

Plain Paradise

A Daughters of the Promise Novel

BETH WISEMAN



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

To Barbie Beiler

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Pennsylvania Dutch Glossary

ab im kopp: off in the head

Aamen: Amen

ach: oh

aenti: aunt

boppli: baby or babies

daadi: grandfather

daed: dad

danki: thanks

Die Botschaft: a weekly newspaper serving Old Order Amish
communities everywhere

dippy eggs: eggs cooked over easy

Englisch: a non-Amish person

es duitt mir leed: I am sorry

fraa: wife

gut: good

gut-n-owed: good evening

batt: hard

baus: house

kaffi: coffee

kapp: prayer covering or cap

kinner: children or grandchildren

lieb: love

maed or *maedel*: girl or girls

make wet: rain

mamm: mom

mammi: grandmother

mei: my

mudder: mother

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

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

schtinker: irritable person

scrapple: traditional dish containing leftover pieces of the pig mixed with cornmeal and flour

umgewnlich: unusual

ya: yes

JOSEPHINE DRONBERGER ADJUSTED HER DARK SUNGLASSES as she stared at the faceless dolls on display. She lifted one to eye level then eased her way closer to Linda. Turning the figure about, she pretended to study it even though her eyes were on the seventeen-year-old Amish girl standing with two friends at the neighboring booth.

She inched closer, as if somehow just being near Linda would comfort her. Then she heard one of the girls talking in Pennsylvania *Deutsch*, the dialect most Amish speak and one she regularly heard at the farmer's market. Josie pushed her glasses down on her nose and slowly turned to her left, feeling like the stalker she had become over the past few weeks. She drew in a deep breath and blew it out slowly.

Two of the girls were wearing dark green dresses with black aprons. Linda was clothed in a dress of the same style, but it was deep blue, and Josie instantly wondered if Linda's eyes were still a sapphire color. All of them wore prayer coverings on their heads, as was expected. Not much had changed since the last time Josie had been in Lancaster County.

She watched one of the girls fondling a silver chain hanging on a rack filled with jewelry. Linda reached forward and removed

a necklace, then held it up for the other girls to see. Again they spoke to each other in a language Josie didn't understand.

Josie knew she was staring, so she forced herself to swivel forward, and once more she pretended to be interested in the doll with no face, staring hard into the plain white fabric. Until recently, that's how Linda had looked in Josie's mind.

She placed the doll back on the counter alongside the others and then wiped sweaty palms on her blue jeans before taking two steps closer to the girls who were still ogling the necklaces. Jewelry wasn't allowed in the Old Order Amish communities, but Josie knew enough about the Amish to know that girls of their age were in their *runschpringe*, a running around period that begins at sixteen—a time when certain privileges are allowed up until baptism. Josie watched Linda hand the woman behind the counter the necklace. Then she reached into the pocket of her apron and pulled out her money.

Josie moved over to the rack of necklaces and glanced at the girls. Linda completed her purchase, then turned in Josie's direction so one of her friends could clasp the necklace behind her neck. Josie stared at the small silver cross that hung from a silver chain, then she let her eyes veer upward and gazed at the pretty girl who stood before her now, with blue eyes, light-brown hair tucked beneath her cap, and a gentle smile.

"That's lovely." Josie's words caught in her throat as she pointed to the necklace. Linda looked down at the silver cross and held it out with one hand so she could see it, then looked back up at Josie.

"*Danki.*" She quickly turned back toward her friends.

No, wait. Let me look at you a while longer.

But she walked away, and Josie stared at the girls until they

rounded the corner. She spun the rack full of necklaces until she found the cross on a silver chain like Linda's.

"I'll take that one," she told the clerk as she pointed to the piece of jewelry. "And no need to put it in a bag."

Josie handed the woman a twenty-dollar bill and waited for her change. She glanced at the Rolex on her left wrist. Then she unhooked the clasp of the necklace she was wearing, an anniversary present from Robert—an exquisite turquoise drop that he'd picked up while traveling in Europe for business. She dropped the necklace into her purse while the woman waited for Josie to accept her purchase.

"Thank you." Josie lifted her shoulder-length hair, dyed a honey-blonde, and she hooked the tiny clasp behind her neck. The silver cross rested lightly against her chest, but it felt as heavy as the regret she'd carried for seventeen years.

Josie straightened the collar on her white blouse. She cradled the small cross in her hand and stared at it. There was a time when such a trinket would have symbolized the strong Catholic upbringing she'd had and her faith in God. But those days were behind her. Now the silver cross symbolized a bond with Linda.

Mary Ellen scurried around the kitchen in a rush to finish supper by five o'clock and wondered why her daughter wasn't home to help prepare the meal. She knew Linda went to market with two friends, but she should have been back well before now. Abe and the boys would be hungry when they finished work for the day. Mary Ellen suspected they were done in the fields and milking the cows about now.

She glanced at the clock. Four thirty. A nice cross-breeze swept through the kitchen as she pulled a ham loaf from the oven, enough to gently blow loose strands of dark-brown-and-gray hair that had fallen from beneath her *kapp*. It was a tad warm for mid-May, but Mary Ellen couldn't complain; she knew the sweltering summer heat would be on them soon enough. She placed the loaf on the table already set for five. Her potatoes were ready for mashing, and the barbequed string beans were keeping warm in the oven.

The clippety-clop of hooves let her know that Linda was home. Her daughter had been driving the buggy for nearly two years on her own, but Mary Ellen still felt a sense of relief each time Linda pulled into the driveway, especially when she was traveling to Bird-In-Hand, a high-traffic town frequented by the tourists.

"Hi, *Mamm*. Sorry I'm late." The screen door slammed behind Linda as she entered the kitchen. Her daughter kicked off her shoes, walked to the refrigerator, and pulled out two jars of jam. "We lost track of the time." Linda placed the glass containers on the table.

"The applesauce is in the bowl on the left." Mary Ellen pointed toward the refrigerator, then began mashing her potatoes.

Linda walked back to the refrigerator to retrieve the applesauce, and Mary Ellen noticed a silver chain around her daughter's neck, tucked beneath the front of her dress. She remembered buying a necklace when she was Linda's age, during her own *rumschpringe*. No harm done.

"I see you purchased a necklace." She stepped in front of Linda and gently pulled a silver cross from its hiding place. "This is very pretty." Mary Ellen smiled before returning to her potatoes. "But I reckon it'd be best if you took it off before supper, no? Your *daed*

knows there will be these kinds of purchases during *rumschpringe*, but I see no need to show it off in front of him.”

“But it’s only a necklace. That’s not so bad.” Linda reached around to the back of her neck, and within a few moments, she was holding the chain in her hand. “Do you know that Amos Dienner bought a car during his *rumschpringe*?” Linda’s brows raised in disbelief. “His folks know he has it, but they make him park it in the woods back behind their house.” She giggled. “I wonder what *Daed* would do if I came home with a car and parked it back behind our house?”

“I think you best not push your father that far. He has been real tolerant of the time you’ve spent with *Englisch* friends, riding in their cars, going to movies, and . . .” Mary Ellen sighed. “I shudder to think what else.”

“Want me to tell you what all we do in town?” Linda’s voice was mysterious, as if she held many secrets.

Mary Ellen pulled the string beans from the oven. “No. I don’t want to know.” She shook her head all the way to the table, then placed the casserole dish beside the ham loaf. “Be best I not know what you do with your friends during this time.”

“*Ach, Mamm*. We don’t do anything bad.” Linda walked to her mother and kissed her on the cheek. “I don’t even like the taste of beer.”

Mary Ellen turned to her daughter and slammed her hands to her hips. “Linda!”

Linda laughed. “*Mamm!* I’m jokin’ with you. I’ve never even *tried* beer.” She twisted her face into a momentary scowl, then headed toward the stairs. “I guess I’ll go put my new necklace away.”

Mary Ellen believed Linda. She trusted her eldest child, and

she was thankful for the close relationship they shared. Linda's adventurous spirit bubbled in her laugh and shone in her eyes, but she was respectful of her parents and the rules. If going to the movies and buying a necklace were the worst things her daughter did during this running-around period, she'd thank God for that.

"Something smells mighty *gut* in here." Abe came through the kitchen entrance, kicking his shoes off near Linda's. Mary Ellen could hear her sons padding up the porch steps.

Eyeing the growing pile of shoes, she said, "I don't know why everyone insists on comin' through the kitchen when there is a perfectly *gut* door that goes from the porch to the den." She pointed to the shoes. "I reckon I'd like to have those dirty shoes in my den and not in my kitchen."

Abe closed the space between them, kissed Mary Ellen on the cheek, then whispered in her ear. "But you are always in the kitchen, and it's your face I long to see after a hard day's work." He pulled her close to him.

"Abe . . ." She nodded toward her two sons, who were now adding their shoes to the others, and she gently pushed her husband away. "The children." She tried to hide her reddening cheeks, but she was thankful that her husband of nineteen years could still cause her to blush. He winked at her as he took his seat at the head of the table.

She heard Matthew make a small grunting sound before sitting at one of the wooden benches lining the sides of the oblong table. Mary Ellen glanced at her oldest son, noticing his slight smile. He looked exactly like his father, minus the beard. Dark brown hair, broad shoulders, and a distinctive square jawline that ran in the Huyard family.

She shivered when she thought about how Matthew only had one more year until his running-around phase, and Luke was only a year behind him. Three children all in their *rumbschpringe* at the same time. Unless, of course, Stephen Ebersol proposed to Linda soon, as they all suspected would happen any day. Linda would be eighteen in August, and they'd been dating for over a year. Mary Ellen knew there would be enough time to plan a wedding by this November or December—the time designated for weddings, after the fall harvest—but she hoped they would wait until the following year to wed. Another year of dating would be good for them.

"Someone's here," Linda said as she walked back into the kitchen. "I saw a buggy comin' up the drive from my upstairs window."

"It's the supper hour," Abe grumbled.

Mary Ellen wiped her hands on her apron and joined Linda by the screen door. They waited until a face came into view.

"It's Lillian!" Linda darted down the porch steps.

Mary Ellen knew how much Linda loved her aunt. When her brother Samuel had married Lillian several years ago, Lillian became a wonderful stepmother to David, Samuel's son. Then they added two lovely daughters, Anna and Elizabeth, to their family. But Mary Ellen couldn't help but worry why Lillian would show up at supertime. *I hope Jonas is all right.*

Lillian's grandfather, Jonas Miller, had been battling cancer and Alzheimer's disease for years, but he'd taken a turn for the worse recently. Everyone adored Jonas. He was a pillar of faith in their community and had an unforgettable—if not contrary—charm that drew people to him.

"Is everything okay?" Mary Ellen opened the door and motioned Lillian inside. Linda followed.

“Hello to everyone,” Lillian said with a wave of her hand, but it wasn’t in her usual chipper manner. “I’m sorry to come callin’ at this time of day. I can see you are about to eat. But I was on my way home from work, and this was on my way, so I told Samuel I was going to stop in.”

Mary Ellen took a step closer to her sister-in-law. “Is it Jonas?”

“Ya.” Lillian hung her head for a moment, then looked back up at Mary Ellen. “Mamm had to put him in the hospital this morning. She can’t get him to eat, and his blood pressure has been really high.”

“Oh, no, Lillian. I’m so sorry to hear that.” Mary Ellen shook her head. “I could see this comin’. He looked awful poor last time I saw him.” Jonas lived with his daughter, Sarah Jane, and his wife Lizzie, but Mary Ellen knew most of the caregiving fell on his daughter. Lizzie was up in years, and even though she was in much better shape than her husband, she still had medical needs of her own.

Lillian sighed. “As you can imagine, Grandpa was not happy about it.” Then she smiled. “He said the *Englisch* will kill him before his time.”

Mary Ellen smiled in return. “The *Englisch* will have their hands full with Jonas, I’m sure.”

Jonas’s offbeat personality wasn’t typical of someone in their district. But poor Lizzie. Jonas married Lizzie almost four years ago, after his first wife had passed. Lizzie was going to be lost without Jonas.

Abe stood up. “I’m sorry to hear that Jonas is down, Lillian. Is there anything we can do for your family?”

“No, Abe. But *danki*. Samuel and David take care of things at

Mamm and Grandpa's. I just wanted to let you know. Grandpa is in Lancaster General."

"Can we visit him?" Linda asked.

"Ya. He can have visitors." Lillian paused. "I best be gettin' home. I have to stop by Rebecca's and pick up Anna and Elizabeth. And Samuel and David will be hungry."

Matthew stood up from the table, then Luke rose alongside him. "Lillian," Matthew said, "we'll help any way we can."

Luke straightened as if to reach the same height as Matthew, but he was still an inch or so shorter. "Me too, Lillian. I'll help."

Her youngest son sported the Huyard jaw too, but Mary Ellen always thought he looked more like her own father, from what she could remember; he'd died when she was a young girl. Her mother still lived nearby, and they saw her from time to time. But Abe's parents lived in a neighboring district, and they didn't get to see them as often.

Abe shook Lillian's hand, as did both his sons. It warmed Mary Ellen's heart to see the fine young men her boys were turning into. She followed Lillian out the door, Linda by her side.

She hugged her sister-in-law, and Linda did the same.

"We're here for you, Lillian," Linda said. "Tell Sarah Jane and Lizzie, okay?"

Mary Ellen echoed her daughter's sentiments, and they both waved as Lillian drove away. Abe and the boys were waiting patiently when they returned to the kitchen. Mary Ellen took her seat at the opposite end from Abe, and Linda slid onto the wooden bench across from the boys.

"Let us pray," Abe said. They all bowed their heads in silent prayer.

When they were done, Luke picked up the bowl of mashed potatoes and asked, “Is Jonas gonna die?”

“Don’t say that!” Linda blasted. “He’s just sick, and he’s in the hospital until he feels better.” She snatched the potatoes from her brother’s outstretched hand and cut her eyes at him, mumbling something under her breath.

“Watch your tone, Linda,” Abe warned.

Mary Ellen knew Abe didn’t like much conversation during the supper hour, and he certainly didn’t like any upset. Or visitors for that matter. But he loved Lillian, and Mary Ellen knew that he was glad she stopped by.

Mary Ellen also knew that she would need to prepare her children about Jonas at some point. Jonas was like everyone’s grandpa, and Lillian shared him with the community, but it was evident to Mary Ellen that Jonas was on a steady decline.

Luke had taken his first ride on a scooter as a young boy, with Jonas coaching from the sidelines, and Jonas had given Matthew lessons driving the buggy when Abe was busy in the fields. But it was Linda who had spent the most time with Jonas, particularly over the past couple of years. Jonas had taught her to play chess, and Linda took every opportunity to sneak off to challenge him to a game. It was only a matter of time for Jonas, and all the adults knew it. The cancer had been getting worse and worse.

“Jonas could get better.” Linda swirled her fork amidst the string beans. “They have chemo—chemo something—that cures cancer.”

“It isn’t a cure, Linda,” Abe said. “It’s a treatment. I reckon sometimes it works, but . . .” Her husband’s voice trailed off when he saw his daughter’s eyes tear up. “We will say extra prayers for Jonas during our devotions each day.”

Mary Ellen spooned potatoes onto her plate. She wasn’t sure

what to pray for. To pray for an extension of Jonas's life could cause much pain and suffering for him.

"Tomorrow, I have some sewing to do, *Mamm*, but not too much else. I was planning to spend the day with Stephen after that." She paused with her fork full of beans. "Maybe Barbie will take Stephen and me to see Jonas."

Barbie was their *Englisch* friend who ran Beiler's Bed and Breakfast off of Lincoln Highway. She was wonderful about providing rides for people in their district. Barbie's husband grew up Amish, and even though he was no longer Amish, they had strong ties to the community.

"That would be nice," Mary Ellen said. "But doesn't Stephen have to work at the furniture store tomorrow?"

"No, Abner gave him the day off because he worked all last week and then on Saturday too."

"I reckon it would be all right, if you finish your chores around here in the morning."

After they finished supper, Abe retired to the den, and the boys headed outside to tend to the two horses. Linda was helping Mary Ellen clear the table when they heard a car coming up the driveway.

"Are you expecting someone?" Mary Ellen tried to keep the edge from her voice. Linda's *Englisch* friends showed up too often these days. Mary Ellen knew this was normal for someone Linda's age, but it bothered her just the same. When she faced up to the reason why, it was because she had less time with Linda, and she was forced to accept the fact that Linda wasn't the same little girl who had glued herself to Mary Ellen's side since she was young. They'd always been close, and Mary Ellen wanted to selfishly savor the time she had left with Linda before her daughter would go and make a home with Stephen.

“No. I’m not expecting anyone.” Linda put two dirty dishes in the sink, then strained to see out the window, past the begonias blooming on the windowsill. “It’s a blue car, the kind that’s like a truck and a car all in one.”

Mary Ellen walked to the kitchen door and watched the blue SUV pull to a stop. Linda walked to her side.

“She’s pretty,” Linda said as the woman exited her automobile and stepped gingerly onto cobblestone steps that led to the porch, wearing high-heeled silver shoes.

Mary Ellen agreed. The tall *Englisch* woman was thin, yet shapely, dressed in denim pants and a white blouse. Her hair was the color of honey and rested slightly above her shoulders. Her dark sunglasses covered a large portion of her face, but her painted features were most attractive. Mary Ellen didn’t recognize her to be any of their non-Amish friends.

Linda let out a small gasp as the woman neared the door, then whispered, “I saw her at market today.”

The woman came up the porch steps. “Hello,” Mary Ellen said. “Can we help you?” She pushed the screen door open.

“Mary Ellen?”

“Ya.”

The woman pulled the dark shades from her face, and Mary Ellen tried to recall where she’d seen the woman before. She was now most familiar looking, but Mary Ellen couldn’t place her.

“I—I was hoping to talk to you.” The stranger’s bottom lip trembled, and she sucked in a deep breath. She glanced at Linda, then back at Mary Ellen. “Alone, if that’s okay.”

“Is something wrong?” Mary Ellen pushed the screen door wide. “Would you like to come in?”

The woman didn't move but bit her trembling lip for a moment and pushed back her wavy locks with her hand. "You probably don't recognize me. It's been a long time since I've seen you, and—" She took another deep breath, and Mary Ellen struggled to recall where she knew the woman from. "My name is Josie. Josephine Dronberger. I mean—well, it's Dronberger now. It used to be Josephine Wallace."

Mary Ellen's chest grew tight as she remembered where she'd seen the woman before—no longer a scared seventeen-year-old girl but a mature woman, beautiful and fancy. Mary Ellen fought a wave of apprehension that coursed through her. Instinctively, she pushed Linda backward and stepped in front of her.

"*Mamm*," Linda whispered with irritation, stumbling slightly. "What are you doing?"

Mary Ellen ignored her daughter as her heart thumped at an unhealthy rate. She gazed intently into the woman's eyes, which were now filling with tears.

"I'm sorry to just show up like this, but I—"

"Now is not a good time," Mary Ellen interrupted. She held her head high, fighting her own tears as well. She stepped backward, pushing Linda along with her, until the screen door closed between her and Josephine. "Perhaps another time." She managed a tremulous smile, but she knew Linda would question her about who the woman was the minute Josephine was gone.

Josephine's lip began to tremble even more, and a tear spilled over thick lashes, which she quickly wiped away. "Please. I'll just leave you my number. Maybe you can call me when it's a better time. Please . . ." She reached into the back pocket of her blue jeans and pulled out a card.

Mary Ellen watched with fearful fascination at how Josephine's brows cinched inward, how she slowly closed her eyes, and the way her trembling mouth thinned as she pressed her lips together. The same expression Linda had always had when she was hurting a great deal about something.

"*Mamm?*" Linda edged around her mother, gave Mary Ellen a questioning look, and then stared at the woman. The resemblance was eerie, and Mary Ellen wondered what might be going through Linda's mind.

"*Ya,*" she said to Josephine. "I—I will call you when it's a better time."

Josephine pushed the card in Mary Ellen's direction. "Call me any time. My home phone number and my cell number are both on the card." She sniffed. "I'm sorry."

Mary Ellen took the card, and Josephine smiled slightly, then fixed her eyes on Linda.

"I will call you." Mary Ellen hastily pulled Linda into the kitchen enough where she could push the wooden door between them and Josephine. It closed with a thud, and Mary Ellen's stomach churned with anxiety. Linda was going to have questions, but she needed to talk to Abe first. She needed Abe to tell her that everything would be all right.

Linda ran to the window and watched Josephine get in her car. "*Mamm,* who is that woman? And why was she crying? Why were you acting so strange? Do you know her, or . . ."

Mary Ellen pressed her hands against her chest, still standing and staring at the door, only half hearing Linda's queries, and wondering how the years had gotten away from her without them ever telling Linda that she was adopted.