



Until Then

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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Cover designed by Libby Dykstra

Edited by Sarah Mason Rische

The Author is represented by Ambassador Literary, Nashville, TN.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-8326-3 (HC)

ISBN 978-1-4964-5426-3 (SC)

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To the brave abolitionists of all faiths, making
special note of the Quakers and Amish.*

*And to all who, in the name of love and faith, dare to fight the good
fight, to stand for the Golden Rule and stand against greediness
and selfishness. May we all be willing to sacrifice in order to make
a constructive difference during our time on this planet.*

Chapter One

JULY 1985

A mix of excitement and anxiety warred in Celeste Lantz as she brought the rig to a halt under a shade tree in her driveway. The midmorning sun filled the lush green valley, dissolving last night's remaining fog that still clung to the rolling mountains. Their rental home with its white clapboard siding and black shutters was always a welcome sight, with a peek of Vin's woodshop from around the back. She loved this place, but none of it belonged to them. Maybe one day.

She grabbed the bags of groceries and the yard sale items and headed for the steps that led to the porch. After she got the little ones out from under their *dat's* feet so he could begin his workday, she'd tend to the horse and rig.

Time had an inconvenient way of slipping by.

She couldn't wait to show Vin the things she'd found . . . but guilt for holding him up from his workday also clung to her. At twenty-four years old, she should be better at balancing her time.

Laughter of little ones filled the air, sounding as if it was coming from the small, fenced backyard. She set the groceries on the porch, keeping the yard sale items with her.

A grin tugged at her lips and refused to let go. Late or not, Vin would be pleased. That man and books went together like a frosty glass of lemonade and a summer day.

"*Dat, geh dabber.*" Four-year-old Steven giggled while telling his dad to go quickly.

What was Vin doing? She strode around the corner of the house. Vin wore a blue- and white-striped ball cap and sat inside a cardboard box that he'd apparently painted to look like a train while she was gone. Were the suspenders to his pants on his head instead of his shoulders?

"Choo-choo," Vin said over and over, making the appropriate noises. One-year-old Drew was in his lap, patting his dat's face and babbling excitedly beyond recognition in any language. Steven was behind his dat, his little arms clutched around his neck.

"Dear *Gott*, I love this man," Celeste whispered.

Drew wiggled out of his dat's arms, getting out of the box. Yep, suspenders on Vin's head and pants pulled up to his chest. He turned his head, grinning at her.

She burst into laughter. "Vin Lantz, what are you doing?"

Without missing a beat, he tugged on an imaginary cord. "Woooo. Wooo. You're home."

"I am. None too soon, I see."

"Too soon. I meant to return to looking all cool and suave before you saw me."

"You missed that particular train. What are you wearing?"

He shrugged, chuckling. "I'm a conductor of old and these are my bib overalls."

"I thought maybe you'd taken it on yourself to redesign the way Amish men wear their pants."

When he stood and she saw that the hem of his pants hit just below his knees while the waist was on his chest, she burst into laughter that wouldn't stop. Were those his father's pants? They were extra baggy, giving him enough room to pull them up high like that. He eased Steven's feet to the ground and both boys got in the box, making train noises.

"Are you laughing at me?" His grin warmed her heart, but she started backing away.

"You bet I am."

He picked up his pace, striding toward her. She turned and took off running. He caught her from behind and lifted her feet off the ground.

She squealed. "Put me down."

"Never." He mocked an evil laugh.

"If you put me down, I'll give you a gift." Her words were jumbled through her laughter.

"A gift, you say?" He set her down. "I'm being good now." He moved to stand in front of her. "Is it a kiss, despite how I look?" He lifted his brows in quick succession, teasing.

She studied him, looking deep into his dark-brown eyes. How had she thought he'd be displeased with her for running late?

He grew serious. "What thoughts are behind those beautiful blue eyes, Celeste?"

She shrugged. "I . . . I thought you might be frustrated with me for leaving you responsible for the children too long. I know that if I were better organized, I wouldn't need to run to the store like this anyway, and now you're getting to today's work later than you should."

“Nah.” He removed the suspenders from his head and released them on his shoulders. Then he cupped her cheek. “That’s not how I feel at all. Ever. We juggle a lot every week, and I think we do a good job of it.” He took off the baseball cap. White strips of tape lined the dark-blue hat that Vin had found in a ditch near their home weeks ago—Vin’s creativity turning it into a conductor’s hat. “If I didn’t need your help in the woodshop a few days each week, you’d have time to keep up with everything else. Plus, I figured you had a good reason for needing extra time, and it gave me a chance to do something with our boys that I’d been promising to do for nearly a month.”

She looked at the boys sitting inside the cardboard box, playing happily, before she pulled one of the three books from the plastic bag, showing him the best one first. “The history of Ohio, and it begins a hundred years before a white man stepped foot onto its soil.”

With a tenderness she knew well, he lifted the book from her hands. “Seriously?” His face looked like she’d just handed him a stack of money.

Always an avid reader, his interest over the past couple of months had been the early days of Ohio. His curiosity sparked after the bishop and his wife visited Ohio and toured a newly built information center about the Plain folk—mostly Amish, Quakers, Dunkards, and Mennonites. The bishop began weaving some of the religious history he’d learned into his sermons, but he didn’t know much about the everyday life of the early settlers in that region. Vin had been on a quest to know more ever since. He ran his fingers across the tattered binding and the brown cloth hardback cover. There wasn’t a single word or letter on the front or back, only gold lettering on the spine.

She tapped the book. “You may need to sit before you look at the copyright.”

But he didn’t budge as he opened the book. His eyes grew

large. “Seriously?” he repeated his earlier question. “The book-dealer I work with out of Philly couldn’t find anything printed before 1880.”

“Printed in 1860. It has chapters covering the history from the late 1500s until the French fur traders arrived. But here’s your really good news. Starting with 1790, each decade has its own chapter.”

He carefully flipped pages, landing on a dog-eared one that said *1820s*. He began reading, and she waited. He turned the page. “Celeste,” he whispered. “This is incredible.”

“*Jah*, I know. I found two other books that are excellent too, but this one is the best find. The author was a great-grandson of early settlers, and he used the ledgers, diaries, and maps his ancestors had passed down from one generation to the next.”

Without looking up from reading, Vin whispered, “*Denki*.”

“You are most welcome, Husband.”

He closed the book. “It already has my full interest, but the workday must come first.”

She tapped the book. “Per usual for these old books, it only has two or three rough sketches in it. All of these 1800s authors needed your talent for drawing and sketching, and their books would be so much better, *jah*?”

He studied her. “Celeste . . .”

“*Jah*?”

His eyes seemed glued to hers for a moment. Then he looked at the book in his hand and smiled. “This will be my most treasured book, but it doesn’t compare to the best find ever. You.” He grinned. “I’d been surly with my *dat* for sending me to Indiana to *volunteer* to work an entire summer for a great-uncle I’d met once. Then, only days after arriving, I stepped into a sandwich shop and saw you behind the counter.” He chuckled. “We bantered, and I was smitten, never before talking to anyone like you. You agreed to go on your lunch break and sit in a booth with me. We talked and

laughed, and too soon we both had to get back to work. I knew then one summer would never be enough.”

She'd been seventeen, a year younger than him, and that summer they went out together every chance they had. When fall arrived, and he had to return to Pennsylvania, he'd called her nearly every night and they wrote to each other endlessly. His long-distance phone bills had to have cost him a small fortune. Added to that expense, every chance he got, he traveled by train and bus to visit her. He kept that up until they married fifteen months after they met.

She leaned in. “If you're asking me,” she whispered, “a lifetime won't be enough either.” She brushed his lips with a kiss. “Now get to work. After lunch, I'll join you to help for a few hours.”

“Sounds like a lot to your day.”

“We're busy people.” She took a step back and removed the book from his hands. “Now go. Do I need to draw a map for you of how to get there?”

He glanced at the woodshop a few hundred feet away. “I think I can remember.” He winked at her. “Oh, and late this afternoon, after our teamwork project is done, I'll need to make some deliveries. It could be close to dark before I'm home.”

“We'll be here when you get back.”



Daylight waned through the open window of their bedroom, and Celeste's body ached from the long day of constant movement. Still, the pleasure of finding those antique books at the yard sale earlier today gave her a bit of energy. The scent of lilacs filled the air as she ran a dustcloth behind the headboard of the bed. She and Vin had worked side by side in the cabinet shop for a good portion of the afternoon, and once the boys were up from their naps, they'd played in their secure spot in the woodshop or in the fenced

area, under the shade trees. Her summertime workdays in the shop while taking care of the children and the garden and meals were especially tiring, but Vin didn't need her help more than a couple of days a week, and she enjoyed being a part of the cabinetry business. Still, on those days, finishing up housework after she got her two little ones down for the night wasn't unusual.

Sweat dripped down her neck as she leaned in farther, trying to reach every strand of a cobweb behind Vin's and her bed. Something hard fell to the floor. Probably one of Vin's history books he often fell asleep reading or a book belonging to one of the children. She knelt and grabbed it from under the bed, touching pages—it was a book. She smiled, realizing it was one of Vin's sketch pads. Getting to her feet, she flipped open the cover.

Her own eyes stared back.

Celeste's breath caught. The dustcloth fell from her hands. She plunked onto the side of her bed. Thoughts raced, but a rational one wouldn't come to mind as her heart thudded like mad. She tried to take in a full breath but had to settle for a few tiny ones.

She looked again. In the drawing on the first page of the sketch pad, she was standing on a hill, the wind blowing strands of her hair forward from under her prayer *Kapp*.

She remembered that day. She and Vin had found a bounty of wild blueberries while taking a walk. She'd been pregnant with Steven but hadn't known it yet.

Perhaps this sketch was a leftover—an item from *before* that Vin had forgotten about. She longed to believe that, but it didn't add up. Studying the artwork with its intricate detail and umpteen thousand pencil strokes, she knew no artist could forget about something that took so many meticulous hours of work.

Maybe this wasn't a sign of open rebellion. Of betrayal. Maybe . . . Her thoughts circled, hoping to find solid ground for denying what this meant. The clock on the wall ticked, crickets outside chirped, and the truth seeped into her mind.

Her husband had been hiding this from her.

She flipped the page. Another drawing of her, but this time up close. She was laughing, hair loosened as she wore it when they were in bed together. He'd captured the fine details of her face, like her long nose, one asymmetrical dimple, and light eyes, though on the page they were shades of pencil instead of clear blue.

Shunned. The word thundered inside her, as if the bishop were standing next to her speaking it. He'd warned them.

Englischers thought they understood shunning. But no one outside the Plain folk knew the reality. It brought unbearable shame on the person, on their family, a shame that didn't dissipate for decades after it was over. To join the church, Vin and Celeste had stood before God and the church and taken a vow to uphold the Amish ways.

Not too long after that, Vin broke that vow.

She turned the page again and saw their Steven as a tiny newborn, eyes shut in the deep slumber of a brand-new person, swaddled in layers of blankets. A man's hand, Vin's, lay as a protective shield over Steven's chest, illustrating the full extent of their baby's smallness. It made her breath catch. She'd forgotten how tiny their two children were as newborns, even with Steven only four years old now and little Drew just one. Goodness, she longed to keep this picture. She kept flipping through the book, and memory after memory jumped out at her, as fresh as the times they'd made them. Mementos from their six years of marriage.

Faces. Why did Vin have to include their faces? For a decade now, most Amish had been allowed to draw animals. Their bishop was more open-minded than most, and he allowed Vin to draw his family to remember those precious times—their backs, their hands, their feet. Bishop Mark considered none of those things idolatry. But all Amish drew the line at drawing faces.

Was it idolatry, though? Something done in Vin's loving hand didn't seem the same as the *Englischers* and their photographs. But

maybe it was. What did she know? At twenty-four years old, she'd barely figured anything out. Vin was only a year older than her. Didn't the people who made the rules know more of the answers than they did?

Not long after they married, the bishop had dropped by for a visit. While talking with them, he had picked up Vin's newspaper from the coffee table, saying something about a local horse show. The next thing Celeste knew, Bishop Mark lifted a sketch pad that had been under the newspaper. Vin drew in the pad almost every evening as they talked about their day, and she mended items. When the bishop opened the book, both he and Celeste saw that Vin had been drawing idolatrous things, the kind of stuff he'd drawn before they took their vows and joined the church. It should've been a pleasant evening of visiting, but the incident marred the early years of their marriage with dire warnings and invasive visits by the bishop. Vin could've faced shunning. Maybe Celeste too. But Vin had voiced sincere repentance, and the bishop didn't mention it to anyone, although he'd kept a sharp eye on Vin for a couple of years. Had Vin only become better at hiding the evidence?

"Celeste, the wheel on the rig isn't right, so don't—" Vin entered the bedroom carrying the history book she'd purchased at the yard sale earlier today. He stopped in his tracks, his dark-brown eyes wide.

She stood, holding out the sketchbook filled with forbidden images.

Vin drew a deep breath and eased it from her hand. "I'm sorry."

She shook her head. It was her duty to tell him she forgave him, but she couldn't get those words past her lips. "I don't know what to say. You said you were sorry to Bishop Mark, too. And yet you were still drawing faces, just hiding it."

"Portraits, Celeste." He set the book on top of a stack of history books next to the bed. "And when I say I'm sorry, I mean that I'm sorry for hiding it from you."

"Sorry for hiding it. But not for doing it?"

His eyes held sorrow when he turned back to her, but he gave a slight shrug. “Jah, I guess so.”

“Vin! You made a promise. *We* made a promise! Our way says this is idolatry!” She needed to keep her voice down or else she’d wake the children. Then nothing would get resolved. But measuring her tone was outside of her ability right now.

“Oh, horse neck!” Vin shouted.

“Don’t yell at me with your version of non-swear words!”

“I’m not yelling at you. It’s all just so frustrating! The Old Ways call it idolatry, and I tried accepting that, but I can’t! I just don’t agree. Not anymore.”

“How can you stand there and admit that you don’t agree with the Old Ways, and yet you’ve not once talked to me about it?”

“I don’t know. I started to tell you numerous times, but I didn’t want to upset you.”

“Well, you failed on that, didn’t you?” Why was she screaming at him? She didn’t recognize herself . . . or him.

“I’m not exalting these drawings to a place of worship. I have no faith in them as if they were a golden calf or had any power. I worship the one true God.” He grabbed the sketchbook, opened it, and pointed to the second drawing she’d seen, the one of her with loose hair. “His creation—you, our children, *people*, are beautiful. He’s the ultimate artist. Capturing a tiny piece of that beauty on paper makes me feel alive.”

“But our vows! The promise we made to the church was to honor the Old Ways. It doesn’t matter if we agree or not.”

“The Old Ways change. Look at our propane-powered refrigerator. You think our ancestors had that? You think they’d have approved?”

“Refrigeration was never a matter of idolatry, so that’s off topic!”

“It’s not. The ministers, the *Ordnung*, they’re all trying to translate God’s Word, but they mess it up. I’m telling you, in my heart, I know that art isn’t evil.”

“And you’re allowed to make art. You can draw any animal, any plant, any place with as much detail as your heart desires.”

“The Ordnung didn’t allow those things fifteen years ago. Doesn’t that fact help you see my point?”

“But faces *are* forbidden now. Why must you draw faces, Vin?”

“Eyes and faces are the windows to people’s souls, and faces change over time. One day, our faces will gain wrinkles and marks of time. How is it evil to want to remember our years together? Our children’s little faces while they’re babies? Look at Steven and how big he already is. Without drawings, would I be able to remember all the details?”

Some of her rolling anger seemed to disappear, like moving a boiling pot off a hot burner. She’d felt that magic when looking at the pictures. All the little things she wouldn’t have thought of if not for the reminder: baby Steven’s downy fluff of hair that was thicker at the sides of his head, his cute lips in the shape of a bow that folded inward at the center. But there were other ways to deal with the no-images rule of the Old Ways. “We hold those things in our hearts. We don’t need something physical to remember them.”

“Our minds are imperfect, though. It was only four years ago, but can you honestly tell me you remember every tiny detail of Steven’s face as a newborn?”

He was right, but it didn’t matter. “We took a vow that said we would always abide by the Old Ways. Convincing me your artwork is not idolatry will do you no good. You lied to me. You’ve been sitting in the room with me while drawing forbidden things, Vin.”

He moved in closer to her. “I . . . I didn’t think about it like that.”

Celeste put her forehead on his muscular chest. He’d been well-built at eighteen when they’d first gone on a date, but the subsequent seven years of hard work crafting heavy tables and cabinets had put even more muscle on his frame.

He wrapped his arms around her. “I’m sorry I hurt you. I should’ve talked with you, but I’m not sure I care what the ministers think.”

She pulled back. “That’s not true. You *do* care or you wouldn’t be hiding it. Your family—me, Steven, Drew, and any future children we have—are counting on you. If you’re shunned, we’re all punished. How can we guide our children to accept the Old Ways as young adults and remain Amish, keeping our precious family together, if you rebel against those ways?”

“Maybe this isn’t the healthiest place to raise our family, then.”

What? Was he considering leaving their way of life, their family, their friends, over art? “You mean Lancaster County or the Old Ways?”

“I don’t know yet.”

She stepped backward until she ran into the bed, sitting down hard. How long had he been harboring these thoughts? “You’ve been considering this for a while, haven’t you?”

“Celeste, I was nineteen and you were eighteen when we married. We made all these vows to the church when we were still children ourselves. How were we supposed to know what we wanted?”

An unfamiliar pain clutched her, an all-consuming one. “What other vows are you now doubting, Vin?”

“What?” He tilted his head, confused.

“You heard me! Answer me!”

“I have never doubted the vows I made to you. You’re my wife, now and forever. I only meant the promises we made to live like this, when it seemed the only way of living. Everyone wanted this life for us—our parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, former schoolteachers, the ministers—and we followed this path, but now I’m not so sure.”

“Vin, we’d lose everything if we left. Our families, our liveli-

hood, *everything*.” And what would that mean for their souls? The Old Ways were the path to heaven, weren’t they? Did he doubt that too? If they left, would they be setting their children on a path toward hell?

“Look . . .” Vin rubbed his thick beard. “I know it’d be a new and hard start. But we could do it as a team.”

He couldn’t be serious! Her insides trembled. “Vin, I can’t. I just *can’t*!”

His face turned red, and he moved to look out the window. “So I’m in the same place I’ve been for years—desperate to extinguish a piece of myself in order to uphold my vow. I . . . I was hoping you, of all people, would understand.” He took a step toward the door.

“Vin? Where are you going?” This was their time together after the little ones went to sleep. He wanted to be away from her?

“I’ve got to clear my head. It’s *stifling* here. And I don’t mean the July heat.”

That was reasonable, wasn’t it? To want to get some space? But something in her was screaming. Her inner voice wanted to be unreasonable. *Stop! Don’t go, please!* She wanted to yell it at the top of her lungs, not caring if the neighbors heard.

He touched the wooden doorframe, turning his head over his shoulder to look at her. “I’ll be back before you fall asleep. Promise.”

Was that true or something he was saying to keep the peace, to appease her? She’d believed in who they were since their earliest days of dating, but now . . . who was he? Who were they? Did she know him or just the version of himself he was willing to let her see? All she thought she knew of who they were seemed to have crumbled under her feet in less than ten minutes. A hundred questions haunted her. But this time, she knew she couldn’t trust Vin to help her figure out the truth.