



CINDY WOODSMALL

New York Times and CBA Best-Selling Author

Ties That Bind

THE AMISH *of* SUMMER GROVE, BOOK ONE

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TIES THAT BIND

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The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

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*To Erin and Shweta, my daughters-in-law.
Despite my hopeful, expectant heart concerning your
arrival in my sons' lives, I never imagined anyone as
wonderful as you. Gifts beyond measure.
I love and admire "my girls," and I cannot envision
my life without you!*

One



Summer Grove, Pennsylvania

Gnarled fingers of smoke seeped under the closed door of the old house. Fear threatened to steal Lovina's ability to obey her husband's departing words to stay put. She eyed a door in the bedroom that led outside. Could she get to it on her own?

Her husband and the midwife had left her about ten minutes ago. Isaac was trying to put out the kitchen fire, and Rachel was going to the phone shanty to call the fire department. Maybe Rachel never made it to the shanty. Perhaps she was down the hallway of the birthing center, delivering the other woman's baby.

Lovina's head swam from exhaustion and the muddled thoughts of a woman who'd taken something for pain—although she couldn't recall what. This was her sixth baby, and each birth had been easier than the one before . . . until this time. She didn't understand.

Another hard contraction engulfed her. She grabbed the rails of the birthing bed, panting and trembling as she squeezed the warm metal mercilessly. When the pain eased, she drew a breath. "Rachel?" Her usually

strong voice came out as a mere whisper. Even the sharp ears of a midwife wouldn't have heard that, especially not over the commotion of a kitchen fire.

The last time Rachel had checked Lovina's progress, she'd barely dilated to five centimeters. But she had an overwhelming urge to start pushing. Could she walk to the hallway door in this state?

Like storm clouds gathering, dark thoughts of what might be ahead filled her mind. Were Isaac and Rachel so busy putting out the fire that she would give birth by herself? Had her husband and her friend been overcome with smoke? What had begun as a kitchen fire could easily spread throughout this old house, like setting a box of matches on fire, she imagined.

Squelching her sense of panic, she tried to scoot to the edge of the bed. Her round belly and aching body had no agility, and with the rails latched in place, she couldn't shift to get around them. Breathing hard, she lay back on her pillow, drenched in sweat.

The oppressive heat made trying to move even harder. It did little good to have the windows open when there wasn't even a slight breeze stirring the sticky air.

Smoke billowed under the door now, and a gray mass of it passed by the window like rolling fog. Her husband's horse was tethered to a hitching post not more than twenty feet away. While Lovina had been at the clinic last night, Isaac had stayed with their other children. Then he'd ridden here bareback. The horse stomped and reared, trying to break free, probably afraid of the swelling smoke.

As the seconds ticked by and the muscles throughout her torso worked together to force the child from her, nothing else seemed to exist. She pushed with all she had. "Rachel!" The groaning that often came with this phase of labor caused her voice to return, and she intended to use it. "Isaac! The baby's coming!"

She heard muffled voices as heavy footsteps grew louder. The door

banged open, letting in a swirl of smoke. Rachel hurried inside, cradling in her arms a newborn swaddled in a pink blanket. Lovina's husband barreled in behind her, pushing a disheveled, sleepy woman in a wheelchair. "Lovina!" He slammed shut the door to the hallway with his foot and pointed to the door that led outside. "*Kumm! Mach's schnell!*"

Come, and make it quick? She could hardly move. "*Ich kannscht. Bobbeli iss glei do.*"

He stopped short, eyes wide. "The baby's almost here?"

"Ya."

"I'll check her." Rachel rushed to the bassinet beside Lovina's bed and put the other woman's baby in it. "Take Brandi outside. Get her clear of the smoke, and carefully place her on a blanket. Be easy with her. She's lost a lot of blood. Then hurry back for her baby. A newborn doesn't need to breathe this smoke."

"Wait a minute, Rach!" He waved his arms with exasperation. These two, Lovina's husband and her closest friend, had experienced their share of disagreements over the years, but Isaac had never looked truly upset during any of their rounds. "You just saw how the fire jumped from a slow burn to engulf the front birthing rooms and half the hallway. I'm not leaving without my wife, if I have to carry her myself."

"Okay. You carry her." Rachel nodded. "But Brandi is in no shape to hold her baby while I wheel her out. I'll have to take one and return for the other."

Lovina groaned, giving in to the need to push.

"For land's sake, Lovina, don't push!" Rachel said.

Lovina held her breath, trying to obey. "I . . . I can't stop!"

Rachel pulled Lovina's knees apart, and terror filled her eyes.

"What?" Lovina panted. "*Iss mei Bobbeli allrecht?*"

"Ya, I'm sure the baby's fine, but it isn't going to wait for us to get out of the house. Its head is crowning. If we move you now, we could paralyze the baby." Rachel turned to Isaac. He seemed unwilling to budge. Rachel

put a hand on one hip and waved a finger in his face. "Isaac Brenneman, do as I said! Get Brandi out of here and hurry back with the wheelchair."

He nodded and sprinted toward the door. The *Englisch* woman's silky, white-blond hair dangled about, and Lovina thought it odd the little things a person noticed while in the middle of such chaos. As he opened the door, the wheelchair thudded against it.

Rachel looked up. "Be easy with the woman, Isaac. I packed her insides best I could to stop the bleeding until the ambulance arrives, but she can't afford to be jostled."

Isaac nodded. "Sorry." He disappeared outside, leaving the door open.

Rachel drew a breath. "We're safe . . . for now. But let's get this child born and get out of here." Rachel put on gloves and wheeled a metal table next to the bed. The table had a sterile tray with several instruments and two folded blankets, a blue one and a pink one. During the long night of labor, Lovina had done some mending on her children's clothes. When those were done, she'd used white thread to embroider a tiny pair of baby feet on the corner of each blanket. Which color would Rachel wrap her newborn in this time?

Rachel wiped her forehead with the back of her wrist. "Could today be worse?"

"First fire and first *Englisch* woman to give birth here. Coincidence?" Lovina teased her weary friend.

Rachel chuckled. "Or did she bring bad luck?" she whispered, peering out the door as if the woman could hear her. "Why is she alone in an unfamiliar place?" Rachel ripped the sterile wrapping off the scissors and umbilical clamp. "I hope family arrives to support and help her once she's at the hospital." Rachel glanced into the bassinet. "She isn't doing great. She had all sorts of complications during delivery, and I doubt she'll be able to have another child, but her girl seems to be in perfect health."

Lovina's heart went out to the woman. It was telling enough that she was in a strange place by herself. It yanked at Lovina's soul to know she

would likely be told she couldn't have any other children. "We need to remember to pray for . . ."

Rachel unfolded a towel, seeming lost in concentration as she studied the items on the tray. "Brandi Nash."

Lovina nodded, bracing as another wave of pain engulfed her. She knew they would talk about this night for years to come—wonder about Brandi Nash, laugh at their panic over the fire, cry with relief. But right now all Lovina could manage were moans while trying not to push until Rachel was in place to catch the baby.

Rachel moved into her spot. "Let's do this." Despite her friend's earlier efforts at idle chitchat, Lovina recognized the weariness and concern in Rachel's voice. "Kumm on little one." Rachel looked up. "Will you have an Ariana or an Abram?" She grinned. "Take a deep breath. That's right. Now push hard . . . two, three, four, five . . . push, push, push."

Soon Lovina heard the wailing of her newborn. Relief washed over her, a joy unlike ever before. The child had arrived, and they could get out of here.

"You have a third daughter!" Rachel moved quickly, tying off and cutting the umbilical cord. "Welcome, little Ariana," Rachel cooed as she wiped off the baby. "Your two big sisters have been waiting for you." She wrapped her in a pink blanket.

"And her three older brothers will be bitterly disappointed," Lovina added.

Rachel chuckled. "Don't know why. They're bound to have a younger brother soon enough."

Isaac ran back inside, pushing the wheelchair. "Sorry, I didn't mean to take so long. I ran into numerous complications."

Rachel placed Ariana in her arms while looking at Isaac. "How's Brandi?"

"In and out of consciousness and pretty panicked when awake, but I heard sirens, so help will arrive soon."

Lovina clutched her daughter close. "Isaac, she's beautiful." She turned to her husband. "Look, isn't she a pretty little thing?"

Isaac barely glanced. "She sure is." He pushed the wheelchair to the bed. "Kumm." He shook the railing, trying to lower it.

"She has all ten fingers and toes." Rachel pulled off her gloves. "Now let's get you and these babies out of here." She pushed a button and lowered the rail before taking the baby from Lovina. "I'll hold Ariana while Isaac helps you get in the wheelchair. It's best not to chance a very shaky *Mamm* dropping her newborn."

Isaac held out his hand to Lovina. "Kumm."

When Lovina put her legs over the side of the bed, a gush of fluid left her body. "Rachel, what just happened?"

Rachel glanced at the wet sheets, and she seemed to understand. She passed Ariana to Isaac and then pressed on Lovina's stomach from several angles. "There's another one."

"Twins?" Lovina hadn't been that large, had she?

Rachel pushed the bassinet toward Isaac. "Get the babies out of here."

"*Nee!* Rachel, look!" He pointed to the door that led to the hallway. "The shellac is bubbling and peeling from the heat on the opposite side. The fire could explode into this room." He put Ariana in the bassinet.

Rachel hesitated as she stared at the melted shellac running down the door. Was she frozen in place?

Isaac put one arm under Lovina's knees and one around her back, lifting her into the wheelchair. "Rachel! Get the bassinet and let's get out. Now!"



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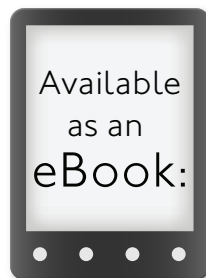
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