

UNFORGOTTEN

SHELLEY  
SHEPARD GRAY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Books by Shelley Shepard Gray

---

A SEASON IN PINECRAFT

*Her Heart's Desire*

*Her Only Wish*

*Her Secret Hope*

*Unforgiven*

*Unforgotten*

# UNFORGOTTEN



**SHELLEY  
SHEPARD GRAY**



**Revell**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2024 by Shelley Shepard Gray

Published by Revell  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
RevellBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gray, Shelley Shepard, author.

Title: Unforgotten / Shelley Shepard Gray.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2024.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024014222 | ISBN 9780800746032 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800746506 (cloth) | ISBN 9781493447190 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Amish—Fiction. | LCGFT: Christian fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3607.R3966 U55 2024 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20240408

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024014222>

Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation. Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover image of woman by Abigail Miles / Arcangel  
Cover design by Laura Klynstra

The Author is represented by The Seymour Agency.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and postconsumer waste whenever possible.

For Lesley,  
who not only lights up every room  
but also my heart.

Lesley, here's a Kentucky book for you.

Though they stumble, they will never fall,  
for the LORD holds them by the hand.

*Psalm 37:24*

Find some good in everyone.  
Perhaps everyone will find some good in you too.

*Amish proverb*

# 1



## July

**W**onders never ceased. Bethanne Hostetler had seen a lot of things and had even experienced some pretty good surprises. That said, the scene playing out in front of her was like nothing she'd ever imagined.

For sure and for certain.

Right there, up on the fairground amphitheater's stage, stood her cousin Candace. Her dark blond hair hung in curls down her back and shone in the sunlight. Eyeliner and mascara accentuated her hazel eyes, and tinted gloss stained her lips, making her naturally lovely face even more beautiful. As the crowd clapped, Candace stood as still as a department store mannequin, her scoop-necked, emerald-green satin gown hugging her hips before flowing softly around her legs. The toe of one of her silver, high-heeled sandals peeked out whenever a faint breeze caught the dress's hem.

All in all, Candace looked nothing like the little girl who used to follow Bethanne around during holiday get-togethers years ago.

Honestly, some folks might even say that Candace Evans

was the complete opposite of her Amish cousin Bethanne Hostetler.

They might be right too.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s give these ladies one final round of applause while they exit the stage,” the announcer called out on his microphone. “But don’t y’all go anywhere. We’ll announce this year’s Miss Crittenden County in just a few minutes!”

Applause and cheers rang out from all around. In response, all seven women on the stage moved to stand side by side. They held hands and smiled.

Every one of them was pretty and graceful. There was no doubt about that. But as Bethanne gazed at each one, she couldn’t help but think that not a one could hold a candle to Candace. Not only was she gorgeous, she was as sweet as spun sugar.

When Candace caught her eye, Bethanne waved and smiled. Her brother, Lott, whistled from his place next to her. Candace’s beaming smile widened.

“What do you think her chances are?” Lott asked when the applause started to die down.

Bethanne shrugged. “About as good as anyone else’s, I reckon.”

He frowned. “Really?”

As the girls exited the stage in preparation for the judge’s final vote, Bethanne faced him. “Lott, you know this is the first beauty pageant I’ve ever been to. I’m still trying to wrap my head around the fact that my English cousin is up on the fairground’s stage wearing makeup and high heels. How would I know about her chances?”

“True. Candace sure is pretty, though.”

“Jah.” Bethanne smiled, though a part of her felt a pinch of melancholy. Once, she, too, had found comfort in the

gifts the Lord had given her. Even though her brown hair and matching eyes weren't as eye-catching as her cousin's, she'd always thought they suited her well enough. Now she believed her pleasing appearance hadn't served her very well.

Then again, maybe what had happened seven years ago had more to do with her actions than her appearance. One impulsive decision on her part had changed her life. Everyone might still say she was a victim, but Bethanne refused to believe that anymore.

Hating the dark thoughts that now threatened her happy mood, she rubbed the back of her neck. *Stay in the moment*, she reminded herself. *Stay right here, right now.*

Unfortunately, her counselor's words didn't do the trick. She sighed.

Lott noticed. "Do you have a headache again?"

"Nee, I'm just a little stiff," she fibbed. "I guess I've been sitting for too long."

"Jah. Me too." He glanced around for a few moments. "Hey, are you going to stay here for a little while?"

"Probably. At least until the winner's announced. Why?"

"No reason."

She knew better than that. "Lott."

"Fine. Melonie is here, and I wanted to walk around with her for a bit. You're welcome to join us, of course."

Bethanne smiled. Lott and his fiancée were a good match. He'd really changed his ways so Melonie Zimmerman—and her family—would allow their courtship. Now both families were waiting for them to decide on a wedding day.

Bethanne loved her brother and was very fond of Mel. But did that mean she wanted to walk around the fairgrounds with them, feeling like the third wheel? No. No, she did not. "Go ahead. I'll be fine."

“You sure?” He scanned the crowd again. “Mamm and Daed are around here somewhere. I thought they were going to sit with Candace’s parents, but I don’t know . . .”

“I’m sure they’re around, but I don’t need anyone to look after me. I’m fine.” Of course, she wasn’t exactly fine. She was currently on the verge of another panic attack. In spite of her best intentions, her smile trembled, betraying her emotions.

Holding her gaze, he sighed. “Bethy.”

“I’m fine. Really. I was thinking about something else.” She hated that her younger brother felt obligated to look after her. She also hated that until recently she would’ve clung to him like a parasitic vine. One day she was going to act like his older sister again. “Go. I’ll see you later.”

He didn’t move. “You know what? I can take Melonie out—”

“Right now,” she finished, her voice firm. Then seeing Melonie walking up the center aisle toward them, she shooed him with her hands. “There she is. Go. We can meet up later.”

Lott followed her gaze and waved at Melonie, then turned back to Bethanne. “Do you need me to accompany you home?”

“Nee. It’s not a long walk. I’ll be fine.”

“You sure?”

“More than sure.”

Her brother grinned. “I’ll see you later, then. Don’t forget to tell Candy congratulations for me.”

She laughed as he started toward Melonie. “If she wins, I sure will, but I won’t be calling her Candy. She hates that nickname.”

Feeling like an odd combination of wallflower and doting aunt, Bethanne watched her brother rush to Melonie. He

touched his fiancée's hand but refrained from clasping it. Within a minute they were out of sight.

Sitting back down on her chair, Bethanne placed her purse neatly on her lap. If it wouldn't look so odd, she would pull out her book. She always carried one with her, whether it was for pleasure or for her job as a reviewer for a local publishing company. Reading had been a favorite pastime for her, especially after what happened with Peter Miller and Seth.

Then about six months ago, she'd decided that some things about her life needed to change. She had to stop worrying about the past and start thinking about what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. She was only twenty-three. It was past time she got over Peter's death. And the fact that he'd attempted to rape her. And what happened to Seth Zimmerman when he came to her rescue. Why the Lord had allowed Seth to hit Peter hard enough for Peter to fall, hit his head, and die was a mystery. But it had happened, and she'd survived.

Like always, guilt slammed her. If she hadn't been so weak afterward, she would've convinced her parents to allow her to testify on Seth's behalf. She'd witnessed the fight, after all. But she hadn't done a thing to plead for mercy for Seth. So he'd spent two years in prison while she descended into a very dark place.

"If Seth Zimmerman can move forward, you certainly can too," she whispered to herself for not the first time. "You have to." Which meant that she needed to stop dwelling on bad memories. Her counselor had told her more than once that she needed to make peace with the past instead of trying to forget everything that had happened.

"Hey, Bethanne."

As Bethanne looked up, Jay Byler sat down—right next to her. “I thought it was you.”

Her whole body tensed even though Peter’s best friend had never done anything to harm her. “Why are you sitting here?” she hissed.

He had the nerve to look incredulous. “Do you mean I should be doing something other than waiting to see who’s crowned this year’s Miss Crittenden County?”

“Come on. You don’t care about such things.”

“How would you know what I care about? It isn’t as if you’ve given me more than a few minutes of your time these last few years.”

Even though his words were true, they still hurt. Everything about Jay made her hurt. Though tempted to stay silent, she wasn’t able to. “You know why.”

“Of course I know.” His voice softened. “But even though I know the reason you ignore me, it doesn’t mean it’s okay. It hurts.”

She shifted uncomfortably and looked away. His tone didn’t confirm whether he was being sincere or sarcastic.

“After all, we were once friends.”

Were they? She couldn’t remember much about their interactions beyond the obvious—that he’d been best friends with Peter and she’d almost been Peter’s girlfriend.

Hating that the dark memories threatened to overwhelm her again, she glared at him. “I don’t want to talk about you and me. Or our past. Ever.”

“Fine. Let’s talk about the beauty pageant.” He glanced at the mostly empty stage. “I know you’re rooting for your cousin, but who else do you think has a chance?”

Jay was as Amish as she was. Yet, here he was, wearing a straw hat over his light brown hair, blue trousers, and a short-sleeved white shirt, acting like he cared one whit about

such things. “Why are you so interested? Are you hoping to take one of the girls out?”

“Of course not.”

“Then?”

He pulled at the collar of his shirt. “You know putting me on the spot isn’t fair.” He exhaled. “Why is everything so difficult between us?”

“Because it is.”

“That’s not a reason.”

“Jay, please.”

“Nee. Bethanne, I’ve been trying to talk to you for a year. Longer even.” Frustration filled his tone. “But . . . every time I do, you run away like I’ve got the plague.”

“I’ve hardly been that bad.”

“Close, though.” Gentling his tone, he said, “Bethanne, please. I just want to be your friend again.”

“Why?”

His blue eyes blinked. “Why?”

“Jah. Why do you want to be my friend so badly? Why do you keep trying?” She stared at him, silently willing Jay to speak the truth. To give her something to use as ammunition against him. She needed it so she wouldn’t continue to think about how charming he was.

“Because you’re worth it.”

Her pulse seemed to slow. “Worth what?”

“Everything.”

*Everything?* She wanted to fume. To remind herself that she did not want to have anything to do with Jay. But her traitorous body disagreed. A flutter stirred deep inside her, but instead of being scary, it felt warm. Soothing. What did that even mean? In spite of her efforts to remain impervious, her guard fell.

And then, there she was, staring at him. No, gazing into his eyes.

A tiny look of triumph appeared in their depths. “See?” he whispered. “I’m not so—”

“Ladies and gentlemen, the judges have come to a decision!” the announcer called out. “Everyone, get on your feet and welcome these beautiful ladies back on stage!”

Bethanne stood, never so happy for the roar of a crowd.