

Plain Promise

A Daughters of the Promise Novel

BETH WISEMAN



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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To Rene Simpson, my dear friend who refuses to
settle for anything less than true love.

Pennsylvania Dutch Glossary

ab im kopp: off in the head

ach: oh

baremlich: terrible

boppli: baby

daadi: grandfather

daed: dad

daadi haus: a separate dwelling built for aging parents

danki: thank you

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

Em Gott Sei Friede: God's peace

Englisch or *Englischer*: a non-Amish person

fraa: wife

guder mariye: good morning

gut: good

haus: house

kaffi: coffee

kalt: cold

kapp: a prayer covering or cap

kinner: children or grandchildren

kinskind: grandchild

lieb: love

mamm: mom

mei: my

naerfich: nervous

narrisch: crazy, insane

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

rumshprunge: running-around period that begins when a teenager turns sixteen years old and ends when he or she is baptized into the Amish faith

schee: pretty

wedder: weather

wunderbaar: wonderful

ya: yes

THE DEN IN THE OLD FARMHOUSE WAS THE COZIEST room in the house, but a nip still hung in the air. Sadie pulled her sweater from the rack on the wall and tossed another log onto the fire, orange sparks shimmying up the chimney. She walked to the window, raised the green blind, and looked toward the guest cottage about a hundred feet away. She couldn't help but recall the hours she and Ben had spent restoring it five years ago, painting the whitewashed walls, installing carpet, and making it fit for use by the *Englisch*.

Sadie was glad when Bishop Ebersol allowed her to furnish the cottage with electricity last year for use as a rental property. Her current renter had come all the way from Los Angeles, his long, sleek automobile now crowding the inside of her barn. But she was grateful for the income. It had been difficult to make ends meet with Ben gone, though her Old Order Amish community never let her go without.

This time of year, men in the district made sure she had plenty of firewood and kept the snow cleared from her driveway. In the spring and summer, the womenfolk kept her supplied with fresh peas and corn from the family crops, but Sadie, a fit woman at age thirty, kept a small garden on her own. She grew tomatoes,

peppers, strawberries, melons, and the like—produce easy to tend. In the fall, her neighbors brought her lots of potatoes. She also had plenty of meat stored in a locker in town, thanks to her best friend, Lillian Stoltzfus, and Lillian's husband, Samuel.

Her shop out front gave her a bit more income. She sold handmade Amish goods that fared well with the tourists. Other women in the district added their crafts to Sadie's, and they took turns tending the store, splitting the profits among them. She turned her head around and checked the clock on the mantel. Nearly seven. She straightened up, tucked loose red ringlets beneath her *kapp*, and bowed her head.

After she thanked the Lord for the blessings of this new day, she grabbed her black cape, bonnet, and gloves. Then she pulled on her calf-high black boots and braced herself for a blast of arctic air. She took a deep breath, swung the door wide, and closed it quickly behind her—gelid wind stinging her cheeks like a thousand tiny needles.

A frosty mix of sleet and snow dusted her cape as she made her trek across the front yard to the shop. How fortunate she was that Ben's old workshop was near the road and visible to tourists. She had cried when she'd given away her husband's tools and turned his favorite place into the shop, but her friends had worked by her side to transform the old building. Then, just two months ago, they opened Treasures of the Heart.

She glanced around at the snow-covered pastures, visions of Ben tending the land still fresh in her mind. Less painful, but still there. It had been four years since the *Englisch* car had sped around a corner of Black Horse Road and into Ben's buggy. She would never forget their crates of fresh vegetables strewn across the road,

patches of red, green, and yellow dotting the black asphalt. She envisioned the toppled buggy, their injured horse, who would later have to be put down, and her Ben . . .

When she'd heard the commotion that day, she had run down Black Horse Road faster than she knew her legs could carry her. Jacob King was squatting beside Ben when she arrived, and she knew by the expression on Jacob's face that her Ben was gone.

A glimpse of movement to her right pulled her back to the present. She looked toward the cottage and saw her renter, Kade Saunders, retrieving wood from where she had placed it on the front porch. He was sparsely clothed for such weather, denim pants and a short-sleeved, white T-shirt. Sadie watched him hurriedly scoop two logs into his arms, then drop one before making it to the front door.

She heard him grunt loudly and say something that sounded like cursing. She wasn't sure, but it stopped her in her tracks. She watched him walk backward into the house, cradling the logs in his arms. She couldn't see his expression, but she waved anyway. He didn't wave back. Of course, his arms were full. He kicked the door shut and was out of sight. It was the first time she'd seen the man since he'd arrived three days ago.

She tucked her head to avoid the thickening snowfall and continued toward the shop. It was hard not to wonder what Kade Saunders was doing in Lancaster County for three months, so far from where he lived in California. When he had stopped by to pick up the key, he hadn't looked prepared for the twelve-degree weather—denim breeches, a black overcoat, and white running shoes not fit for two feet of snow. And the man didn't have a head covering. His wavy, dark hair glistened with icy moisture, and his

hazel eyes shone with irritation. Shivering as he spoke, he had declined the maid service included in the rental cost but requested that his automobile be protected from the wintry elements. She could see it through the open barn doors.

She rubbed her hands together and recalled the phone call from Mr. Saunders's personal assistant. The woman requested the one-bedroom cottage January through March for Mr. Saunders, but only after insisting that his privacy be respected during his stay. Sadie had hesitated. Her previous renters had been couples and families. How would it look for a single man to be occupying the same property as Sadie for three months, even if they were under separate roofs? Would the bishop be displeased?

As if sensing Sadie's concerns, the assistant said, "Mr. Saunders is quite well-known, and I can provide you with any references you might need."

The woman also asked that the refrigerator be stocked weekly. Sadie's normal rental package didn't include groceries, but Mr. Saunders's employee assured Sadie that cost was of no concern. The fee they'd agreed upon caused Sadie to gasp, but she agreed, grateful for the additional income during the off-season.

Sadie learned that actually finding the products Mr. Saunders desired was a challenge. She'd never heard of Gruyère cheese, for example, so she substituted Gouda cheese instead. His exhausting list of flavored coffees, organic breakfast cereals, and gourmet pastries were also frustrating.

She did the best she could and also threw in some extras. He was, after all, in Paradise, Pennsylvania—the heart of Lancaster County. Wouldn't he want to try Amish favorites, like shoofly pie and chowchow? She provided these for him in an attempt to

make up for the items she couldn't find. She'd also prepared him a hearty batch of tapioca pudding, along with a loaf of home-made bread, a meat loaf, and zucchini casserole, and had also included a few jellies and jams she had canned last summer.

But even Mr. Saunders couldn't distract her from thinking about her forthcoming visit from Milo Troyer, her Amish friend from Stephenville, Texas. They had been writing letters for over two years, and he called Sadie every Tuesday night at eight o'clock. They talked for fifteen minutes, a cold fifteen minutes out in the barn this time of year, but she was thankful that the bishop allowed telephones in the barn these days, a luxury that would have been unheard-of in years past. Sadie looked forward to Milo's call all week long, and this spring he would be riding on a bus from Texas all the way to Lancaster County. They decided he would stay with her friends Ivan and Katie Ann for his two-week visit.

With pictures forbidden, she hadn't a clue what he looked like, except what he told her. He was tall and slender, like she was, with dark hair and the customary beard after marriage. His wife died shortly after Ben, and Sadie's cousin had introduced them via mail.

His looks were of no concern though. Milo's heart spoke to her in a way she didn't think possible after Ben died. He understood the grief of losing a spouse, and their hours of consoling each other had grown from friendship into much more. She knew it was God's will for her to move on; it was customary in their community to quickly remarry. But she'd been a widow for four years, and there were no options for remarriage. Perhaps she'd been too picky, but she refused to settle for anything less than something comparable to the love she'd shared with Ben.

She could tell by Milo's letters and phone calls that they would be a good match, and her desire was to begin her life with Milo soon. Milo's correspondence was always upbeat, kind, and filled with hope for the future. He was a hard worker, like Sadie, and family was his top priority. Perhaps they would have the children that she and Ben never did, for reasons the natural doctor in town couldn't seem to explain.

She entered the gift shop, went straight to the gas heaters, and lit them both. Only the cottage had electricity. It'd be cause for a shunning if she connected to the outside world when it wasn't necessary or approved by the bishop. She rolled up the green blinds in each of the four windows. The sun was just starting to rise, giving only a hint of light, just enough for her to attach price tags to some of the quilted pot holders she'd finished the night before. Fridays were usually good sale days, even in the off-season.

If she lived to be a hundred, she'd never understand why the *Englisch* found their way of life so interesting. With less farmland and bigger families, many in her community worked outside the home; it had become a way of life. She felt blessed not to have to travel farther than her own front yard.

The bell on the front door chimed, and Sadie turned to see her friend Lillian walk in. Lillian's mother, Sarah Jane, followed behind her. Lillian and her mother now shared a close relationship. But it hadn't always been that way. Sarah Jane had left the Amish community when she was a young girl of eighteen, and she had protested when Lillian left to come live with her grandparents. But after a few months, Sarah Jane surprised everyone, returning to Lancaster County and being baptized into the faith alongside her daughter. Then when Lillian married Samuel Stoltzfus, a widower

in the community with a son named David, Sarah Jane had made her home with her father.

Lillian hung her cape on the stand inside the door. “Whose Mercedes-Benz?”

Sadie ignored the question. She had a hunch the less they all knew about her mysterious guest, the better. “Where’s Anna?” she asked instead. Lillian usually brought her daughter, a precious bundle who wasn’t much over a year old.

“Anna is with Samuel’s sister, Mary Ellen,” Lillian answered. She rubbed her expanding belly.

Sadie noticed the gesture. “How are you feeling? Are you still having morning sickness?”

“No more morning sickness.” Lillian moved toward the back of the shop and peered out of the window toward the barn. “That’s a very expensive car,” she said. “Who does it belong to?”

“Kade Saunders.” Sadie joined Lillian at the window while Sarah Jane took over pinning price tags on various items. “I don’t know much about him. His personal assistant told me he’s from Los Angeles. I reckon it’s *gut* to have a renter this time of year. These harsh winters tend to keep people away.” A tinge of cold air seeped in from outside when her face neared the window. “He’s leasing the place for three months.”

Lillian pulled her head back and squinted her eyes. “*Ya?* What for?”

“Don’t know. But that assistant lady asked me to stock the refrigerator with all kinds of strange foods every week. Some of them I couldn’t even find at the market.” She paused. “And he doesn’t want any cleanup service. I reckon he’ll have to wash his own towels and linens in the washing machine and dryer.”

“Hmm. That is odd,” Lillian mused, still gazing toward the cottage and the fancy car in the barn.

Kade stared at the TV screen and wondered if he could survive without basic cable for the next three months. The antique antenna provided a whopping four channels. No CNN or other national channels, only local news that was fuzzy at best. But this is what he wanted, he reminded himself—away from everything.

He leaned back on the couch and propped his feet on the coffee table, trying to ward off his festering thoughts about Alicia. It wasn't as if she'd broken his heart or anything, but once again he'd let himself be used and fooled by a member of the opposite sex. One shiny new car, a diamond bracelet—and pretty much anything else she'd asked for—and then she was gone. Story of his life. Young, attractive women interested in his money, nothing more.

Kade glanced around at his modest accommodations. This was hardly what he had in mind when his friend Val had suggested he get out of Los Angeles to unwind. Val had brought his ex-wife here and said the peacefulness would help Kade clear his head. Though it must not have worked for Val—he and his wife had divorced shortly after their trip. Val never wanted to talk about what had happened, and he seemed to be mending his soul with travel. Kade could rarely get hold of him these days. But Kade understood. Kade's soul could certainly use some mending as well.

The roaring fire warmed the room, and his refrigerator and pantry were stocked, though he couldn't identify some of his

host's offerings. Amish food, he presumed. He wished it wasn't so cold outside, but he didn't feel the need to venture out anyway. That would mean interaction with others, and he wasn't up for that. Besides, he found the simple cottage to be quite cozy. He'd hole up here and try to heal himself of all that ailed him. It was a long list.

For whatever reason, he thought of the Amish woman he was renting from. He couldn't remember her name. But he could recall her ivory skin, incredible blue eyes, and strands of wavy red hair spiraling against her cheek from beneath a cap on her head. She was quite lovely, even without a stitch of makeup on her face and clothed in a baggy dress to her knees. And she was tall and slender. Like Alicia. Kade's brows narrowed as he grumbled in disgust. *Blasted woman.*

Still. It was no reason to be rude to the Amish gal when he'd first arrived—demanding he park his car in the barn and hastily accepting the key before he retreated to his much-needed solitude. Perhaps he could have been a little kinder to the woman. Kade hadn't seen another soul on the property, except for a few women who entered the shop up front each day. He wondered if she took care of this whole place on her own.

He opened the refrigerator and took out the plastic bowl of tapioca pudding. Best pudding he'd ever had in his life. He grabbed a spoon from the drawer and finished the last little bit in the large container, then tossed the empty bowl in the sink, along with the past three days of dirty dishes. He would have been better served to have accepted the Amish woman's house-cleaning services included in the rental. He wondered for a moment if he should reconsider but disregarded the thought. It

would require a limited amount of conversation. He began to fill the sink with soapy water.

Thirty minutes later, he was back on the tan couch. He adjusted the volume on the TV, listened to a woman discuss a nearby animal shelter, and then he turned it off. And he sat—thinking.

He crossed his ankles on the coffee table and thought about how successful he'd become by following in his father's footsteps. At thirty-seven, Kade had more money than he'd ever spend in one lifetime. And, he decided, he couldn't be more miserable.

One thing would cheer him up, though—some more of that tapioca pudding from the Amish woman.



In the fading twilight, Sadie braved the below-freezing temperature and pulled two logs from the stack of firewood she kept in the barn, wishing she'd remembered to do it earlier in the day. Her boots heavy in the deep snow, she edged toward the farmhouse, glancing at the cottage lit up by electricity, smoke wafting out of the chimney. Something caught her eye on her renter's front porch. It was the empty plastic bowl that she had sent the tapioca pudding in. Why in the world would he set it on the front porch?

She put the logs down and trudged toward the cottage, the frigid air nipping at her cheeks. She grabbed the bowl, retrieved her wood, and then headed toward the farmhouse. All she wanted to do was climb into bed and reread the letter she received from Milo two weeks ago, to take refuge in his words and combat her dwindling hope.

Following a bath, she lit the lantern by her bed upstairs and pulled out Milo's note.

My Dear Sadie,

I am counting the days until we meet. I will come to see you when the winter weather has passed. I reckon the springtime is when I will come. The sound of your voice helps me to picture you in my head. You are sbeee, I know. If it is God's will, you will become my fraa and we will be together. The Lord will guide us.

I am reminded of a song from our Sunday singings—"We Have This Moment." The words make me think of you—"Hold tight to the sound of the music of living. Happy songs from the laughter of children at play. Hold my hand as we run through the sweet, fragrant meadows, making memories of what is today. We have this moment to hold in our hands, and to touch as it slips through our fingers like sand. Yesterday's gone and tomorrow may never come, but we have this moment today."

I want to share mei moments with you, Sadie. I will write you again soon.

In His name,

Milo

Sadie folded the letter and pressed it against her chest. She could only pray that Milo would be everything she longed for. While she'd grown accustomed to fending for herself, how wonderful it would be to have a man to help with chores, to hold her, to love her, to grow old with. Maybe God would even see fit to bless them with a child.

"We Have This Moment" was one of Sadie's favorite songs. She recalled another verse from the song—"Tender words, gentle touch, and a good time sharing, and someone who loves me and wants me to stay. Hold them near while they're here and don't wait for tomorrow to look back and wish for today."

Please God, she prayed silently, bless me with companionship as I go forth in life to serve You.

The ground was solid beneath Sadie's feet as she walked toward the shop, with no new snow since the heavy downfall yesterday afternoon. She wondered if the snow would keep tourists away, but it was Saturday. At least a few customers would rough out the weather. Today's schedule called for Sadie and Katie Ann to work, since Lillian and her mother had worked the shop yesterday. But Katie Ann was down with the flu, and Sadie declined Mary Ellen's help. There wasn't enough going on this time of year to require two women to run the shop. Sadie knew she could handle it on her own. Besides, Mary Ellen had a family to tend to. She, on the other hand, did not.

It was nearing eight o'clock when she lit the heaters and drew the blinds in the shop. Her day had started early that morning. She'd made another large batch of tapioca pudding, thinking her guest might have been requesting more when he left the empty container outside. It was no trouble. She also baked two loaves of bread for an elderly friend down the street, Lizzie Esh. Lizzie suffered with arthritis and had difficulty cooking these days, particularly considering the effort it took to repeatedly knead dough. She planned to run the bread to Lizzie after she closed the shop in the late afternoon.

The container of pudding sat next to her, and she peered out of the back window toward the guesthouse. One light appeared to be on. With her winter cape, bonnet, and boots still on, she decided she'd leave Mr. Saunders's pudding on his porch. Surely he'd come out soon for firewood and see it before it froze.

She was grateful for a pleasantly warmer day, approaching thirty

degrees. Nearing the cottage, she saw that Mr. Saunders still had plenty of firewood stacked on the porch, which reminded her that she would need to cart some to the farmhouse for later. Then she heard the music.

Evidently he was awake. She plodded slowly across the yard and stopped at the bottom of the steps. A woman's voice belted loudly above an assortment of instruments. Sadie loved to sing and wondered what it would be like to sing along with actual instruments, something that would never be allowed in her district. Owning an instrument was said to bring forth unnecessary emotions.

This is like spying, she thought, as she held her position, beginning to hum to the rhythm. *Just a little longer*. How could owning an instrument that produced such beautiful sounds be wrong in the eyes of God?

Finally, she placed the plastic container with the tapioca pudding on a small table between two rockers. She turned to leave but hadn't even made it to the steps when the cottage door swung open.

Sadie spun around. Stunned, she faced Kade Saunders standing in the threshold. A flush rose from her neck, accompanied by a knot in her throat as she gulped back her embarrassment. The man was wearing what appeared to be pajama bottoms. He was barefoot, and he didn't have a shirt on. She instinctively threw her hands over her eyes, gasping, but unable to move.

"Wait right here." Kade held his palm toward her and backed into the house.

No problem. She couldn't move. She widened her fingers on one hand to have a peek. He stood in the living area, pulling a white sweatshirt over his head as if sensing her embarrassment at

seeing him in such a way. The flush had overtaken her face, she was quite sure. She brought her hands down and began nervously twisting the ties on her black cape. *Pajama bottoms, for goodness' sake.*

When he returned to the door, she stammered, "I . . . I brought you some tapioca pudding."

Kade walked toward her, still barefoot. "Thank you. That was the best tapioca pudding I've ever had."

His shoulder brushed hers as he whisked by her to retrieve it. Her feet were rooted in place when he came back her way; then he stood uncomfortably close to her, facing her. He put one hand on his hip and tucked the pudding container against his side with the other hand. "Do you want to come in?"

"No. I do not." She wished right away that she hadn't sounded so shocked by his offer. He wasn't smiling, but at least he didn't have the irritated look on his face like he did the first day of his arrival. "Okay," he said, then shrugged. "Suit yourself." He turned to head back into the cottage.

Finally, she was able to move her legs and turned to head down the steps, promising herself she would never come back to the cottage until time to deliver more groceries, which she quickly calculated wasn't for another three days.

"Hey," he called out to her.

She had only taken four or five steps into the snow when she was forced to turn around and acknowledge him. "*Ya?*"

"What's your name?"

"Sadie." She offered a brief smile before turning back around.

"Hey, Sadie?"

Again she turned around. "*Ya?*"

"If you like listening to the music so much, why don't you

knock on the door and come in out of the cold next time?” he said. “You don’t have to loiter on the front porch.”

If only the earth would open up and swallow me, she thought.

“No, no,” she mumbled. She gave him a quick wave and began stepping backwards.

She remembered falling. She wasn’t sure what she tripped over, but as her legs buckled beneath her, she hit her head on the icy ground.

Sprawled out on her back, she recalled the image of Kade Saunders bolting barefoot across the snow.