



A Sweet Christian Romance

By
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Lonely Hearts
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Lonely Hearts

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. In the beginning of our story, we see some reactions to Becky's arrival in a small town. It's less than pleasant. What would your response be? Would you be embarrassed? Has something similar ever happened to you?
2. Becky and her children are surprised at the house they're renting. What would your first reaction be if you had been in this situation? After meeting Mr. Pickles, would you change your outlook?
3. It seems Becky manages to attract more than passing interest in one particular cowboy, Scott. What was your first impression of him? Why do you suppose the waitress seemed angry and not too pleased by Scott's obvious attention to Becky?
4. As they're looking for a church to attend, Becky mentions that it's difficult to find a church. Do you agree with her assessment? Why or why not? What's important to you when you're looking for a church?
5. As time moves on, we're quickly introduced to two more prospective love interests for Becky. Jack, an old friend, and Pearce. Which character did you initially want Becky to fall in love with? Why? Which character did you like least? Why? Did you change your mind at all regarding these men as you read through the story?
6. Jen and Jeff were very young when their father passed away. Do you think this helped them as they searched for a new husband for Becky? Is this realistic?
7. What were Becky's concerns about a new husband? Was she actively looking for a new mate? What makes you think this? Why do you think it took her so long to become interested? In someone else.
8. Although Curly wasn't a main character, he was a prominent

one. Why was his role in the story important? What did you learn about Pearce through him?

9. Pearce kept a picture of Eva. Do you think this had any emotional value other than what was stated in the story? Have you ever held onto a hurtful or embarrassing memento that helped you grow?

10. Abandonment happens in real lives, and its effects can run deep. How would an abiding faith in God help in a situation like this? How about someone who didn't have faith in God? How might they react to abandonment?

11. Abandonment can happen emotionally as well as physically. If this has happened to you, are there verses in the Bible that help you through these trials? One in particular comes to mind for me - Proverbs 18:24 -A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. How would remembering the fact that Jesus will never leave His children help during a difficult time?

12. Pearce wasn't open to Becky's warnings to Eva's presence. What was your reaction? How would you have responded to Pearce when he wouldn't listen? As a Christian, it's important to forgive because we are forgiven. But, are we supposed to just accept anyone or anything back into our lives? How should Pearce have handled the situations differently? How might the story have changed?

13. What would you have changed about the story? What and why?

Enjoy an excerpt of
The Price of Trust

A Christian Romance
By Amanda Stephan

Beaten and betrayed by the one
who was supposed to love her...



Carly Richards is on the run

Forced to live as a fugitive as her ex-fiance stalks her across country, she finds refuge in a small town in Montana. Her emotional scars are reluctant to heal, and Carly resists the friendliness of those around her ~ especially handsome farmer Joe Baird. Caught in the circumstances, the kind people around her begin to creep into her softening heart. God is at work, and she has to trust Him not only to take care of her, but care for the people she is learning to love.

Carly must learn the Price of Trust.

Available at online booksellers and at

www.BooksByAmanda.com

The Price of Trust

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Chapter One

One more mile. Please, Lord, take me just one more mile, Carly prayed, trying to coax the wheezing junker to the next town. Without realizing it, she was rocking back and forth to encourage the old car to keep up the speed.

It wasn't working. Going slower and slower, she was afraid that she was going to stall and didn't stop praying until she reached the dingy service station that was next to the ramp. The car stalled as she pulled into a parking space.

Thank you so much, Lord. Thank you so much. She prayed with a sigh of relief. *Now will you please take me to where you want me to go? I don't know anyone, and I have to be careful with the little money I've got left. Please let me know what you want me to do,* she prayed under her breath as she got out of the wreck that belonged to her.

A man in dirty overalls came out, wiping his hands on an old grease rag.

"Excuse me, but I noticed your car. Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked, looking her up and down warily.

She was used to stares. Especially in little towns like this one. Newcomers were rare, and most places she'd been, they didn't trust new people right away but looked at them with suspicion. She gave him her best smile and decided to be as friendly as possible.

"Well, I'm not so sure what you can do to fix that old junk, but maybe you could possibly point me to the nearest place to find something to eat, and then I'll decide what to do with it. Will it be okay where it's at for now?"

"Yeah, it'll be okay there for now. But you'll have to take care of it later. The owner doesn't like people just leaving their stuff lying around. There's a diner across the street," the mechanic said, turning around and walking back into the garage.

Nice fellow. Not talkative, but not rude. That was a change from the last place she'd been. She'd been to so many she was a

little tired of new places. She wished and prayed that maybe she could stay here longer than the last place. She wanted to belong somewhere. Stop running. Just stay and be happy. But it didn't seem likely to happen any time soon. She sighed.

"Thanks," she called after him. She turned, and crossed the street to the diner. Taking a deep breath, she pushed open the door and walked in. Everyone turned to stare at her.

Whew! What a way to make people nervous! She smiled bravely and seated herself at the counter.

"May I help ya?" a waitress asked with a drawl.

"Well, I'd like a bowl of soup and water please. And could you tell me if there's a junkyard around here? I've got a donation for them," she said, smiling sardonically.

The waitress proved to be more talkative and friendly than the mechanic.

"Well, we've got two junkyards, but they're run by the same family, so you won't get much from them. They're pretty stingy when it comes to paying for junk cars. Or anything for that matter. You new in town?" the waitress asked while pouring her water.

It always made her nervous when people asked questions. They always wanted to know more than she could or would tell them.

"Yeah, I just arrived. Do you know of anyone that's looking for some help?" she asked, trying to curb the waitress's curiosity.

"Hey there, Sandy! Could I have another cup of coffee over here, or are you going to jaw away the day and let your customers die of thirst?" a man in a booth called out good-naturedly, waving his coffee cup in the air.

"Aw, come on George! I'll get to ya! When have I ever let ya down?" Sandy answered. George guffawed in return. "I'm not too sure about any jobs around here. Are you lookin' for anything special?" Sandy called to her while pouring George's coffee. Carly turned red. She wasn't used to small town people who weren't too worried about keeping things private. "George, ya know anyone that's lookin' for some help?" Sandy asked loud enough for everyone to hear.

George smirked. "Well, depends on what she's looking for. I

hear them junkyard people are looking for someone to work in their 'office.'"

"I wouldn't send her to those people! They're mean! They just ain't right. In fact..." Sandy trailed off as the door swung open and the diner bell tinkled. A bulky man walked in. Carly looked at him as he came in and sat two stools down from her. He was really big with black hair, a belly that hung over his waistband, scruff on his chin, and a mean hard look in his eyes.

"Sandy!" the new man barked needlessly. A silence had fallen over the diner as soon as he walked in. Carly noticed that a few customers were leaving, quickly paying their bills and leaving their tips strewn on their tables. God had blessed Carly with an uncanny ability to figure out people, and most of the time, she could tell if they were to be trusted, if they were honest, or if she should stay away from them. Sometimes she made a mistake, but it wasn't very often.

She didn't trust or like this man sitting by her at all, so she quickly ate her soup, hoping that he would continue to ignore her.

"Yes, Bob. May I help ya?" Sandy asked very quietly and not as friendly as she had been with the other customers. Carly could tell that many people were afraid of this man. She wondered who he was and where he figured in this little town.

"Give me my usual." And that was it. No please. No thank you. Nothing. Just rudeness. Without looking at her, he asked, "Is that your piece of junk sitting at my garage?"

Carly assumed, correctly, that he was talking to her.

"Yes, sir. I was just going to get in touch with the junkyard, and I'll have it taken off your property," Carly stammered, turning red.

"Well then you'll be talking to me, seeing as I'm the owner of the junkyard." He sneered meanly. "What do ya want?" he asked as Sandy brought his food, and he began to eat noisily.

Lord, please help me, she prayed silently, disgusted with this man and his manners. "Well, how much will you give me for it?" she asked with a brave smile.

"I'll give ya fifty bucks and that's it," he said, dribbling food

out of the corners of his mouth.

Repulsed, Carly replied, "That's fine. Thank you. I just have to get my stuff out of it."

He looked at her for the first time. "If you mean the radio or anything that is part of the car, you better leave it," he warned, his eyes hard on her.

"No, I just meant my clothes and stuff like that," Carly stuttered, astounded at his rudeness.

"You're new in town, aren't ya? I would have recognized that hair anywhere," he said, laughing at Carly's red hair. Carly had always been a little oversensitive about her hair. The kids in her schools had always made fun of it, and this man making fun of her didn't endear him to her either. She held her head higher and looked at him defiantly. She wasn't going to let this guy get the best of her.

"I'll go empty my car right now," Carly answered, leaving her money on the counter for Sandy to pick up. He laughed at her as she walked out the door.

Dear Lord, I know that you love that man in there, and I think it's a good thing that you do. I just can't imagine anyone else doing it! she prayed indignantly. I need your help again, Lord. I hope you're not getting tired of helping me so much. I need a job, and a place to sleep. Somewhere Ian won't find me. Will you please lead me where you want me to go?

After both her parents had died, God was the only one she had to take care of her. And she had to admit, that he always did a good job of it. He always answered her and showed her the way. She had no reason to think that this time would be any different.

As she was getting her old, ratty bags out of the car, she heard a cough behind her. She turned to find George from the diner standing a bit aimlessly on the curb by her car.

"Sandy said you were looking for work around here. I think you might try the hardware store. They're getting on in age and could use some help. And, uh, watch out for Bob back there. He's really not a nice guy. You stay away from him and his two sons. You hear?" He walked away before Carly had time to say anything.

"Thanks," she called after him. She closed the door to her car

sadly. It felt like a chapter of her life was closing. She knew it was only a car, and it was silly to feel sad about a car dying, but it was the last thing that was really hers, except for her two suitcases with all her clothes and toiletries.

Lord, you've never let me down before, so please give me the courage to go on. This is where you have placed me, and I ask you to please give me strength and the nerve I'm gonna need, she prayed as she saw Bob walking toward her, grinning.

"Maybe I've offered you too much for that junk. I think I'll change my mind. Naw. I suppose it's worth fifty bucks for scrap." He laughed raucously as he threw a fifty-dollar bill at her. She stooped to pick it up off the ground and started to walk away. "You should meet my boys. One of 'em is bound to like ya! Let us know if you get lonely!" Once more, rude, loud laughter erupted behind her. She kept walking, acting as if she hadn't heard him.

She strolled down the sidewalk, looking for the hardware store. She walked in, leaving her suitcases near the front door. An older gentleman with white hair, rosy cheeks, a white mustache, and wire-rimmed glasses was behind the counter. He reminded her of an old friend she had known in church long ago. Nostalgia threatened to bring tears to her eyes.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, she said pleasantly, "Hi, I'm new in town, and I heard that you might be able to use some help?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am looking for some help. What can you do?" he asked, looking at her worn suitcases. She hesitated.

"Well, I'm pretty good at accounting, data entry, making change, stocking shelves, shoveling out barns, babysitting, farm work, cleaning houses, you name it. I can learn anything you want me to if you'll just give me a chance," she gushed out finally, turning red. She was afraid that he would think she wouldn't be right for the job. She had had to learn so many things, that she was sure that she really could learn anything.

The man looked at her for a moment. Then he came around from behind the counter and held out his hand to her.

"My name is Samuel, but the town folk just call me Sam."

"Carly. Carly Adams," she answered, turning red as she gave

her mother's last name instead of her own. She shook his hand and felt that he knew she hadn't told him the truth. She hated to fib, but she knew she had to.

"Carly Adams," he repeated, as if trying it out. "Hmm. Well, I've always been partial to the name 'Red' myself. Would you mind if I called you Red instead?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

Red. She used to hate that nickname, but somehow, this old man made it all right. He didn't mean it as a cruelty to her. Instinct told her that she could trust him.

She chuckled. "Yes, that would be fine."

"I can't pay you too much, this being a small town and all, but I'll do my best. If you need a place to stay"—he nodded toward her suitcases—"there's a room upstairs with a small bathroom the manager used before he left you could have. That way you wouldn't have to pay for a place to live, and I could feel easier about the pay. Would that suit you?" he asked, looking at her above his glasses.

"That would be wonderful! Thank you so much!" She felt like crying, she was so happy. God was so good to her. He always provided for her needs. Even when she didn't understand or when people failed her, she knew she could really trust God to take care of her.

"Here. I'll show you the way upstairs so you can put your things away and get settled a bit," Sam said, taking a suitcase while she took the other.

He led her up the stairs at the back of the store and opened the door to a tiny apartment at the end of the hallway. Sam placed her suitcase on the floor beside the door and showed her around.

"It's not much, but it is a place to stay. Here's the bathroom." He opened a small door to the tiny bathroom that had a sink, toilet, tub, and nothing else. "Here's the kitchen, refrigerator, stove. That's a table that you pull down from the wall, and here's the bed," he said pointing to an older couch that pulled out to a sleeper bed. It was small, but extremely clean and well cared for. "My wife came in here and cleaned up after the manager left, so there shouldn't be any surprises." He laughed.

"Thank you so much, Mister..." She trailed off, not sure what

to call him.

"Please just call me Sam. That's all. Just Sam. My wife's name is Sue. You'll meet her later when she comes in to see me around four. It's a habit she's always had. She always comes, and she's never late. Well, I'll leave you be for now. You unpack, take care of your things, relax. Whatever. But we do ask that you don't smoke or drink in here. We're Christians, and we don't think that would be right for us to allow that while you're here," he said, turning to go back downstairs.

"You're Christians?" Carly asked, delighted.

He turned back to her, surprised. "Yes, we are. Why?"

"I'm so glad! I am too! Where do you go to church?" she asked, smiling.

"Well, we go to the little church down the road here. Got a real good pastor that preaches right out of the Good Book. It just doesn't get any better than that. We'd love to have you come with us tomorrow if you'd like," he invited.

"I'd love to!" Carly said with an eager shake of his hand.

About the Author



Amanda Stephan is just a normal, everyday country girl. Residing in Middle, TN with her husband and children who closely resemble several of the seven dwarfs, (Sleepy, Sneezy, Grumpy, and Happy), three cats, (only because hubby refuses to get one of his own so she must share,) one dog, and multiple roosters that love to roost under their bedroom windows. She loves to laugh and have a good time, and loves to read a good book.

She finds writing to be an opportunity to share God's love for others in a fun and entertaining way. Her first novel, *The Price of Trust*, was published in May of 2010, her second novel, *Lonely Hearts* was released at the end of October, 2011, through TreasureLine Publishing.

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