

LESLIE GOULD

A woman in profile, wearing a white bonnet and a blue dress with a dark vest, stands in a field. The background shows a sunset over a landscape with a barn and a silo in the distance. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue.

BY
EVENING'S
LIGHT

AMISH MEMORIES

♦ *Three* ♦

Books by Leslie Gould

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OF LANCASTER COUNTY

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A Brighter Dawn

This Passing Hour

By Evening's Light

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

◆ *Three* ◆

BY
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LIGHT

L E S L I E G O U L D



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To Natasha Kern,
agent and friend, thank you.

Brighter days are sweetly dawning,
Oh, the glory looms in sight!
For the cloudy day is waning,
And the evening shall be light.

From the hymn “The Evening Light”
by Daniel S. Warner (1885)

Treva Zimmerman

MARCH 26, 2019

LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

After six months on a mission trip, I was back in Lancaster County.
But not for long.

Tears blurred my vision. Both the white house and red barn seemed to have grown larger since I'd left. So had the green pastures. Even my beloved cows seemed bigger.

"I can't come in." Ivy turned toward me. "I have a client to go see." My eldest sister was a social worker for an elder-care company. "But Conrad and I will come for dinner."

"Thank you for the ride." I opened the passenger door of her twenty-year-old Toyota Corolla, which was my age. Well, almost. I would turn twenty-one on the fourth of June.

As I climbed out and pulled my bag from the back seat, Ivy turned and smiled. "Treva, I'm glad you're home. I really missed you."

Home.

“Thanks.” Perhaps she’d just been preoccupied on the drive from Philadelphia—she wasn’t her usual chatty self. Then again, neither was I. But I’d need to update her about my life and plans sometime soon. Maybe I could set up a call with the two of us and our sister Brenna, who was living in Ukraine. “See you tonight,” I said as I slammed the door.

I inhaled the scent of our family farm. The dairy barn. The alfalfa. The plowed field. It was the smell of hope, even on a cold day. I slung my duffel bag over my shoulder and took another deep breath. And the smell of home.

Exhausted, I trudged toward the back door of the house. A cold rain began to fall. I tried to quicken my step, but my bag weighed me down. Six months on a mission trip in Haiti had aged me by six years. I needed a few nights of solid sleep, and then I’d break it to my family that I was going to take a job in Alaska.

I’d always been the homebody. And the compliant one. The peacemaker. The sister who didn’t want to cause any problems. I couldn’t be that girl any longer.

The *Dawdi Haus* was to my left and the barn to my right. I kept my eyes on the farmhouse as I started up the steps. The kitchen was Rosene’s domain. I hoped she was waiting for me.

After kicking off my shoes on the porch and hanging up my jacket, I dragged my duffel bag into the kitchen.

It was eleven thirty, almost time for lunch. A pot of soup simmered on the burner. Two fresh loaves of bread cooled on the counter.

Tears threatened again.

“Treva! Is that you?” Rosene came around the corner from the hallway. She smiled and opened her arms. “You’re home!”

I dropped my bag and ran toward her tiny frame. She hugged me tight and held on for a long minute.

Finally, she released me. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

She seemed even smaller than she’d been when I left.

“How are you?” she asked.

I swallowed hard, and tears flooded my eyes.

“Trevi? What’s wrong?”

“I’m tired is all,” I answered.

“How about a shower before we eat?” She gestured toward the table. “Arden and Priscilla”—my *Mammi* and Dawdi—“will be ready for lunch in a half hour. Afterward, you can take a nap. Your room is ready.”

“*Denki*,” I said. “A shower is just what I need. And then a nap. In fact . . .” I hesitated for a moment. “I think I’ll skip lunch.” I’d flown a budget airline with a nine-hour layover in New York. I was exhausted. “Please tell Mammi and Dawdi I’ll be down after I get some sleep.”

Rosene’s eyes widened. “Are you feeling all right?”

I wasn’t. But I didn’t say that. “I’m fine. Just tired.”

“That’s understandable,” she said. “I’ll tell your grandparents. Get some rest.”

As I walked through the living room, Mammi’s cuckoo clock chimed the half hour. Our grandmother in Oregon had an identical one that Mammi had given her years ago. Tears sprung to my eyes as my grief threatened to bubble out of me.

I took a long, hot shower. My showers in Haiti had been cold and infrequent, and they’d involved a bucket to catch the runoff to later use to flush the toilet. As tired as I was, I had to force myself to turn off the shower. I put on a pair of sweats that smelled freshly washed, climbed between the clean sheets and under the double wedding ring quilt on my bed, and let my head sink into the feather pillow.

I'd met Pierre in Oregon over a year ago at Christmastime. He was close to our family friends Brooke and Daniel, who served in Haiti as missionaries. He was also friends with Ivy from when she volunteered in Haiti seven years ago, and with our middle sister, Brenna, too, from a Mennonite Global Gathering she and Ivy attended in Germany five years ago. Pierre was four years older than I was and had huge responsibilities when it came to his family and community. His father had been injured in the 2010 earthquake. He had four younger siblings. He worked at the orphanage where I volunteered. His community was overrun by gangs.

While I was in Haiti, I'd suggested he apply for asylum in the US. He'd responded with, *"And never be able to return to Haiti? Maybe my sisters and brother would be able to come to the US someday, but not my parents. How could I live the rest of my life without ever seeing them again?"*

I'd hoped he would do it for me, but I had no idea what I was asking of him.

Pierre spoke softly, his French accent thicker than usual. *"Do you know how many Haitians are denied asylum in the US each year?"*

I shook my head.

"Thousands," he said. *"Thousands and thousands and thousands. More than from any other country. Considering how long and how often the US has interfered in our lives, it seems your government would be more welcoming. But they're not. And this is a particularly difficult time."*

I'd been so naïve when I went to Haiti. About Pierre. About his life. About the work I'd do. It was harder than I'd expected—and more rewarding.

But mostly harder. Sparks had flown between Pierre and me in Oregon, and again when I arrived in Haiti. At first,

I'd imagined us marrying and me staying in Haiti. But after a couple of months, I knew I couldn't make my home there.

Brooke and Daniel decided not to stay either. Too many kidnappings and shootings. Too much instability when it came to supplies and health care. Instead, they decided to raise money to continue the work of the orphanage and hire Pierre to manage it.

I rolled over to my side as my tears started again. Everyone saw me as an old soul and a caretaker of others. I was "beyond my years." Ivy and Brenna saw me as relaxed and easy-going, which I was, compared to them. I'd always tried to be low-key and not take up a lot of space, but I behaved that way even more after our parents were killed in a car accident five years ago, just after I'd turned sixteen. I figured everyone had enough to deal with without me adding to their stress. I wanted to make life easier on Gran, our mom's mother, and Dawdi and Mammi, our dad's parents. And my sisters. I willed myself to accept our parents' death. I wouldn't take up time going through the stages of grief. I'd be strong for everyone else.

One time, Rosene told me that denial and acceptance looked a lot alike on the outside. I was beginning to see her point.

Yes, I was grieving my relationship with Pierre, grieving him. But even more so, I was grieving my parents. It was as if a dam had been breached. I couldn't seem to stop the tears I'd suppressed for the last five years.



I slept until 5:15, awakening to the smell of roasting chicken. My stomach growled as I crawled out of bed. I'd missed the milking. And closing the store. And helping with dinner. I groaned. I hadn't meant to sleep so long.

I contemplated putting on one of my Amish dresses but decided to stay in my sweats. Mammi preferred I wear a dress. I figured she'd care, but I doubted if she'd say anything tonight. And as soon as I told them I was leaving again, it wouldn't matter.

I put my hair in a ponytail and twisted it into a bun on top of my head. Then I headed to the bathroom to splash cold water on my face. As I suspected, my reflection showed red and puffy eyes. I splashed more cold water on my face, patted it dry, and then shuffled down the staircase. As I neared the bottom step, Ivy said, "She seemed really quiet this morning." I stopped as Ivy asked, "Did she open up to you about what's going on?"

"*Nee*," Rosene said.

Ivy added, "I had a text from Pierre that he was really sad to see her leave."

I expected her to say more, but Rosene asked her to fill the water pitcher. The conversation shifted to dinner. I could recognize Rosene's move to change the topic—one she used whenever she feared a conversation had taken a turn toward gossip.

As I entered the kitchen, Rosene said, "There she is. How was your nap?"

"Good," I answered. "Supper smells great."

Rosene smiled. "It's your welcome home dinner. We'll eat in fifteen minutes."

"What can I do?"

"Why don't you see if you can help Priscilla finish up in the store? She must be running late. Conrad went out to help Arden."

I'd much rather help in the barn, but I'd do what Rosene asked. I stepped out onto the porch to put my shoes on.

Ivy said, “See what I mean? She’s definitely not her chipper—”

I closed the door behind me.

A half hour later, we were seated around the kitchen table, passing around roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans, applesauce, and homemade rolls. Mammi had more wrinkles around her mouth, and Dawdi had more gray in his beard. Both seemed a little more stooped over.

“I hope you didn’t tire yourself out cooking,” Mammi said to Rosene.

“Not at all,” she answered. But she looked tired.

“I’ll clean up,” Ivy said.

“I’ll help,” I quickly added.

The conversation turned toward my time in Haiti. It wasn’t as if I hadn’t talked with everyone on the phone once a week, so nothing I had to say was new. I answered questions as succinctly as I could until Ivy asked, “When do you plan to return?”

“I don’t plan to.”

“Oh. I thought you would.”

I turned toward Conrad. “How is Gabe doing?” He was Conrad’s little brother and had worked for both Dawdi and Mammi for years. He’d joined the Army Reserve and had been deployed to a US Army base in Kuwait with his unit a few months ago.

Conrad spread butter on his roll. “Okay, I think. He’s not very talkative.”

I asked, “Is he happy to be there?”

Conrad shook his head. “I don’t think so. In fact, I think the whole Army Reserve thing turned out to be a lot harder than he anticipated.”

That sounded like my experience in Haiti.

Ivy cleared her throat and asked, "So you and Pierre aren't a couple?"

After swallowing my water, and trying not to choke, I answered, "No. It didn't work out. He doesn't intend to leave Haiti."

"Oh," Ivy said. "I thought he would."

I shook my head.

Ivy stared at me. "So what's next?"

"Staying here, I hope," Dawdi said.

Mammi gave me a pleading look.

It seemed Rosene was trying to appear neutral.

I shrugged. I'd rather tell Ivy and Brenna at the same time than make an announcement now. I pulled my fork through my mashed potatoes. On the other hand, the longer I waited to tell Mammi, Dawdi, and Rosene, the more awkward my announcement would be. "I met a couple from Alaska who volunteered at the orphanage in January and February—I think I mentioned them. Misty and Shawn Wright."

Everyone nodded.

"They own a resort in Alaska." It was called the Resort of the Midnight Sun, which I thought sounded enchanting. "They have a restaurant but also host events throughout the summer—weddings, reunions, and some conferences. That sort of thing." Misty and Shawn's daughter, Lindsay, was getting married in early May. I was excited to help with that event in particular. "They've offered me a job as an event planner."

Ivy's jaw literally dropped, and then she said, "But you're not taking it, right?"

Part of me wanted to hedge, to say, *I'm thinking about it*. But that wasn't an honest answer. It would only delay the inevitable.

“No, I am going to take it.” I spoke as confidently as I could. “I start April fifteenth.”

Ivy sputtered, “That’s three weeks away.”

“Eighteen days,” I said.

Mammi gasped.

Ivy crumpled her napkin in her fist. “You don’t know anything about event planning.”

“I do. I planned our events in Haiti. That’s why Misty asked me. She said I have a gift for planning and coordinating—for bringing people together.”

Ivy shook her head. “That’s not the same.” Conrad put his hand on her arm. She ignored him. “You can’t. You just can’t.”

“I can.” I sat up as straight as I could. “And I will.”



The next morning, Dawdi was quiet while we did the milking. So was I as I concentrated on the cows. We didn’t have animals, except for dogs and cats, on our Christmas tree farm in Oregon. I found the cows magical in their relationships with one another and with humans too. They adored us. I’d missed them. It seemed like they’d missed me too, and several gave me extra love as they rubbed against me.

I enjoyed working on the farm the most out of the three of us girls. I was tall and had always been strong. Working on the farm had made me even stronger. I was also interested in what it took to run the dairy farm and manage the land. I found the work engaging.

As I looked around, I noticed that everything in the barn was up to code but not up to Dawdi’s high standards. Obviously having Gabe and me both gone had taken a toll. “Have you hired someone to help?” I asked.

“*Jah*, several times,” he answered. “I just can’t manage to find anyone who stays for long.” He gave me a woeful smile. “And then I stopped looking when you said you were coming home.”

Ouch. I tried to return the smile but failed.

I stepped into the milk room for the bottles Dawdi had already filled and then out to the calf pens on the grassy east side of the barn. With sixty cows in the herd, we averaged five calves a month—unless a cow had twins. We raised the calves in the pens with a hutch for shelter and hand-fed them for a month, until they were ready to join the herd.

The entire process on a dairy farm involved a lot of planning, record keeping, and detailed scheduling, along with an understanding of science and health codes. The results, besides our endless supply of milk, were female calves to carry on the herd, while the males were sold. Some of the female calves were too, depending on how many cows we needed to replace in a year.

Running a dairy farm was a three-hundred-sixty-five-days-a-year, twenty-four-hours-a-day job. The milking had to be done. Calves had to be pulled in the middle of the night. Feed had to be grown. The horses had to be fed and groomed. All the animals needed veterinary care. It was an endless and often thankless job. But I loved it.

At least I had.

I fed two calves at once, standing between the pens with a bottle in each hand held through the wire pen. They butted against the bottle, jarring my arms and making me feel even more connected to them. It was one of my favorite tasks on the farm.

Once we finished the milking, we tackled sterilizing the

milk room. When we were almost done, the barn phone rang in the office.

Dawdi had his hands deep in hot water. “Would you get that? I’m expecting a call from the feed store.”

“Sure.” I figured it would probably go to voicemail before I could answer, but I hustled around the corner to the office anyway. I snatched the phone off the receiver and said, a little out of breath, “Hello. Zimmerman farm. How may I help you?”

“Hallo. This is Herr Mayer of Frankfurt, Germany. May I please speak with Rosene Simons?” He spoke with a clipped accent and sounded super serious.

“Yes,” I said. “May I ask what this is about?” If it was bad news, perhaps it would be better if I told Rosene.

“I must speak with Rosene Simons,” he answered.

“All right. Hang on. It will take me a few minutes to get her.” I put the phone down on the desk and jogged to the milk room to tell Dawdi the call was from a man in Germany and was for Rosene. “I’ll go get her,” I said.

He seemed concerned and began peeling off his rubber gloves.

I returned a few minutes later with Rosene. She strode into the office and picked up the phone. “Hallo.” Then she began speaking in rapid German. I had no idea what she was saying. Neither did Dawdi, who stood in the doorway beside me.

The conversation continued, and Dawdi wandered back to the milk room. Finally, Rosene said, “*Auf Wiedersehen*,” and ended the call. She turned toward me, looking distressed.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“I’ve had some bad news.” As she took a step toward me, she stumbled.

I hurried toward her but not fast enough. She stumbled

again and then fell, first to her knees and then onto her side, landing on her left arm.

“Rosene!” I exclaimed as I kneeled beside her.

“Oh dear.” Rosene sat up. “How clumsy of me.” She held her left arm with her right hand.

“Did you hurt yourself?”

“I don’t think so.” She placed her right hand on the floor and started to push herself up.

“Wait! I need to get Dawdi. Stay right there.”

“I’m fine.”

I put my hand on her shoulder. “No. You need to stay put. Humor me.”

She patted my hand.

“Dawdi!” I called out as I stood and then ran toward the milk room. “Rosene fell! We need you.”

He stepped to the doorway. “What?”

“Rosene fell.”

He hurried after me to the office.

Rosene still sat on the floor where I left her, her face turned toward the door. “I’m fine,” she said. “My knees are sore, and I also landed on my arm.” She rubbed it. “It’s sore too.”

I took my phone out of my sweatshirt. “I’m going to call for an ambulance.”

Rosene shook her head. “There’s no need for that.” She reached out her right hand for Dawdi to pull her to her feet.

Dawdi stepped closer but didn’t take her hand. “How about if I stand behind you and lift you up? That’s not as abrupt as pulling you.”

Rosene nodded.

Dawdi put his hands under Rosene’s arms and lifted her slowly. She stood. He let go of her, and she began to sway, clutching her arm.

I said, "I'm calling 9-1-1."

"No," Rosene said. "Take me to the urgent care."

"Dawdi?" I asked.

"I think that's a good plan," he said. "I'll ride along."

Twenty minutes later, we arrived at the urgent care on the edge of Lancaster in the van that I'd inherited from Brenna, that used to be our mother's. Rosene had grown even more pale and hunched over. Thankfully, one of the doctors could see her right away. Dawdi went with her while I stayed in the waiting room.

After ten minutes, he came out and said, "It's her heart. An ambulance is on the way."

