew for four months, but they'd only been intimate one time. *No one gets pregnant the first time.*

She slowly opened her eyes and swallowed hard at the realization that she and Matthew were going to be parents. After giving it a few minutes to sink in, Danielle tried to focus on the positive. Laying a hand across her stomach, she held her breath and tried to envision the tiny life growing inside of her. It would be a lot to take on since they were both only eighteen,

but they were in love. They'd said the words to each other only once, but Danielle was sure he was the right guy for her.

Matthew's parents weren't wild about him dating someone who wasn't Amish, but Danielle knew that Matthew had no plans to be baptized into the Amish faith. He'd made it clear to Danielle that he was just waiting for the right time to leave. *What better time than now?*

She paced the small bathroom, taking deep breaths as she thought about a future with Matthew. It wasn't the first time she'd fantasized about a life with him, but it was the first time her vision included a baby. She'd just assumed that they would eventually get married and have children, but in that order. The Amish were all about having lots of kids, and Danielle planned to be the best mother on the planet, something her own mother hadn't been any good at. She was sure Matthew would be a great father. Even though he planned to leave the Old Order district, Danielle knew that he'd had a good upbringing, something he would pass on to his children.

Looking in the mirror, she pulled her hair to the side and gathered it in a loose braid as she fought the worry that began to creep into her mind. Surely he'd be happy about the baby, even if it hadn't been planned?

Only one way to find out.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON, Danielle shifted her weight on the log where they were sitting by the edge of the creek. It was their special place, the spot where Matthew had kissed her for the first time. As the sun began its descent behind the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Danielle reached for Matthew's hand

and took a deep breath. A rush of adrenaline shot from her toes to her fingertips, and she briefly wondered if he felt it. Or could he see or hear her heart pounding in her chest?

As they sat hand in hand, Danielle held her breath as she watched the water. They were beneath the old oak tree as water trickled atop small rocks on the far side of the creek. She watched two cardinals fly by before she finally blew the air from her lungs.

“Matthew . . .”

He brought her hand to his lips, kissed her fingers, and smiled. “*Ya?*”

She’d practiced how she would tell him about the baby all morning, but as she looked at him, she couldn’t recall any of her preplanned speech. All she could think about was whether their child would have Matthew’s beautiful eyes, shades of amber and green.

“I’m pregnant.” She swallowed hard but kept her gaze fixed on him.

His eyes widened as his jaw dropped. After a few moments, he closed his mouth and stared at the ground.

“I can’t believe it either.” She reached for his hand and squeezed. “But I love you so much. Together, I think we can do this.”

Matthew eased his hand from hers and stood up. He pulled his straw hat off, rubbed his forehead, then paced along the bank as late-afternoon rays from the sun glistened atop the blue-green water. Danielle kept her seat and pulled her pink sweater snug around her. It was a chilly May afternoon in the shadow of the mountains. She glanced at her watch. Four o’clock. It was going to take Matthew a few minutes to realize what this meant for the future.

“Matthew?” Danielle stood up and put her hand on his arm. “I know we weren’t expecting all this so soon, and—”

“So *soon*?” Matthew took a step backward as a muscle clenched along his jaw. He blinked his eyes a few times beneath cropped brown bangs. “I wasn’t expecting this at *all*.”

Danielle fought the wave of dizziness that came on all of a sudden. Surely Matthew just needed a few more minutes to sort out his feelings. She bit her bottom lip as a faint thread of panic formed a lump in her throat.

He walked closer and hung his head for a moment, fidgeting with his hat in his hands. When he finally looked up at her, Danielle tried to force her confused emotions into order. *Please, Matthew . . . don’t say what I think you’re going to.*

“Danielle . . .”

She reached up and cupped his cheek in her palm. “I know we’re young, but we can be wonderful parents.” She paused, clinging to hope that Matthew would drop to one knee. Or at the very least, she hoped the tense lines across his forehead would relax and some color would return to his face.

“I don’t want to do this.” He pulled away and stepped back again as fear twisted around Danielle’s heart. “I—I’m not ready for a family. You know that I’ve been waiting for the right time to tell *mei mamm* and *daed* that I’m leaving here.”

Danielle’s mind was a crazy mixture of hope and fear. She swallowed and found her voice. “I know it’s not the perfect situation, but you’ve already said your parents can’t shun you because you aren’t baptized yet, so maybe this is the perfect—”

“Danielle.” Matthew latched on to her arms with both hands. “You’re not hearing me. I don’t want to get married, and I don’t

want a family. I want to go to college. I've been telling you that. How I'm going to get a job, then save so I can go to school."

"You can still do all those things. I know how much you want to go to college. I want you to have everything you—"

"Danielle, stop." Matthew held up both palms and avoided her eyes. "I don't love you."

He might as well have closed his hands around her throat and killed her. She couldn't control the trembling that began to take over. "But you said you did," she managed to squeak out after a few moments. "You said you loved me."

"Well, at the time, we were . . ." Matthew looked at the ground, shook his head, and kicked the ground with the tip of his shoe. When he looked back up at her, he eyed her with a critical squint—almost as if she'd been the only one in his parents' barn that day. "I thought *Englisch* girls used birth control, took pills or something."

Danielle's mouth fell open. "I told you I wasn't on birth control, and you didn't seem to care." She touched her stomach with both hands. "It's not like I planned this."

Matthew started to pace again, shaking his head. "*Ach*, this is a mess."

Danielle's stomach twisted. She would have never agreed to be with him in such an intimate way if she'd known he didn't love her. She tried to recall if she'd pushed him into saying the words. She didn't think so, but did it really matter now anyway? *He doesn't love me*. Her own upbringing had been a disaster, and she was determined to be a good mother and to raise her child in a normal home, one filled with love.

She swallowed back the tears building and imagined telling Martha. If Matthew couldn't cope with it, how would

Martha? The older woman had taken Danielle in a year ago, before they'd been joined by Arnold, Martha's new husband. She'd been more of a mother to Danielle than she'd ever had, but this news was going to be upsetting to them both.

Matthew finally stopped pacing and faced her. "Maybe you should give the baby up for adoption?" He looped his thumbs beneath his suspenders and stood taller.

Danielle's bottom lip began to tremble. "No. I'm not giving my baby away." She shook her head as she stuffed her hands in the pockets of her sweater. "No way."

Matthew put on his hat, tapped it into place, then stared down at her with eyes that no longer twinkled of amber and green, but instead were stony as jade. "You're on your own if you do this. I've been trying to get out of here forever. There're a lot of things I want to do."

Danielle wanted to cry, beg, tell him that this was a great excuse to leave the community, but she'd heard him loud and clear. *He doesn't just want to leave the community . . . He wants to leave me.* She slowly backed away, holding her sweater tightly around her as the tears came.

"Please don't cry. I'm sorry, Danielle." He took two steps toward her. "I—I'm just not ready to be a father. Or a husband." He raised his eyebrows. "I don't think I'd be *gut* at either one. You deserve better than—"

"Shut up, Matthew! Just shut up!" She ran to where her car was parked several yards away from Matthew's horse and buggy. As she hurried into the seat, she could hear Matthew yelling something in *Pennsylvania Deutsch*. She couldn't understand his dialect.

Not that she needed to. She'd heard enough.

LEVI SLOWED HIS horse, Chester, to a stop in front of Sarah's house. Sarah's father was sitting in a chair on the front porch, the way he had been the last two times Levi brought Sarah home from a Sunday singing.

"I think he's worried you might try to kiss me good night." Sarah tipped her chin down, grinning.

Levi was glad it was dark. He could feel the warmth in his cheeks even though his cold breath formed a cloud in front of him. Levi wanted to tell her that didn't make much sense. He could have kissed her all the way home, not just when he was dropping her off. But he didn't say anything. He stepped down from the buggy and walked around to Sarah. She eased the heavy brown blanket from around her, then Levi helped her down. She was almost as tall as he was.

"I had a *gut* time." Sarah smiled, her teeth chattering. "*Danki* for taking me."

"*Ya*, it was fun."

Sarah leaned closer, near enough that Levi could have kissed her. "See you next Sunday?"

Levi looked over her shoulder and saw that her *daed* was still on the porch, so he just smiled as he stared into her dreamy brown eyes. "*Ya*."

Sarah was beautiful; a perfect white smile, delicate features, and in the *Englisch* world, she probably could have been on the covers of those fancy magazines. Every guy in Canaan wanted to court her. Levi still wasn't sure why she'd chosen him.

"You're so sweet and shy, Levi. It's one of the things I love about you." Sarah kissed him on the cheek, then quickly turned and ran across the yard toward her house.

Levi moved fast too, hurrying back into the buggy since

Sarah's father was now standing and holding a lantern out in front of him at arm's length. It was completely dark, but a full moon lit Sarah's front yard enough to make him wonder if John Troyer saw his daughter's bold move. He clicked his tongue and moved the horse toward the main road, glad that his house wasn't far. He pulled the blanket Sarah had used onto his lap and adjusted the small battery-operated heater on the floor of the buggy.

Once his shivering was under control, he thought about what Sarah had said. "*It's one of the things I love about you.*"

Was that Sarah's way of saying she loved him or just a casual comment? He'd known Sarah since her family moved from Indiana to Canaan about six months ago, but it wasn't until recently that Sarah seemed to take an interest in him. Before that, Sarah had been spending time with Jake King, another newcomer to their small community. The talk around the community was that Jake might even propose. But a few weeks ago, Levi noticed that Sarah was going to the singings alone, and one night she asked Levi to take her home, then continued to do so. He hoped Sarah wasn't expecting him to propose anytime soon. He cared about Sarah, but they weren't anywhere near that kind of promise to each other. Plus, Levi wasn't even baptized yet. Marriage seemed far off in his mind, even though he was twenty-two and his mother constantly pushed him about the issue. Two of his siblings, Jacob and Emily, had both married when they were younger than Levi.

Thankful to be home, and looking forward to the warmth of his house, he pulled into his driveway, parked the buggy, then led Chester to the barn, lighting his path with a flashlight

he kept in the buggy. It was then that he heard crying. He pointed the light to the crumpled-up shape in the corner.

“Danielle?” Levi hurried to her and squatted down. He pushed back long strands of blond hair from her face and saw tears rolling down her cheeks. “What are you doing here?” He sat down on the cold dirt beside her. “What’s wrong, Ladybug?”

Levi had been calling Danielle by that nickname for almost as long as he’d known her, close to a year now. She’d plucked one of the red and black insects from Levi’s hair last spring and told him that ladybugs were lucky, something she wasn’t. Levi had told her that life wasn’t based on luck, but on faith and God’s plan. Danielle had gently placed the bug in her palm, smiled, and said, “I don’t know about that, but I want to be lucky like a ladybug.” And somehow the nickname just stuck.

“I wasn’t ready to go home. I just needed—” Sobbing, she buried her face in her hands. “My life is a wreck. I’ve made a mess of everything, and Martha and Arnold are going to be so upset with me, and Matthew doesn’t love me, and . . .” She started crying so hard that Levi could barely understand her. After a few moments, she lifted her face to his and locked eyes with him. “And . . . and . . . I’m pregnant.”

Levi hung his head and sighed before he looked back at her. “*Ach, mei maedel*. Are you sure?” Danielle was his best friend, the only person he felt completely comfortable with. It had been like that since they’d met. She was a high-spirited *Englisch* girl who said whatever was on her mind, and she’d lived life in a way that Levi didn’t understand, but from the beginning, they’d fit together like bread and butter.

“I’m sure.”

Levi’s temples throbbed, and he wanted to leave right then

to find Matthew. He'd never met the man, but he felt the need to punch him in the gut just the same. Matthew lived in a small district near Alamosa, about ten miles away, but Levi'd make the trip to straighten him out . . .

He took a deep breath, reminding himself that it was not their way to be aggressive. But how did Matthew let this happen?

Danielle sniffled and studied his face. "It takes two, Levi. This isn't all Matthew's fault."

Levi gritted his teeth together for a few moments. "Well, he should have . . . I don't know . . . done something different." He paused, shining the flashlight toward the barn window. "Where's your car? You didn't walk here, did you?" His teeth chattered as he spoke.

Danielle nodded in the direction of the light. "It's out there, parked on the other side of the barn. I didn't want your parents to know that I was out here."

"You should have waited inside. It's not that late, and you know *Mamm* stays up until I get home."

Frowning, she sighed. "Your mom doesn't like me. You know that."

"She likes you." He let the lie slip from his lips. Vera Detweiler hadn't liked Danielle since the first time she noticed her spending time with Levi after worship service. Martha was friends with the Amish community, attended the Amish church service every other week, and often brought Danielle with her. His mother saw Danielle as a threat—an *Englisch* girl set on stealing away her baby boy, which couldn't have been further from the truth. If his mother only knew how much time he and Danielle had really spent together, she'd have been doubly worried.

Danielle smiled a bit, but sniffled again. “Thanks for saying that, but we both know it’s not true.”

Levi gave her a rueful smile. He’d hoped his mom would have relaxed once she found out that Danielle was seeing someone, and now that Levi was seeing Sarah. But no, his mother was still worried. “*You are too close to that girl. She’s wild, and she’ll lure you into her world,*” *Mamm* had said. More than once.

Levi pushed back the rim of his hat, and in an effort to avoid another lie, he changed the subject back to her pregnancy. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.” She swiped at her eyes. “Remember when I got stung by that huge bumblebee when we were picking blueberries?”

Levi nodded. “*Ya*, your hand swelled up pretty bad.”

“But you went to your house and got something to put on it, and the swelling went down right away.” Danielle almost smiled.

He shrugged. “It was just an herb mixture *Mamm* keeps around the *haus*. It wasn’t that big of a deal.”

“I could name lots of other times, but the point is . . . you always know what to do about things.” She let out a heavy sigh.

Levi scratched his chin, knowing he couldn’t fix this for her.

“I’m going to be the best mother in the world,” she said. “That’s what I’m going to do.”

Levi knew that Danielle hadn’t seen her own mother in over a year. And that was a good thing since the last time she’d been around, Danielle landed in the hospital; a faint scar on her cheek was a reminder of her mother’s cruel blow. That’s when the older *Englisch* woman, Martha, had taken her in. Levi

figured it was the best thing that had happened to Danielle. Even though Danielle and Martha didn't see eye-to-eye much of the time, it was clear that they loved each other.

"I know you'll be a great *mudder*. What do you think Martha and Arnold will say?"

"I don't think Arnold will say much. He's kinda quiet." She smiled for a moment, swiping at her eyes. "Like you." She bit her bottom lip, pausing before she went on. "But I suspect Martha will have *plenty* to say."

"Maybe not. She loves babies. She keeps Katie Ann's *boppli* all the time."

Levi looked at her and wished they could go back in time. Back to before she fell in love with Matthew. Before she gave him everything and ended up with nothing but a babe in her womb and a new set of challenges ahead of her.

Danielle leaned her head against the barn wall, then turned to him with teary eyes.

"Levi?"

"*Ya?*"

"Do you really think I'll be a good mother?"

He smiled. "*Ya*. I do." He glanced at her stomach. "How long 'til . . . ?"

"I think sometime around Christmas."

They were quiet for a few moments, then Levi asked, "So, what exactly did Matthew say?"

"That he wants to go to school, that he's leaving his community, and that a wife and baby aren't in his plans."

Levi stiffened. "Did you tell him that God has other plans for his life?" After the words were out, he held his breath. Months ago, Levi learned the hard way that if they were going

to be friends, he couldn't force the Lord on her. But he'd often wondered if God put Danielle in his path so that he could minister to her, even though it wasn't the Amish way to do so with the *Englisch*.

"Levi, I don't want to be with someone who doesn't want to be with me. I need Matthew to want me, whatever God has planned." She started to cry again. "You don't think being a bad mother is hereditary, do you? You don't think I'll be like my mom, do you?"

Levi shook his head. "*Nee*, I don't. I told you. You'll be a great *mudder*."

Danielle shifted her weight, twisting to face him. As she leaned forward with teary eyes, the movement brought her lips within inches of his. It wasn't the first time he'd wanted to kiss her. But he never did. She was his best friend, and he didn't want anything to mess that up. Plus, her being *Englisch* complicated things. But sometimes it was a struggle, especially now when he wanted so much to comfort her.

"You think I'm a bad person, don't you? Because I slept with Matthew." Danielle leaned back against the barn wall again as she crossed her legs underneath her. Her teeth were chattering, like his. "Tell me the truth, Levi."

He frowned. Everything about her screamed goodness. If only she could find her way to a relationship with God, she'd find the direction she so desperately sought. "You know I don't think you're bad." He playfully rolled his eyes.

"But you're disappointed in me," she was quick to say.

"Danielle, it's not my place to judge. Only God—"

"Yeah, I know."

But she didn't. She was just cutting him off at the mention

of God, like she'd done so many times before. She sat up taller and sniffled.

"I gotta go." She stood up, and so did Levi.

"You gonna be okay? Are you going to talk to Martha and Arnold tonight?"

She shook her head. "No. Martha has her schedule. She eats at seven, bathes at seven thirty, and she and Arnold watch TV until nine." She looked at her watch. "I can't see what time it is, but I know it's after nine, and they're probably in bed."

Levi smiled. He'd heard about Martha's strict schedule from Danielle plenty of times. "If I miss my scheduled bath time, well, I'm just out of luck," Danielle had told him before. Martha lived in a large house with two and a half bathrooms, but it was old and had a small, noisy water heater that required time to heat up between the scheduled bath times. There was no bathing allowed after nine o'clock because that was when Martha and Arnold went to bed. It was one of Martha's many rules.

Danielle wrapped her arms around Levi's waist, and he pulled her close, resting his cheek on the top of her head. "You'll be okay, *mei maedel*."

Among his people, it wasn't unheard of to be married and pregnant at eighteen. The average family had six or eight children, so they started early. But he knew it was considered young in the *Englisch* world, and the fact that Danielle had no husband . . . It would be hard for her. And the baby.

He walked her to the car and waited until she pulled out of the driveway before he headed toward the house, dropping his flashlight back in the buggy on the way. Enough light shone

through the living room window to illuminate his way up the porch steps. He pulled open the screen, then eased the wooden door open, not surprised to find his mother curled up on the couch reading a book, a lantern on the end table. She closed the book when Levi shut the door behind him.

“Does that girl really think we don’t know she’s in the barn?” *Mamm* spit the words out as if Danielle had committed a crime. She placed her book on the coffee table in front of her. “Why doesn’t she just come inside like a normal person?”

Levi dropped his shoes by the front door in the pile with everyone else’s, hung his black coat and hat on the rack, and warmed his hands by the fire. “She knows you don’t like her.”

Mamm scowled before shaking her head briefly. “That’s not true.”

Levi sat down on the couch, leaned his head back, and closed his eyes.

“How’s your asthma?”

“It’s okay.” It had been better for the past couple of years, since they moved from Ohio to Colorado. But *Mamm* still asked about it once a week. Vera Detweiler was a wonderful mother. A bit meddlesome at times, but she loved her *kinner*. Pushing his sister Emily to go out with David Stoltzfus—and then seeing them get married—had only made her more convinced she *should* meddle. He didn’t think she was going to change her mind about Danielle, and if anything, *Mamm* was about to like her even less. He hoped Danielle was okay tonight. His heart hurt for her.

“Well, you don’t need to be sitting out in the barn, in the cold air, with that girl. That’s not *gut* for your asthma.” His mother folded her hands in her lap.

Levi grinned. “*Ach*, I see . . . but it’s fine for me to be out in the cold air carting Sarah around?”

“Don’t sass, Levi.”

He rubbed his eyes, too tired to argue with his mother. Where Danielle was concerned, he wasn’t going to win.