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LESLIE GOULD

A woman in Amish attire, wearing a white headscarf and a purple long-sleeved shirt under a black vest, stands in a field of yellow flowers. She is holding a large, scalloped-edged sign that reads "A BRIGHTER DAWN". The background shows a rural landscape with a wooden fence and several houses under a bright sky.

A BRIGHTER DAWN

AMISH MEMORIES

◆ *One* ◆

A
BRIGHTER
DAWN

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AMISH MEMORIES

A Brighter Dawn

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♦ *One* ♦

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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To my family,
past, present, and future.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us . . .

Luke 1:78

This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls.

John Muir, *John of the Mountains:
The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*

Ivy Zimmerman

JUNE 11, 2014

CLACKAMAS COUNTY, OREGON

As I reached the bottom of the staircase, I took off my right sandal and hurled it at the carved cuckoo that had just slipped out the door of the clock in the entryway of our log cabin.

The sandal hit the side of the clock, but the cuckoo did not budge.

“Ivy.” Gran stepped from the living room and picked up my sandal. “Your mother is in the kitchen. She has a question for you.” She held up the sandal. “And then come talk to me, and I’ll return this.”

Chagrined—I’d thought Gran was in her room, resting—I turned into the dining room and then shuffled into the kitchen, one sandal on and one sandal off.

Some sort of potato and cheese casserole baked in the oven. There was a salad on the counter and a basket of rolls.

Mom, who stood at the sink, was a younger version of Gran, with her blond hair in a bun at the nape of her neck and a Mennonite prayer covering on her head. She turned toward me. “What was that racket?”

“Nothing.”

She shook her head. “Don’t hurt that cuckoo clock. You know how much your grandmother treasures it.”

I may have rolled my eyes. I despised the cuckoo clock. Besides being annoying, it was also kitschy, which I realized once my friend Ellen pointed it out.

“We need you to pick up Brenna after church.” Mom dried her hands on her apron. “Treva’s staying home with Gran.”

“Why aren’t you and Dad going to church?”

“There’s a meeting at Eagle High that Dad needs to attend. I’m going with him.”

That sounded weird, but I didn’t care enough to ask for more details. “I’m studying for my German final with Ellen and Alec. We won’t be done by eight.”

Mom took a step toward me, the skirt of her dress swishing against her bare legs. “We need you to do this, Ivy.”

“But I have my final to study for.”

“I doubt you need to study for it at all.”

“No, I do.” I was horrible at languages.

Mom wrinkled her nose, which meant she thought I was bluffing. “Take my van. I noticed you have a low tire.”

“Yes. And it’s nearly flat now. I’m lucky I made it home.” I turned away from her, as if it were her fault I hadn’t put air in the tire of my old Camry. All I had to do was drive up to Dad’s shed and use his air compressor.

Mom called after me, “We’ll eat as soon as Dad gets here.”

I called back, over my shoulder, “I’ll get something at the café.”

When I reached the entryway, I grabbed my backpack and the key to Mom’s van. Then I stepped into the living room.

Gran turned her head toward me, but it took a moment for her eyes to focus. When they did, she smiled slightly. “Come here.”

I took a step forward. Gran was battling an aggressive uterine cancer, and the last few months had been hard on her with surgery and then chemotherapy. She was currently doing a round of radiation and had a few sessions left. With classes and all, I hadn’t been around to help much.

“How are you feeling?” I asked.

“Tired today, but I’m hoping I’ll be better by Saturday. I don’t want to miss your graduation.”

“It’s okay if you do.” It was all the way in Portland, at the Coliseum. There would be thousands of people. Not the best place for someone trying to stay away from germs.

She stood, my sandal still in her hand. “I want our whole family to be there.”

For being Mennonite, we had the smallest family I knew of—just my parents, us three girls, and Gran.

“I’ve been worried about you,” she said. “I know you’ve been busy with school, but I’ve sensed an unsettledness in you.” She held up my sandal. “As evidenced by your violent outburst.”

“It was hardly violent,” I said. “I didn’t kill the cuckoo. I could have if I wanted to.”

“That cuckoo has been with me my entire adult life. The clock is a precious gift. I’d hate to lose him—or it—now.” She smiled again.

I tried to smile back, but I was afraid it came out as a smirk. She laughed. “I know you hate that clock.”

“And I know you love it.”

She put a hand on my shoulder. “Whatever’s bothering you, please talk to God about it.” A hint of humor seeped into her tone. “Attempting to destroy helpless cuckoos is not the answer.”

My tone shifted toward meekness. “I know.”

She gave me a hug and then turned over my sandal.

I slipped it on my foot and then headed out the door as Dad pulled into the driveway and parked his Outback. I walked quickly toward the van, hoping he wouldn’t engage me in conversation.

“Ivy!”

The kitchen door closed, and Mom started toward us. “Isaac. We need to eat and be on our way.”

Dad smiled at Mom and then said to me, “Thank you for picking up Brenna tonight.”

“All she needs to do is ask someone for a ride,” I answered. “There’s no reason I should drive her around.”

“Ivy.” Mom stepped closer and lowered her voice. “Brenna’s having a hard time again. She started a new medication a couple of months ago.”

I may have rolled my eyes again.

Mom cocked her head. “Your sister is not doing it on purpose.”

“Actually,” I said, “she is. And you catering to her only makes it worse.”

Mom took a step away from me, and Dad took a step closer. “Trust us, she’s not doing it on purpose. And we really do need your help.”

I wanted to take my sandal off and throw it again. But I wasn’t sure at who. Dad? Mom? Brenna? Instead, I hissed, “I hate this family,” and then spun around and climbed into Mom’s van.

Out the windshield, I watched my parents step next to each other, in perfect union, as if they'd choreographed their moves. Maybe twenty-four years of marriage did that. Both smiled at me, squinting a little into the afternoon sun. Perhaps they hadn't heard my cruel words.

I started the engine and backed up, not looking at my parents again until I turned onto the narrow road. They stood with their arms around each other, waving at me with their free hands.

I focused on the road ahead and accelerated toward the highway.



When I reached the Mountain Café, neither Ellen nor Alec had arrived yet. I sat in the parking lot, gripping the steering wheel of Mom's van. Gran had been diagnosed with cancer over a year ago, about the same time Brenna started having panic attacks. I began spending time with Alec soon after, even though I was taking twenty credits a semester so I could graduate from college a year early. Mom, Dad, and Gran all voiced concerns about my relationship with Alec, considering my other commitments. I assured them I was doing fine.

Which was a lie.

I knew Gran loved all her granddaughters equally, but I'd always felt a special bond with her. I was her first grandchild. But over the last couple of years, I sensed her disapproval. First, it was that I stopped wearing a prayer covering. Then it was that I started hanging out with Alec. I knew she was sick and exhausted, but her grumpiness still surprised me. Sure, she grieved after Papa Uri died, but she bounced back to her positive self. Now she was tired and irritated most of the time.

I shook my head—at myself. How selfish of me. Now I feared Gran heard me telling Mom and Dad that I hated our family. I felt worse about hurting Gran than hurting Mom and Dad.

A year ago, I would have prayed for forgiveness. Now I touched my bare head, grabbed my backpack from the passenger seat, and opened the door. Once in the café, I scanned the dining room, landing on the table in the far corner. I headed toward it, pulling my phone from the pocket of my backpack as I walked. No text from Ellen or from Alec.

I was too anxious to be hungry, so when the waitress extended a menu toward me, I said, “I’ll take a cup of coffee.”

After she left, I pulled my laptop and my German textbook from my backpack.

Alec had already registered to take first-year German starting last fall, and Ellen, Tony, and I decided to join him. We were all going to Frankfurt the first week of August for the Global Gathering, an event for young attendees of Anabaptist churches. Ellen and I both attended Eagle Creek Mennonite Church. Tony started going with Ellen a year ago, and then Alec started attending a couple of months after that.

I didn’t realize the German class would be two hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus an online lab. I had to leave German class early each day during spring term to make it to Portland State for my abnormal psychology course, which didn’t endear me to the instructor. It also gave me a bad case of FOMO—fear of missing out—when it came to not hanging out with Alec, Ellen, and Tony after class. Basically, I had a fear of missing out when it came to anything.

Every time friends did something without me, I took it personally. Plus, it seemed everyone else was in a committed

relationship. And other people had better families. And other families went on vacations. It didn't help that Ellen posted on social media at least five times a day.

"*Stop,*" Mom had told me the week before when I complained about Ellen, Tony, and Alec going out to lunch without me. "*Practice being happy for other people. Practice being content. God has provided everything you need.*"

I'd finished my last final at Portland State a few hours ago and hadn't had time to study for my German final. Now, I regretted taking the class. It had been a lot of work and not much fun, and I still couldn't speak much German beyond *Hallo; Auf Wiedersehen; Ich heiÙe Ivy; and Ich spreche kein Deutsch.*

Alec was the most interested in learning German, because he had a few friends in his online communities who were German. Alec was completing his second year at the community college and would start his mechanical engineering program at Oregon State University in the fall. His maternal grandparents were paying for his education. It's not like his dad couldn't—he had a successful car repair business—but his father didn't think Alec needed a four-year degree.

I felt like the odd one out in our group of four. The other three had all gone to public high school while I'd gone to a private one. Although we all attended the same church now, my parents were far stricter than theirs. I didn't know that much about pop culture, and they were always laughing at my ignorance.

My coffee arrived. I took a sip and checked my email on my laptop. I had a message from my friend Johann Mazur, who lived in southeastern Ukraine. I'd met him last summer when I went on a mission trip to Berdyansk, a city on the Black Sea where an Anabaptist church had recently been

established. I traveled with a group of Mennonite college students from Seattle, some of whom I'd met the previous summer on a mission trip to Haiti.

Johann's maternal great-grandmother had been Mennonite. As a teenager, Johann became interested in his family history and began attending the church. Unlike me, Johann had a knack for languages. Besides speaking Ukrainian and Russian, he spoke perfect English and was studying German too, along with software design.

The two mission trips I'd gone on were the high points of my life. There, I'd felt as if I completely belonged. It was in everyday life that I felt like an outcast.

I lived for Johann's emails, especially since the anti-government protests in Ukraine ran their president out of office last November—and straight to Russia. Then, in March, Russia invaded Crimea, and in April, they began seizing territory in the eastern part of Ukraine. A Ukrainian fighter plane and several helicopters had been shot down by separatists in rebel-controlled areas. Johann assured me that he was far from the fighting and perfectly safe.

I'd always been boy crazy. But as attracted as I was to Johann, I didn't become romantically involved with him. I had just started hanging out with Alec, and he had a hard time understanding why I was going off to Ukraine with the Seattle group, even though I only saw him when Ellen and Tony were around. It wasn't until five months later that Alec and I started spending time alone and our relationship became more serious.

Now we were going to all be together with Johann at the Global Gathering, which was bound to be awkward.

After another sip of coffee, I checked the time on my phone. 6:57. I sent Ellen a text first. She replied immediately.

So sorry! I'll be there ASAP.

I texted Alec.

Hey, what's up? I'm at the café . . . ready to study.

A few minutes later, he responded.

I'll try to be there soon. Just got back from the doctor with my dad. He's having back pain.

His father was in his midforties or so. He was big—at least 6'5"—and had a history of a bad back. Alec was an only child, and his parents were divorced. He often helped his father.

A half hour later, Alec texted again.

I'm not going to make it. Making dinner for Dad. Sorry. I'll see you tomorrow.

Okay.

I had dreams. Big dreams. I was receiving my bachelor's in social work from Portland State University on Saturday. In the fall, I'd start my master's in social work at George Fox University and live in an apartment on campus. I planned to continue traveling with mission groups. I had chosen my major to be prepared to help people anywhere I landed.

I had big plans, but I'd felt unsettled the last couple of months. Mostly about my relationship with Alec. I knew Mom and Dad and Gran had concerns too.

Last month, Mom said she thought it would be difficult for me to stay focused if I became serious about Alec. She said he didn't seem like the supportive type. Mom seldom criticized anyone, and I'd been offended by what she'd said.

But I'd noticed lately that when I needed to study, he

wanted to go for a drive. When I needed time with my family, he questioned my commitment to our relationship. When I said our relationship was getting too physical, he accused me of being too modest.

Last week, he'd asked me to go to Oregon State to be closer to him next semester, even though I'd already been accepted to George Fox.

Was I willing to give up my dreams for Alec? I couldn't imagine my life without him.

I returned to studying for the next half hour, until Ellen arrived. She grinned as she approached the table, her dark ponytail swinging. She plopped down in the chair across from me. Immediately, the waitress arrived at her side. Ellen ordered a slice of banana cream pie and a cup of coffee. Then she said, "I can't wait for August first. Until we land in Germany. Just the four of us."

"Plus a hundred other people from all over the world."

"Exactly," she said. "Finally I'll get to travel with you instead of just hearing about your trips."

Twenty minutes later, as Ellen finished eating her pie, my phone rang. "Aren't you going to get it?" Ellen asked.

I shook my head. "It's Brenna."

"What does she want?"

"A ride home from church." It was now 8:04. "If I don't answer, she'll be forced to take responsibility for her own life and ask someone to give her a ride."

Ellen laughed. "Tough love. Way to go."

My phone dinged. Guessing it was Brenna, I ignored it again.



I packed my backpack as the waitress turned the *Closed* sign a few minutes before nine.

“I’m going to flunk,” I said.

“You’ll do fine,” Ellen answered. My phone dinged again. I took it out of the pocket of my backpack, hoping it was Alec.

It wasn’t. Treva had texted me. In fact, I had two texts from her.

Gran’s sick. Mom and Dad went to get Brenna.
Can you come home?

Where are you?

I followed Ellen out the door of the café. “See you tomorrow!”

She gave me a wave. I climbed into Mom’s van and answered Treva.

Sorry. Just saw these. On my way.

At this point, Mom, Dad, and Brenna would already be home. They were probably already home. Hopefully Gran was feeling better.

I started the engine, turned on the headlights, and then drove through town. I accelerated when I reached the highway, catching a glance of the sun setting through the trees in the rearview mirror. Then I concentrated on the pavement ahead of me, my eyes flitting to the left side of the road for deer. It was the time of night when they darted across the highway down to the river.

Five miles out of town, I turned onto Eagle Creek Road. I was in the thick of the forest now, and the sun had completely set. I flicked on my bright lights and continued looking for deer. Just after I turned right onto Trillium Road, I saw the flash of emergency lights. I turned off my brights and slowed.

Probably someone not familiar with the road had driven into the ditch. At least it had happened here and not a half mile up the road along the gully.

I pulled to the side behind the last police car, grabbed my phone, and climbed down from the van. Dad had pulled plenty of cars from the deep ditch with our tractor. I'd call him if needed.

As I stepped between the police car and the stopped car, I caught sight of two people in the middle of the road. A police officer and a girl.

Brenna.

I turned my head toward the right. Dad's car was on its side in the ditch, with the wheels pointed toward the road.

♦ 2 ♦

I stumbled toward Brenna. “What happened?” She turned toward me and then stepped into the headlights from the sheriff’s car. She had a cut across the left side of her forehead, and blood dripped down her temple and along her chin. Blood was smeared into her hair and white *Kapp* too. She held her right forearm with her left hand.

“I-vy,” she stammered. She turned toward the deputy. “This is my sister.”

I stepped to her side and put my arms around her. She jerked her head toward the ditch. “I rolled Dad’s car.” “What?”

“Don’t be mad. I didn’t do it on purpose.”

Thankfully, sympathy instead of anger filled me. “Of course you didn’t do it on purpose. Are you okay, mostly?”

“I think so,” Brenna answered.

I turned toward the officer. “What about our parents? Are you getting them out?”

He answered, “The fire department is on the way.”

Brenna began to shake.

The officer stepped closer to Brenna. He wore one latex glove and had a first aid kit in his hand. “She’s probably going into shock.”

“I’ll get a blanket.” I let go of Brenna and rushed to the van.

The driver of a car stopped in the middle of the lane rolled down his window. “Can I do anything?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “You don’t need to stay.”

He began pulling forward, easing around the officer and Brenna.

I opened the back of the van, grabbed a blanket, and hurried back to Brenna. The officer wiped blood away from her eye with gauze. After I draped the blanket around her shoulders, I turned toward Dad’s car. Another officer was on the other side of the ditch, talking into a cell phone. The driver’s door wasn’t open, but the window was down. Brenna must have been able to crawl out of it. The interior light wasn’t on, and I couldn’t see into the car.

I took a step forward, but the officer next to Brenna took my arm and said, “Stay here.”

Before I could protest, a fire truck siren wailed. We turned toward the flashing lights coming up the lane. The officer directed Brenna and me toward the other side of the lane, saying, “We need to give them room.”

Brenna began to shake again.

“Wait,” I said. “Why were you driving?”

“Dad told me to. For more practice.”

She’d already failed her driver’s test twice, but I knew Dad wanted her to get her license before she started college in the fall.

The fire truck blocked our view of Dad’s car. I’d started to walk around the front of it when a man wearing jeans

and a sweatshirt came around from the other side. “Were you the driver?”

I gestured toward Brenna. “My sister was driving. Brenna Zimmerman. I’m Ivy. Our parents are in the car.”

“I’m Tom Leal. I’m a volunteer chaplain with the fire department. Is there a relative you want with you?”

Even though the lights of the fire truck flashed in my eyes, it seemed as if the night grew darker. “Our grandmother is ill,” I said.

“Do you attend a church nearby?”

“Eagle Creek Mennonite.”

“I know Pastor Ron.” The man took out his phone. “I’ll give him a call.”

I froze but managed to ask, “What’s going on?”

Someone yelled, “Tom, could you come here for a sec?”

I turned back toward Brenna. The officer who’d been staying by her side was gone.

“What’s happening?” An iciness spread through me. “Brenna? What’s going on?”

She kept her eyes on the ground. “Mom and Dad are dead.”



Someone, maybe the chaplain, put a blanket around me too. Brenna was wrong. Mom and Dad would be fine. They had to be.

Brenna was probably having another one of her panic attacks. And no wonder. Maybe I was having one too.

The firefighters would extract Mom and Dad from the car in a couple of minutes. Then an ambulance would take them to the emergency department in Oregon City to get checked out. They’d be home by morning. I’d take

my German final—do the best I could—and then graduate on Saturday.

One of the firefighters looked at Brenna’s forehead and arm and said she needed to go to the ER. “I can take her,” I said.

He shook his head. “You shouldn’t drive anywhere. An ambulance is on the way.”

Pastor Ron appeared. He greeted us and then went to speak with the chaplain.

“I killed them,” Brenna whispered.

I shook my head. “Stop it. They’re going to be okay.”

Another sheriff’s car arrived, and two officers approached us. “Which one of you was driving?”

“I was.” Brenna’s voice was steadier than I expected it to be.

“Can you tell us what happened?”

“No,” she said. “I mean, I’m not sure. I remember turning left onto Trillium Road. But then I think maybe I blacked out or was knocked out. I woke up, tried to wake up Mom and Dad, and then climbed out the window.”

The officer asked, “Was the window already down?”

Brenna squeezed her eyes shut and then opened them. “Dad must have had it down when they picked me up at the church. I didn’t roll it back up.”

“There’s damage to the back bumper,” the officer said. “Do you know anything about that?”

Brenna shook her head.

“Did something happen earlier in the evening?” the officer asked. “Or sometime recently to the rear of the car?”

Brenna looked at me.

I shrugged. “I didn’t notice anything when I left the house just after six.” I glanced at Brenna. “Was it okay when they picked you up at the church?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I didn’t see the back of the car.”
The officer asked, “How fast were you going?”

“I’m not sure.” Brenna drove like a grandma—more like a great-grandma. There was no way she was speeding.

“Did you swerve for anything? Maybe a deer?”

Brenna exhaled. “I can’t remember.”

Another siren wailed, followed by more lights coming up the lane. One ambulance. It might take a while for the other two to arrive.

The ambulance parked behind the fire truck. A moment later, an EMT walked toward us while the other two headed toward where the firefighters were gathered around Dad’s car. The sheriff pointed at Brenna. “This is Brenna Zimmerman. She has cuts, abrasions, and an injured arm.”

“Let’s take a look,” the EMT said. “Come back to the ambulance so we can clean you up.”

Brenna grabbed my hand with her good one. “Come with me,” she said.

“Of course.” I walked alongside her.

The EMT directed Brenna up the steps into the back of the ambulance, where she sat down on the gurney. I stayed below on the pavement, still wrapped in the blanket. The sheriff’s car was between me and Dad’s car, but I could see activity down in the ditch and took a step to the right. The firefighters had gotten the driver’s door open, and the passenger door behind it. The EMTs were reaching into the car.

The chaplain and Pastor Ron stood up the lane, talking. A car, its headlights blinding me, approached from the other direction. Squinting, I stepped back to the ambulance.

“Brenna? Ivy?” Gran appeared around the back of the ambulance, followed by Treva. “Are you two okay?” Even in

the dim light I could tell Gran was pale as a ghost, and her eyes were rimmed with red.

I nodded.

“Pastor Ron called,” Gran said. “I’m so sorry.”

Treva put her arms around me. She was taller than me too, although not as tall as Brenna, who had at least seven inches on me. And her hair was darker than mine, but not as dark as Brenna’s. “We’ll get through this,” she said. “That’s what Mom and Dad would want for us.”

Would. Past tense.

“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,” Gran said.

I cringed. I hated that verse. That’s what people quoted when Mom delivered a stillborn baby when I was eleven. That’s what people said when Papa died three years ago.

I pointed toward Dad’s car. “They’re getting Mom and Dad out right now.”

Gran shook her head. “They won’t until the coroner—”

“No,” I said it a second time, louder. Then again. “No! No! No!”

Treva held me tight.

Brenna stared at me from the gurney inside the ambulance. “I told you they were dead.”



Treva held my hair as I vomited into the ditch on the other side of the road. The emergency vehicles cast red and blue lights on the trees, and the night had fallen eerily quiet.

Gran stepped to my side. “I’m going to follow the ambulance into Oregon City to be with Brenna. I think once they stitch her forehead and set her arm, she’ll be able to come home.”

“No, you’re not feeling well.”

“I’m doing okay,” Gran said.

I heaved into the ditch again while Treva continued to hold my hair. When I’d finished, I wiped my mouth with the blanket that was still around my shoulders and turned back toward Gran. “Take Treva with you to the hospital.”

“I think I should stay with you.” Treva was the definition of an old soul. Even though she was the youngest, she always wanted to take care of the rest of us.

“No,” I answered. “Go with Gran.” Treva had her learner’s permit and was a good driver. She had turned sixteen three weeks ago and would get her license soon. “I’ll go home.”

Treva put her hand on my shoulder and said, “You shouldn’t be by yourself.”

“I’ll call Ellen. She’ll come stay with me until the three of you get back.”

Pastor Ron approached Gran. “Laurel, I can go down to the hospital and then bring Brenna home.”

“No,” Gran said. “I need to go.”

Pastor Ron wrapped an arm around her and pulled her close. “I’m so sorry.”

“I know,” Gran said. “It’s unbelievable.”

It was. Gran had lost her husband three years ago and now her only daughter—her only child—all as she battled cancer.

My knees began to shake.

“Text Ellen,” Treva said to me.

I pulled my phone from my back pocket.

Can you come to my house?

Ellen texted right back.

What’s up?

I’ll tell you when you get here.

It's late. We have a final in the morning.

I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important.

I waited a minute. When she didn't text back, I stuffed the phone back in my pocket.

Treva asked, "What did Ellen say?"

"She's on her way."