

LESLIE GOULD

A young woman with brown hair pulled back, wearing a white bonnet and a teal dress with white ribbons, is looking down thoughtfully. She is standing on a gravel path in a rural, Amish-style setting with green hills, a white house, and a red barn in the background. A horse-drawn carriage is visible on the path to the right.

THIS
PASSING
HOUR

AMISH MEMORIES

♦ *Two* ♦

Books by Leslie Gould

THE COURTSHIPS OF LANCASTER COUNTY

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A Patchwork Past

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AMISH MEMORIES

A Brighter Dawn

This Passing Hour

A M I S H M E M O R I E S

♦ *Two* ♦

THIS PASSING HOUR

L E S L I E G O U L D



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To my siblings,
Kathy, Kelvin, and Laurie.
Thank you for your care, love, and friendship
throughout my entire life.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

In our changing world nothing changes more than geography.

Pearl S. Buck

♦ 1 ♦

Brenna Zimmerman

OCTOBER 18, 2017

LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

I hated the apartment. The hum of the dishwasher. The smell of the new paint. The scratchy carpet. The straight-back chairs and rickety table in the dining room. My secondhand desk and office chair.

Ivy, my older sister by three years, had convinced me to move out of our Amish grandparents' farmhouse. We didn't have internet on the farm and had to do our coursework at the closest coffee shop, which closed at five. That was a problem for two college students.

I had hoped I was ready to move out.

I wasn't.

"You need to start thinking about more than yourself," Ivy said to me as I stared at my backpack on the table. "It's been over three years."

She didn't say *since Mom and Dad died*. She didn't have to.

“Remember what Chet told us at their service?”

I’d never forget. Chet was the principal of the high school where Dad had taught in Oregon. He’d told my sisters and me, *“I hope, in time, all three of you will follow your parents’ footsteps and serve others even more than you already are.”* Except I wasn’t serving anyone then, unlike my sisters. And I hadn’t served anyone since. Also unlike my sisters.

I chomped on my gum.

“You could start by taking Treva to the airport on Friday. That would be a really big help. I can’t skip class—and you don’t have class. Mammi said you could take off work.”

“I hate driving in Philadelphia.”

“It’s just to the airport. All you have to do is put the address in your phone.” Ivy put a hand on her hip. “You’re better at geography than any of us.”

Just because I have a thing for geography didn’t mean I liked driving anywhere near big cities. I didn’t like driving at all. I only did it because I had to.

“It’s time to step up,” Ivy said.

No doubt it was. I grabbed my backpack off the table and slung it over my shoulder. “I need to drop a box of china by the store before class starts.” Our paternal grandmother had an antique store where I worked. “Class is from ten to noon. It takes a half hour to get there, but with the stop by the store I need to leave now.” It was 8:45. I hated to be late for anything. I started toward the door.

“Brenna!” Ivy stomped after me—or tried to, but she was wearing fuzzy slippers, so her stomps were just little puffs on the carpeted floor. She was five inches shorter than I was, but I always felt as if she towered over me. “Will you take Treva?”

I opened the front door. “I’ll think about it.” I stepped out into the chilly morning, grateful I’d put tights on under

my denim skirt and wore my puffy jacket. I headed toward Mom's van in the parking lot. I'd inherited it when Ivy drove her old clunker Camry out from Oregon the summer before.

I had two goals in life, and serving others, even though it was a foundation of our Mennonite church, wasn't one of them. My goals were to somehow figure out how to create a life for myself and to be a functional adult. I had no expectations of actually being successful at either.

My phone dinged. I stopped at the back of the van and pulled it from the pocket of my jacket. *Johann*. I smiled as I read his message.

At work. I hope your classes go well today!

He was eight hours ahead of us, which would become seven after the time change.

Dyakuyu, I texted back. He was teaching me Ukrainian, which was complicated because it used the Cyrillic alphabet, although one slightly different than Russians used, instead of the Latin alphabet. There was a Ukrainian Latin alphabet, a transliteration. Johann was using that to teach me so I could learn vocabulary and pronunciation. Then we would concentrate on the Cyrillic spellings.

I headed around the side of the van to the driver's door.

"Hey!" a man yelled. "You!"

I opened the door, certain he wasn't talking to me.

"Hey! Girl! With the thing on your head."

Maybe he *was* talking to me. My Mennonite prayer covering might seem like a "thing" to someone who didn't know better.

I stepped to the back of the van and turned toward the voice. It belonged to a man standing next to a pickup. I recognized him. "Rylan Sanders."

He leaned against his cane. “You know my name?”

I nodded, feeling a little creepy. I’d noticed him the first day of class and every class since. He looked the way I’d often felt in the past—anxious. One time the professor accidentally knocked a book off his table, and it made a loud pop as it hit the linoleum floor. I jumped—but Rylan jumped even more. After he realized what had happened, he ducked his head for at least five minutes. I’d also noticed that Rylan was thin and had a noticeable limp. I couldn’t help but wonder what happened to his leg. I guessed a car accident or something.

Today, he wore a black down jacket, a beanie over his short hair, and sports pants. “You’re in my information security class, right? On Mondays and Wednesdays?”

“Yes. I’m in your Tuesday and Thursday class too. I’m Brenna Zimmerman.”

“Got it,” he said. “I’ve noticed you. Probably—” He nodded toward me. “Because of that thing on your head.”

“It’s a *Kapp*,” I said. “A prayer covering.”

He shrugged. “So, do you drive that van?”

“Yes.”

He gestured toward his pickup with his free hand. “It won’t start.”

I paused a moment. *Serve others*. Ivy was right. I needed to stop thinking about myself all the time. Here was my chance to help someone else—even though I hated to give people rides. It made me nervous. “I can take you to class, although I only have the one today.”

He smiled. “Same.”

“Hop in.” I winced. That was a stupid thing to say.

“Thank you.” He came around the back of the pickup. “I’ll get my buddies to look at my truck.”

I was relieved to hear that he had buddies. At least he

wasn't without some sort of support. That had made all the difference for me. There were times when my family and community seemed suffocating, but I'd be lost without them.

He turned toward the passenger side of his vehicle and opened the door. Then he leaned his cane against the side and pulled a backpack out of the front seat.

I hit the unlock button on the fob in my hand and started toward the driver's door of the van, taking a few deep breaths. I expected the ride to be awkward—everything I did was awkward. My therapist advised me to embrace the awkwardness and not try to change it. *Just be your awkward self* had become one of my many mantras.

Rylan came around the passenger side of the van, opened the sliding door and swung his backpack onto the floor, and then climbed into the passenger seat, positioning his cane to the right of his legs.

I fastened my seatbelt and turned on the engine. I decided not to go by Mammi's store before class. I'd go after. I didn't want to chance being late.

Before I put the car into drive, I thought through arriving at the college, just as I thought through the details of everything. Every errand. Every class. Every trip. Every workday at Mammi's antique store. Every social event, which were nearly nonexistent.

I would drop Rylan off and then park.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked.

"Your seatbelt."

He didn't move. "Are you a mother or something?"

"Fasten it." I knew what happened when seatbelts *were* fastened. I didn't want to imagine what might happen if one *wasn't*.

“Yes, ma’am.” He did as he was told, and I backed out of the space.

Neither of us spoke. After what seemed like an hour but was only a few minutes, I turned west onto Highway 30 and headed toward the city of Lancaster.

Ivy had chosen the apartment in the village of Gap because it was about twenty miles to the community college to the west and fifty miles to her graduate program in Philadelphia to the east. Mammi’s store, on Dawdi’s farm, was less than ten miles to the northwest.

There was an openness to Lancaster County that I found inspiring. It wasn’t like the vast openness of Utah and Wyoming that gave me fits of anxiety on our trip east. That was a sort of gloomy openness. This was an ordered openness of manicured farms and managed spaces. It was different than the foothills of Mount Hood, where I grew up, which were full of gullies and ravines and forests. That was a landscape that was gloomy in its own way with the constant shadows from the trees along the roadways.

Lancaster County was the antidote to that with its patchwork fields. Add the covered bridges, the white rail fences, and the changing leaves of October and the landscape was as much a work of art as an Amish quilt.

Once we were on the highway, Rylan said, “I didn’t think Amish people drove.”

“I’m Mennonite.” I pointed to my head as I kept my eyes on the road and my speed at fifty miles per hour in the fifty-five miles per hour zone. “This is a Mennonite Kapp. The Amish ones are heart shaped.” I sometimes wore heart-shaped Kapps at Mammi’s store if I was wearing an Amish dress and apron too.

“So Mennonites drive?”

“Most of us do.”

“Weird,” he said. “Although—” he grinned at me—“you’re not as weird as I’d expected.”

It seemed he thought I might take it as a compliment. I didn’t.



I dropped Rylan off as close to the building as possible.

He climbed out of the van, opened the sliding door, and retrieved his backpack. Then, before closing the door, he said, “I’ll save you a seat.”

I wished he wouldn’t. He’d only prolong my awkwardness.

He slammed the door, stepped to the sidewalk, and then turned and waved. Then he pivoted and started toward the building. I couldn’t tell what was wrong with his leg by watching him walk. Perhaps it was a bad break that didn’t heal correctly. Or even a bad hip.

When I reached the classroom, Rylan was in his usual place in the middle of the room. He turned, grinned, waved, and then pointed at the chair beside him. My face grew warm, even though it was cold inside. Two girls between Rylan and me turned to see who he was waving at. When they realized it was me, one of them frowned and the other laughed. They both turned around and faced the front of the classroom again.

“Brenna!” Rylan called out. “Down here.”

I started toward him, clutching my backpack. He put his hand on the plastic chair next to him as I approached. “Sit here.” He grinned.

I froze for a moment. His grin caught me off guard. It

seemed so genuine, as if he were truly happy to see me. Not many people were.

I sat down. As I extended my leg, I bumped his foot. “Sorry,” I said.

He smiled a little. “I didn’t feel it.”

My face grew warmer. I wriggled out of my coat, pulled my notebook and textbook from my bag, and then asked Rylan if he was majoring in computer information security.

He nodded. “You?”

“Yes, but I’ve been taking business classes too.” I paused a moment and said, “I don’t remember seeing you last year.”

“I finished up a paralegal program a couple of years ago,” he said. “Then I started online classes in IS last year. I’ll finish this program in the spring.”

Two associate degrees. Maybe he could combine them. I was about to ask if he planned to work as a paralegal or just in IS or in both when the instructor arrived, plopped a stack of books and papers on the front table, and then logged into the computer and pulled up his slideshow.

“Good morning.” He began the class without any chit-chat. He was all business, thankfully.

I took notes. Rylan opened his binder and jotted down the date but didn’t write anything else. Maybe he was one of those people who remembered everything. I, on the other hand, had to write everything down—notes were like a map of the class. I’d be lost without them.

When the instructor dismissed us for a fifteen-minute break, I headed down the hall to the restroom. The two girls who’d stared at me earlier peered in the mirror. Both had long, straight hair.

“How do you know Rylan?” the taller one asked.

“I don’t.” I stepped into the last stall.

When I came out, they were still there.

“I knew him before he went to Afghanistan,” the shorter one said. “His girlfriend was friends with my oldest sister.”

“Oh.” I concentrated on washing my hands. I hadn’t thought he might be a soldier—or was. Johann served in the Ukrainian army for eighteen months, and I was grateful every day that he came through it. Johann told me that his fellow Ukrainians were grateful to him for his service, and many went out of their way to show appreciation. Perhaps I could do the same for Rylan.

“It looks like you know him,” the other girl said.

I flicked the water from my hands and grabbed a paper towel. “I gave him a ride to class today,” I said. “That’s all.” After I dropped the towel in the garbage can, I spit out my gum and then pushed through the door.

“Not very friendly, is she?” the second girl murmured.

I hesitated a moment but then continued. Gran told me once that what other people thought of me was none of my business, which wasn’t really advice I needed.

Ivy always had a bad case of FOMO—fear of missing out. I had a bad case of the opposite—JOMO—joy of missing out. The less I interacted with other people, the better.



After the class ended, I told Rylan I could give him a ride home, but I needed to stop by my grandmother’s store first. “Is that all right?” I asked.

“Yeah, that’s cool,” he said.

“If you need to get home right away, the two girls who are sitting behind us said they know you. They might be able to give you a ride.”

He scowled and turned to look at them. “I don’t know them.”

“The short one said her sister was friends with your girlfriend.”

He didn’t respond at first. Finally, he said, “I don’t remember her. But there’s a lot I don’t remember.”

Ten minutes later, I was driving toward the farm. I slowed for an Amish buggy with several children peering out the back at us. I waved. The children grinned and wildly waved in response.

Rylan laughed and then said, “I get so tired of driving around those buggies.”

I didn’t answer. I never got tired of seeing Amish families out and about, but my current worst fear was accidentally hitting a buggy. Especially one filled with children. Driving in Amish country was a big responsibility. “Did you grow up in Lancaster County?” I asked Rylan.

“Nah. I grew up in Ohio. But not in Amish country.”

“What brought you here?”

“An army buddy.” Rylan turned his head and stared out the passenger window for a few minutes, but then he asked, “Why are you always chewing gum?”

I must have been smacking it without realizing it. According to Ivy, I did that a lot. “My mouth gets dry.”

“Oh.”

I braced myself for more questions, but they didn’t come. The antidepressants I took made my mouth dry, but they were worth it. They didn’t make me exactly functional, but they did help me to cope with daily life, along with therapy. Although I hadn’t gone for the last six months. When I did go, it was to Edenville Behavioral Health, a place that worked with Mennonite and Amish people specifically. Rosene knew

about it, and Ivy made my first appointment and drove me the first year we lived in Lancaster County. Soon after that, I got my license and started driving myself.

Rylan and I rode in silence, but I was feeling quite accomplished to be driving a stranger. I was serving someone else. Ivy would be proud.

I turned into the parking lot of Mammi's store, Amish Antiques, built nearly a hundred years ago on the edge of the Zimmerman family farm. It was a wood building with boards that had to be stained every other year and a plank porch that was about a foot off the ground.

"Wait," Rylan said. "You work here?"

I nodded.

"Your grandmother is the Amish lady?"

"Jah." I opened my door as Mammi's buggy turned into the parking lot. The day had grown warm. I inhaled the earthy scent of hay drying in the field behind the shop. "Stay here. I'll be right back."

"I thought you said you're Mennonite," Rylan said.

"I am. My grandparents are Amish." I gestured toward Mammi and her buggy. "That's my grandmother."

"Weird," he said.

I slammed the door shut and hurried to the back of the van for the china. I picked up the box, balanced it on the back bumper, and pulled the hatch down. As I did, one of the barn cats—a longhaired gray, one of many—slinked around my ankles.

Mammi climbed down from the buggy and tied her horse's reins to the hitching post in front of the shop. "I thought you were going to bring the china earlier."

"I intended to," I said. "Why do you have the buggy?"

"Gabe's van broke down on the way to work, so I needed

to make a delivery.” Mammi wore her work coat over her cape dress and apron and a black bonnet over her white Kapp. “I’m just dropping off some paperwork before I unhitch the horse.” She had a file tucked under her arm.

As she held the door, I followed her into the shop as the collection of clocks all chimed the half hour, feeling as if someone was staring at us. I’m sure Rylan was. And probably the gray cat that had followed me up onto the porch too.

The smell of Mammi’s store always calmed me. The wood floor was scrubbed with a special soap that made the whole place smell clean and fresh. She—well, usually me—rubbed the old oak counter with lemon oil every week. Mammi had set up the business like an old-fashioned store, with shelves and drawers behind the counter, quilts on the wall, and a woodstove in the back, surrounded by chairs.

Mammi sold dining room table sets, bureaus and dressers, kerosene lamps and lanterns, old washboards and irons, sets of china and lone dishes, silver and Depression glass, old sewing machines and wringer washers, linens, and quilts. And clocks. Lots of clocks. Cuckoo clocks. Mantel clocks. Grandfather clocks. Mechanical wall clocks. All of them chimed, and the mandate was that they all chimed in unison, which was pretty much impossible to achieve.

A portion of the merchandise came from estate sales and yard sales, although some of the items—including most of the clocks—were new. Each antique that came through the shop was cleaned and refurbished with oil or re-stained or treated or painted however it needed to be. Lots of the people in Lancaster County came to Mammi first with their family items, knowing she’d give the best price possible. Both tourists and locals alike frequented the shop.

Tourists loved it because it was like stepping back in his-

tory. Our great-great-grandmother, Monika Kaufman Zimmerman, started the store in the 1920s as a mercantile. She was Mennonite and grew up in Germany. Her oldest daughter, Clare, married an Amishman—Jeremiah Zimmerman—and they inherited the farm and store. Clare ran the store until her daughter-in-law—my Mammi—took it over in the 1970s and turned it into an antique shop. Now, she wanted it to be mine someday. In fact, she was training me to manage it.

I put the box on the counter as Gabe appeared with the feather duster in his hand. He wore trousers, a white shirt, and suspenders. His sandy hair was cut short, but not in a bowl cut. Which gave away that he wasn't really Amish.

Except not to the tourists. Most of them didn't know little details like that. Mammi liked us to dress Plain when we worked in the shop.

Gabe dropped the duster on the counter. "I tried to call you like ten times."

I patted the jacket of my coat for my phone, which I had on silent, and then pulled it out. "Three times," I said. "Not ten."

He rolled his eyes. "I wanted to get the china cleaned up. The customer is stopping by in an hour."

"Well"—I opened the box as I spoke—"you can do it now." Gabe was the younger brother of Ivy's boyfriend, Conrad, which made Gabe like the annoying younger brother I never had. Except he wasn't younger than me. He was two years older. Regardless, he was annoying.

"Who's in the van?" Mammi asked.

"A guy from class." I turned toward the door. "He lives in our apartment building."

Mammi scowled. She'd been absolutely against us getting

an apartment. It made no sense to her when there was plenty of room in the farmhouse.

“He’s harmless. I’m just helping him out today. That’s why I couldn’t bring the china earlier.” I headed toward the door, and both Mammi and Gabe followed me. As I stepped outside onto the porch, the first thing I noticed was that Rylan wasn’t in the van. I looked to my right and then quickly to the left. He was nowhere to be seen.

I yelled, “Rylan? Where are you?”

“Back here.” His voice came from behind the building. I jumped off the end of the porch and walked around the side of the building. Mammi and Gabe didn’t follow. I guessed they were headed through the store to the back door.

There was a rickety staircase in the back that led to an upper storeroom, where the view of the farm and the surrounding land was fantastic. Several years ago, according to Mammi, a young couple had climbed past the *Do Not Enter* sign and were sitting on the stairs, taking selfies. When Mammi came out the back door, they’d asked her to take a photo of the two of them on the woman’s phone. I could only imagine what Mammi said in response.

After that, Dawdi made a bigger sign that read *Private! Do Not Enter!* and bought a bright yellow rope as a barricade. Recently, even though the staircase was roped off, Dawdi realized it had deteriorated more and had ordered lumber to repair it. But it hadn’t been delivered yet.

“Rylan?” I called out as I rounded the corner. As I feared, he stood on the first landing of the staircase, about five feet off the ground. The rope was on the ground, and I didn’t see the sign anywhere. The gray cat sat on the bottom step.

He turned toward me and leaned his back against the railing as Mammi and Gabe came out the back door.