

A woman in a green Amish dress with white ribbons is smiling and holding a large, golden-brown pie in a metal pan. The pie is decorated with a red ribbon. The background shows a kitchen with a window and shelves.

AN  
AMISH  
*Christmas*  
KITCHEN

*Three Novellas Celebrating  
the Warmth of the Season*

LESLIE GOULD  
JAN DREXLER  
KATE LLOYD

AN  
AMISH  
*Christmas*  
KITCHEN

*Three Novellas Celebrating  
the Warmth of the Holiday*



*An Amish Family Christmas*

BY LESLIE GOULD

*An Amish Christmas Recipe Box*

BY JAN DREXLER

*An Unexpected Christmas Gift*

BY KATE LLOYD



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*An Unexpected Christmas Gift* © 2019 by Kate Lloyd

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AN  
AMISH  
FAMILY  
*Christmas*



LESLIE GOULD

For my husband,  
Peter,  
who makes Christmas  
magical every year.

## CHAPTER ONE



The vase slipped through Noelle's hand and shattered on the *Kicha* floor.

Just as her heart had been broken.

"What was that?" *Dat* asked from his chair in the living room.

"Just an old vase." Noelle stared at the shards of red glass. "Nothing, really." The vase was a gift from Jesse King before he moved to Montana.

Just the night before, as Noelle moved the last of her things out of the *Dawdi Haus*, her oldest sister, Salome, said she'd heard Jesse had returned to Lancaster County from Montana. "He's hoping to get a job at the Christmas Market," Salome had said.

Noelle felt ill as she stepped around the glass and headed for the broom closet. After three years, just like that, Jesse King had returned.

After she dumped the glass in the trash, she returned to the boxes stacked on the counter. The next one was the set of china her parents had given her back when she was courting Jesse. She slammed the lid down. The box would go in the back of

her closet. She'd label it "Do Not Open Again." She moved on to a box of whisks, wooden spoons, and measuring cups.

The new house smelled of wood and fresh paint and the sweet creamsticks she'd just pulled out of the *Offa*, from a recipe that called for baking them instead of frying. She and Dat had their rooms set up, but she had a lot of unpacking to do in order to truly make it a home. And most importantly of all, she needed to get the kitchen set up. It had always been the heart of their home, and even though *Mamm* was now gone, that wouldn't change.

The Christmas Market, all five weeks of it, was the Schrock family's busiest time of the year. From March through the weekend before Thanksgiving, they participated in the Country Market on Saturdays, which was lucrative. But the Christmas Market, held at the same place and on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, brought in as much money as the other months combined. The family baked goods business had to go on, even though *Mamm* was no longer here to make sure it all ran smoothly.

It had been three months since *Mamm* died, and the grief was still as sharp as the broken glass. The pain hadn't lessened one bit; in fact, it had only grown stronger, much to Noelle's embarrassment. She'd been taught to accept the ways of God, to know He knew best with life and death. But every minute of the day, Noelle missed *Mamm*. It was the worst when she baked. She'd imagine *Mamm* beside her, her gray hair tucked under her *Kapp*, her wrinkled hands kneading bread dough, rolling out piecrusts, mixing fillings. The memories pierced her heart—but not enough to avoid baking. *Jah*, she missed *Mamm*, but she also felt her love and comfort the most clearly in the kitchen.

No doubt about it, she'd had one loss after another. *Mamm*'s stroke. Noelle's fight with Jesse. Jesse going to Montana. Jesse

staying in Montana. Her estrangement from her niece, Moriah. And then Mamm's death just before it was time to harvest the corn. At times, it all felt like too much.

Of course, she told others that she was doing fine. That God was in control. That she missed her Mamm, but the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

And if anyone asked, she said she was long over Jesse. She tried to convince herself of that too. But in truth, she doubted she ever would be. He'd hurt her too deeply.

Dat shuffled unsteadily toward her, his long white beard flowing over his belly. He carried his empty coffee cup in one hand, and she quickly took it from him.

"If only I would have known how much I was going to need you back when you were first born," he said.

Her Dat had a way of reminding Noelle, over and over, what a surprise she'd been nearly twenty-two years ago. Before she could form a reply, footsteps fell on the front porch and then a knock landed on the door.

She opened it to find her brother-in-law, Ted, leaning on his cane as a gust of icy wind assaulted her. Behind him, their Lancaster County farm looked like a Christmas greeting card, flocked in *Shnay*, as the first rays of light fell over the landscape. It was Noelle's favorite time of year.

She squinted. A van idled in the driveway.

Ted gestured toward it. "Salome threw her back out. She needs you to run the booth today."

Noelle shuddered. What if Jesse was at the market? "I'm unpacking," she said. "Can Moriah do it?"

Ted shook his head. "She needs to help Salome." Moriah was Ted and Salome's twenty-two-year-old daughter. Noelle and Moriah were practically raised as twins, which made their current conflict all the more unsettling.

Noelle squared her shoulders. She wasn't used to challenging her brother-in-law. "I don't want to leave Dat alone when—"

Dat cut her off. "Go ahead. I will be fine."

Noelle's shoulders slumped. She'd avoided helping with the booth for a few years now. She was horrible at selling. Her job was to do the baking. And, above all, she didn't want to see Jesse.

However, missing the second Saturday of the Christmas Market would be a big hit to the business. She had to go—it was her duty to help her family. "Just a minute. I'll change my apron."

Ted gave her a nod, rubbed his hands together, and then headed toward the kitchen counter. "Mind if I have a cream-stick?"

"Go ahead," Noelle answered as she headed down the hall to her room.

She put Jesse out of her mind, as best she could. But she dreaded bumping elbows with a crowd of local *Englischers* and out-of-state tourists all day too.

She put on a fresh Kapp and a clean apron and determined, regardless of her stomach, which was growing more and more upset, to do what she needed to. When she came back down the hall, Dat stood at the kitchen counter with two slices of bread and a jar of peanut butter spread in front of him. "You will need a sandwich," he said.

Surprised, Noelle answered, "*Denki.*" It wasn't like her father to think of her needs.

He made the sandwich while she put on her boots, slipped into her coat, and grabbed her purse. Then Dat handed her a brown bag. "I put an orange in it too."

She thanked him again and met his eyes. "The market doesn't close until six."

Dat nodded. "I will be fine. We will eat when you return."

She stepped out the door. The exhaust from the van billowed out into the cold, and the icy wind stung her face. The weather forecast was for a weeklong cold spell with more snow.

Ted sat in the passenger seat of the van, licking his fingers, so Noelle climbed into the middle seat. She didn't recognize the driver—a woman Ted introduced as Pamela—but he seemed well acquainted with her. The driver dropped him off at the Dawdi Haus behind the original farmhouse on the Schrock property.

"I'm sorry about your mother," Pamela said as she turned the van around. "Salome said you were a big help in caring for her."

Noelle wasn't sure what to say. It worried her to know Salome talked about her to a stranger. Her sister was known for her constant gossiping, and Noelle didn't trust her.

Plus Salome had used the word *help* in talking with Pamela, as if Salome had been in charge of Mamm. It was Noelle who had seen to her care, along with Dat. True, Salome liked to barge in as if she were in charge, but it was Noelle who'd done all of the work.

Pamela turned onto the highway. "So you and your father just moved into the new house?"

"That's right," Noelle answered, soaking in the view of the snowy fields on either side, appreciating the winter wonderland around her. Salome and Ted's oldest, Paul, now farmed the land. Paul and his wife already had four little ones, so it made sense for them to live in the big house. The new house, the one she and Dat had just moved into, was essentially a second Dawdi Haus, although it sat by itself on the southeast plot of land.

Noelle had lived in the big house as a baby. By the time she was in school, Ted and Salome and their children occupied

it, because Noelle and her parents had moved into the Dawdi Haus after the last of her eight older sisters left home. By then Noelle already had a score of nieces and nephews.

Now all of the older ones were married, except for Moriah, who was a widow. Of course there were many who were younger than Noelle was too, all the way down to infants, and now there were great-nieces and great-nephews too.

Time seemed to march on for everyone but her. Family and friends all around her were growing up, getting married, and starting families while she'd been frozen, as solidly as the icicles hanging from the eaves of the farmhouses they passed by, for the last three years.



They arrived at the market by eight-thirty, parking in the back among the other vans, cars, and buggies. Noelle only had a half hour to unload and set up the booth. Thankfully, Pamela grabbed a dolly just outside the door of the market and began stacking plastic crates, explaining, “Salome pays me extra to do the heavy lifting. She’s been having pain in her back for a while.”

Noelle grabbed a crate of whoopie pies and followed Pamela. Salome had complained some about her back, using it as one of her excuses to not help lift Mamm, but Noelle hadn’t realized it was affecting her ability to carry crates in and out of the market or perhaps do things at home. And now she’d injured it worse.

A threshing accident had left Ted disabled over a year ago. Then Moriah’s husband died. Jah, it had been a hard year for all of them.

Pamela pushed through the back door into the building and then led the way past a big dining area with a kitchen to their right. The door was open, showing a large range, double sinks,

and lots of counter space. Noelle couldn't help but be impressed by the kitchen. The dining area was also new since the last time she had been to the market. She'd come with Jesse not long before he'd left.

She followed Pamela into the large hall with booths of pretzels, popcorn, sausages, candles, soaps, quilts, furniture, baskets, and dried flowers. She caught whiffs of lavender potpourri as she hurried past. Finally, the woman stopped at Salome's booth, toward the back. "You start setting up," she said. "I'll keep unloading."

"Denki," Noelle replied.

Noelle had started helping Mamm with the baking for the business by the time she was nine. Of course, everything had to follow regulations, and Mamm made sure to teach Noelle all of their mixing and baking techniques, along with their ingredients. But working with Mamm in the kitchen had always been her favorite thing to do. Her mother was a wonderful baker: whoopie pies, loaves of bread, sticky buns, fruit pies. "Keep it simple" was Mamm's motto.

Mamm didn't mind working in the market, but Salome hated to bake and agreed to do the selling, even though it meant interacting with the Englischers that she seemed to disdain. She'd come home with stories about how hopelessly impractical they were, how it took them forever to make a simple decision between something as mundane as choosing either a blueberry or peach pie. How they fretted if their children would prefer the chocolate whoopie pie or the peanut butter one. "*It's no surprise,*" she once said, "*that our word for anxious is Engshgtlich. Don't you think it was inspired by the word Englisch?*" Noelle responded that she had no idea.

And she had no idea if her sister was accurate in portraying the Englisch. She hadn't spent enough time around any to know, except for nieces and nephews who hadn't joined the Amish.

Salome would go on and on. Not only were the English anxious, but they always bought more than they needed—of everything. Still, Salome never balked at working at the market. Noelle asked her once why she agreed to do it when she seemed to despise the English.

*“Oh, I don’t hate them,” she’d said. “Quite the contrary. I find them highly entertaining. I enjoy spending time among them. And I find getting them to buy our goods quite rewarding.”*

And she was good at selling, which meant Mamm and Noelle could do the baking without any pressure to go to the market. Noelle had hoped to continue with the arrangement after Mamm died.

She sighed. There was no reason to think Salome wouldn’t soon be back at the market, and Noelle back in the kitchen. As Noelle stacked the pies, all securely packaged in cardboard boxes, she caught a whiff of chocolate. She had her back to the aisle as she looked to her left, to the soap booth. Then to her right, to the quilt booth. She turned around. Sure enough, a candy booth was directly across from her.

A young woman, probably around Noelle’s age, pulled trays of handcrafted chocolates from a plastic crate. She already had five candles, four purple ones with a white one in the middle, set up on the front counter, along with a stack of super-thin boxes that had a picture of a nativity scene on the front.

A young man arrived with another plastic crate. “That’s all,” he said. “I’ll see you at five-thirty.”

“Thanks.” The young woman flipped her long dark hair into a hair band and then knotted it into a bun high on her head. “Have a good class.”

“I’ll try.” The young man’s dark eyes sparkled as he turned to go.

“Carlos.” The girl’s voice was commanding. “Don’t forget to call Mama on your way.”

“I won’t.” He glanced over his shoulder. “I’ll tell her you’ll call this evening.”

Realizing she was staring, Noelle turned her head.

As the young man walked away, the girl called out to Noelle. “Hey, where’s Salome?”

“She hurt her back.”

The girl stepped into the aisle, her hand extended. “I’m Holly.”

Noelle met her and shook her hand. “Noelle.”

“Really?”

Confused, Noelle nodded.

“Any chance you’re a Christmastime baby? I mean, with a name like that . . .”

Noelle couldn’t help but smile. “You too?”

Holly laughed. “Christmas Eve.”

Noelle wrapped her finger around the tie of her Kapp. “Same.”

Holly held up her hand. It took Noelle a half second to realize she wanted to high-five. Awkwardly she slapped her palm against Holly’s.

The girl said, “I’m turning twenty-two.”

Noelle smiled in surprise, again. “So am I.”

“We’re twins.” Holly beamed. “I was born at Lancaster General. How about you?”

“A birthing clinic.” Her Mamm had been forty-seven, a little old to have a baby. But all the tests, including an ultrasound, had indicated her baby was fine and the birth would be low risk.

“Ah well. We’re still twins.”

Noelle fought the urge to laugh. Clearly they weren’t, but she enjoyed the thought of it. A twin would have been lovely. She wouldn’t have felt like the odd one out, the tagalong, the after-thought child.

“I’ve always wished my parents named me Noelle instead of Holly. It’s the perfect Christmas name.”

“Oh no,” Noelle said. “I’ve always loved the name Holly.” It was true, she had. Mainly because her Mamm had been sure that her last baby, this Christmas surprise, was going to be a boy. In fact, that was what the ultrasound technician had told her. After having eight girls—she’d finally have a boy. She’d make the best of the shock and name the baby boy Noel.

When a little girl arrived instead, she couldn’t think of another name, so Salome convinced their mother to add “-le” to the end. At least that was the story Noelle had heard her entire life.

Of course, she didn’t tell Holly all of that.

Pamela arrived with another crate. Holly said, “We’ll chat later . . . twin.” The girl’s melodic laughter warmed Noelle’s heart.

The market opened by the ringing of Christmas bells. Salome had told Noelle all about them, saying the manager thought they added class. Salome thought they added chaos. Noelle listened carefully, thinking she liked the sound of the bells as they reverberated under the open timbers of the hall. Granted, they had to be a recording. There were no bell ringers on the premises. But she still appreciated the sound.

She turned her attention to her products—whoopie pies, bread, rolls, and pies. All things she’d made in the Dawdi Haus kitchen yesterday morning, before several of her nephews moved most of her and Dat’s things, while she packed up the kitchen and then moved the rest.

Now she needed to sell what she’d made. A few customers trickled by, but no one stopped to buy anything the first half hour. However, several people stopped and bought the thin boxes Holly was selling.

Finally, Noelle's curiosity overpowered her shyness. "What are those?"

"Advent calendars," Holly answered.

Noelle's expression must have given away her confusion because Holly continued, "Advent . . . the pre-Christmas tradition?"

Puzzled, Noelle shook her head.

"I know—the Amish don't celebrate Advent. Neither do the Mennonites, which we are."

Noelle was surprised.

"My mom grew up celebrating Advent, but then as a teenager in Mexico, she joined a Mennonite Church. Now we go to one a few miles from here."

Obviously it was a liberal one. The girl was dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt.

Holly continued. "Advent celebrates the coming of baby Jesus, during the four weeks before Christmas . . ." She pointed toward the five candles on the counter, all unlit. "The purple candles are for hope, joy, peace, and faith. And the white one symbolizes Jesus. That's what my mama taught me. We light one each Sunday before Christmas." Holly grinned. "Or flip the switch, for the battery-operated ones because we're not allowed to light candles in here. I'll"—she made air quotes—"light' the one for hope tomorrow, the first Sunday of Advent."

Holly held up one of the calendars and pointed to the numeral one. It wasn't a normal calendar with grids. Instead it had little cardboard doors arranged around the painting. "Each of the twenty-five flaps has a verse printed on it, and inside is a piece of chocolate." She put the calendar back down on the counter. "It's a fun countdown to Christmas, but it also helps kids stay focused on the reason for the season." She grinned again.

Noelle appreciated the lesson. She liked Holly. And not just because they shared a birthday.



Business picked up gradually with each passing hour, but it wasn't as packed as Noelle remembered from when she helped before. Holly was keeping busy, but sales were slow for Noelle. An older English woman stopped at her booth and asked what Noelle was selling. In her typical low voice, she explained. The woman proudly announced she was visiting Lancaster County and reached out and patted Noelle's hand. "Try to smile and sound a little more enthusiastic, dear."

Noelle grimaced.

The woman bought an apple pie, sticky buns, and a loaf of bread. "I'm going to compare your baking to mine." Her eyes twinkled.

Noelle knew she should come up with a snappy comeback, but she couldn't think of a thing to say except for "Have a nice day."

The tourist gave her a smile and then joined another English woman at Holly's booth.

When Noelle and Jesse courted, she'd been more confident. She always felt more outgoing with him, and she had plenty to smile about back then. When he left, she grew even more shy than she'd been before. Mamm had told Noelle, or tried to in her post-stroke speech, not to let embarrassment isolate her. But Noelle couldn't seem to help it. Her shame sucked all of her energy, except what she needed to care for Mamm and continue with the baking for the business.

Noelle stayed in her booth without a break, not wanting to miss any customers. She took bites of her sandwich as she

stood, hoping for more customers, while Holly grew busier and busier as the day continued.

Finally, in the midafternoon, the girls watched each other's booth so they could each take a quick trip to the restroom and grab a cup of coffee. Holly gave Noelle a truffle, and Noelle returned the favor with a sticky bun.

Noelle enjoyed interacting with the girl. Her best friend had been her niece Moriah, who was a couple of months older than Noelle. Her husband, Eugene, had been good friends with Jesse, and the four of them had gone on buggy rides and hikes together. But Noelle's relationship with Moriah had grown strained in the last few years, especially after Eugene had died nearly a year ago. Noelle had tried to console her niece but to no avail.

Most of Noelle's friends from school were either married or would be soon. Spending time with them just reminded her of what she didn't have. After Jesse stayed in Montana, Noelle was too embarrassed to go back to the *Youngie* singings and volleyball games. She saw enough pity in the expressions of others at church. Soon, Moriah told Noelle that she'd heard, through the grapevine, that Jesse was dating an Englisch girl in Montana.

Noelle felt as if a half-grown calf had kicked her. Before that, she still hoped Jesse would come home, that they would make up and join the church together. And then marry.

But obviously those were no longer his plans.

She'd joined the church the next spring. Mamm and Dat thought that meant she'd forgotten Jesse, that she was willing to marry someone else. It meant nothing of the sort.

It just meant she was resigned to a life alone.

By midafternoon, Noelle had sold a quarter of the pies. She hoped the rest would sell and moved the boxes to the front of

her booth, sure Salome would be nearly out of product by now. It appeared that Holly was out of calendars.

As Noelle bagged a pie, someone off to her right caught her attention.

Her worst fear had come true.

*Jesse.*

He wore Amish clothes and a beard that matched his sandy hair. Unintentionally her eyes met his. They were as bright blue as ever. She stepped backward, struggling to catch her breath.

Not only was he at the market, as she'd feared, but as indicated by his beard, he was both Amish and married.

She finished the transaction as her heart thumped in her chest. She hoped she could continue to function without crying.

As the customer stepped away, Jesse took the woman's place. He held something in his arms. Noelle stepped backward again. A sleeping *Boppli*, wrapped in a pink woven blanket. The baby's head was partly uncovered, but her face was turned toward him.

Noelle clenched her trembling hands. Jesse was a father.

Feeling as if her heart might stop, she turned away from him and toward a customer. Thank goodness her booth was the busiest it had been all day. "May I help you?"

As she handed the customer a boxed blueberry pie, Noelle looked behind Jesse, trying to spot his wife. Obviously he'd married an Amish woman—not the Englisch girl he'd been dating. But there didn't appear to be anyone with him.

A man wearing a Pittsburgh Steelers hat stepped in front of Jesse. "Are you Noelle Schrock?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I'm Steve Browne—the manager of the market." She guessed he was in his forties. "Your driver called. She can't give you a ride tonight. Some sort of emergency came up."

Noelle rubbed the back of her hand over her forehead, wish-

ing Jesse would go away. She didn't have any idea what to do now, and she couldn't think with him so close.

Jesse stepped to the man's side. "We can give you a ride."

*We.* She shook her head but didn't speak.

Steve, who seemed to sense her discomfort, nodded toward Holly. "I'll ask if Carlos can give you a lift."

Before Noelle had a chance to say anything more, Steve disappeared into the crowd and Jesse stepped forward again. "Let me give you a ride."

The last thing she wanted in all the world was to talk with Jesse King.

"Noelle."

She couldn't fathom how he could seem so familiar and so foreign all at the same time. The line of his jaw. His baby blue eyes. The way his hair curled along his forehead, ruining his bowl cut. It was as if he'd never been away. But he'd left her and married someone else. And now had a baby daughter in his arms. She turned toward the customer to her right, willing herself to remain calm.

Jesse stayed put, even after Steve returned and announced that Holly said Carlos could give her a ride. Noelle thanked the man and helped the next customer. A baby cried and Noelle realized it was Jesse's. Where in the world was his wife?

A few minutes later, he finally left, without saying another word. God willing, Salome would recover quickly, and Noelle would never have to see Jesse again.