

The Price of Trust



By
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The Price of Trust
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Printed in the United States of America

1. Fiction / Romance / Contemporary 2. Fiction / Religious



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READING GROUP GUIDE

1. In the opening chapter, we see Carly about to stall out on the expressway and she begins praying for God to take her just one more mile. What insight does this give you about Carly? Is it a reasonable assumption? Why or why not?
2. Throughout this book, we see Carly praying often in various situations - even about little, seemingly meaningless things. Do you think this gives a taste of her relationship with God? When do you find yourself praying the most? After a difficult time or all the time?
3. Is a prayer life important? Why or why not? Would you change your prayer life? In what way?
4. After a time, we see Carly and Joe falling in love. Do you think this was an easy thing for Carly, or difficult? Why? Is it possible for an abused woman to overcome the pain of her past and learn to trust someone again enough to love them? How did Carly's relationship with Christ help her with this?
5. Why would Joe be so willing to take care of Carly and what showed you, the reader, that he was concerned for her?
6. Billy Pruitt was the typical, unsaved, from the wrong side of the tracks character. What was your first reaction to his character? Why did you feel this way? After you were finished with the book, did you feel differently about him? What made you change your mind?
7. Joe has been hurt in an emotional way, while Carly has been hurt in a physical way. How do both these situations influence the way they handle life? In what ways are these two similar? Different? What is it about their past that bring them together?
8. Is it believable for Billy's character to readily accept Carly's forgiveness? Why? What about Billy's conversion? Is that possible and what makes you think that?

Reading Guide

9. Have you ever done something that someone wouldn't forgive you for? How did that make you feel? If you could do something--anything--about it, what would it be? Does your reaction fit with Scripture?

10. Which character did you find yourself drawn to the most? Why? The least?

11. If you could change one thing about the book, what would it be and why?

12. Is there anything in this book to which you personally can relate? Is there any advice or ideas you can take and apply to your own life?

Enjoy an excerpt of
Lonely Hearts
A Sweet Christian Romance
By *Amanda Stephan*



One lonely mother. Two matchmaking kids. Three eligible bachelors, and some very yummy apple pie!

When widow Becky Callis moves to a new town, her intentions were to start over in a place where she's not reminded of her dead husband. Her kids, however, take it as a chance to help her start over romantically. They soon realize it's easier to find someone to like their mother than it is to figure out which man is *best* for her.

Lonely Hearts is a heartwarming story of second chances and choices, and includes an exclusive apple pie recipe!

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Chapter One

Becky Callis was new in town, and she felt her intrusion.

A bearded man outside the hardware store stopped sweeping, broom held in mid-air and watched them narrowly as they drove past, perhaps wondering if she were the type to plunder and loot his shop. A couple of older women that had been chatting outside a tiny florist shop suddenly turned to stone, their mouths gaping open, snickering about what kind of woman would be caught dead in such an old pick-up truck. Becky even imagined one of their tongues hung out.

She repressed a giggle and waved, receiving an incredulous half-wave from one of the women, and no acknowledgement from the others.

She hated being stared at, and tried to keep a somewhat pleasant smile pasted on her freckled face as she drove through. She could feel her fair skin literally burning with embarrassment.

Her thirteen year old daughter, Jen, gave her a twisted frown. "Mom, what is wrong with these people?" Her pixie face turned dark red as a teenage boy waved at her. "They act like they've never seen strangers before."

Becky's grin grew larger and more realistic as she gave a two-finger salute to the policeman leaning on his squad car with arms crossed as if daring her to go faster than the posted thirty mile an hour sign. Obediently, she stopped at the one red light the town could boast of and waited for it to turn green.

"I guess," she said with a shrug, watching an old man sitting outside a diner pretend to read a newspaper. He spit tobacco juice into a jar and set it down next to his chair, his bushy eyebrows making it very clear he was looking at them. "They don't get too many newcomers here."

Jen grimaced and pushed her sleeping brother's head off her

shoulder onto the vinyl headrest instead. “Well that’s fine, but they don’t have to stare. Makes me feel like we’re pets in a pet shop.”

“Or beef at a cattle auction.” Becky laughed at her discomfort, noticing that the green light flickered faintly before going completely out. She drove on at the urging of the honking car behind her before she spoke. “Oh don’t worry, they’ll get used to us and I’m pretty sure you’re going to like it here. Just think,” she said brightly, turning onto a dirt road the ratty map indicated. “We’re celebrities!”

Jen laughed and looked out the window, taking in the country scene before her, the nosy townsfolk left behind. Large open fields of tall grass, trees lining the road, and mountains off in the distance made it a lovely scene she couldn’t find fault with.

Becky smiled a sad, wistful smile, thankful she had her kids. In the nine lonely years following Frank’s death, she often found herself wondering how she was supposed to cope and go on as she desperately missed her ‘better half.’

At least I’ll never forget what Frank looked like, she thought a little morosely to herself as she glanced over at Jeff.

Tall for his eleven years, he liked his dark hair short so he wouldn’t have to mess with it, and his cherubic face hid a wealth of mischievousness and humor that always brightened her day. Especially when he looked at her with his guilty dark brown eyes as if to say he were extremely sorry for some prank he was about to pull or had pulled. Just like his father. Her heart wrenched with sadness, and she quickly turned her thoughts to another source of comfort. Jen.

When she looked at her daughter, it was like she was looking into a mirror. Petite, sassy copper hair that loved being just a tad on the unmanageable side, her hazel eyes full of compassion and loyalty, quick to laugh and quick to cry, she promised to be a beauty when she got older. Like her mother.

That’s what Frank had always said, Becky fought against the lump that insisted on forming in her throat as more memories of her dead husband flooded in.

Just in time to stop a tirade of reminiscent thoughts that would

have pushed her into a melancholy spirit, Jeff let out a tremendous snore and wetly smacked his lips, making them erupt into giggles as his head lolled once again onto his sister's shoulder. She rolled her eyes, but didn't move him.

A few minutes later, Becky pulled into what looked like a tractor path instead of a driveway and stopped abruptly when a home came into view. "Jen, would you please check the address and see if this is the right place?" She asked solemnly, studying the old, dilapidated farm house, complete with thigh-high weeds for a lawn.

Brittle shutters hung on by sheer will-power next to dusty, grimy windows that hadn't seen a washcloth in years. A huge, antique antenna had fallen off the roof and now hung dejectedly by a thin wire as if for dear life and swung endlessly against the side of the house, knocking off peeling paint with every slight breeze. A rustic lean-to that served as a shed, as well as termite dessert, stood forlornly off to one side of the drive. She tried to stifle a laugh and ended up snorting instead.

"Mom," Jen answered doubtfully, looking at the paper in her hand. "This is the right place," she wrinkled her nose, "but I don't think the guy you're renting it from told you the truth. Didn't he say it was nice?"

They looked over at each other and burst out laughing, waking Jeffrey out of a terrific snore storm.

He bolted upright and rubbed his eyes, looking out the window. "Huh? What? What are you guys laughing at? Why are we stopped here?"

"Welcome home kids," Becky said, grinning as she pulled up alongside the drooping porch and turned off the truck.

Jen opened her door and glanced down at the weeds. Becky could almost see her thinking about ticks and bugs getting on her. "Oh my word," she muttered as she looked around, a dismal frown on her face. "How are we supposed to get in? Is he going to meet us here or something?"

Jeff, always ready for an adventure, hopped out of the truck and ran to the porch. "He said he would leave the key under the mat

by the front door. Come on,” he said as he ran, wanting to be there before his more cautious sister.

Always in a hurry, he yanked on the handle of the screen door, causing the whole thing to fall right off the frame on top of him. “Uh, mom?” He hung his head in shame, embarrassed that he’d already broken something. “I think we’re going to need a new screen door.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not the only thing we’re going to have to work on.” Jen laughed, thankful that it had happened to him, and not her.

“Noted,” Becky answered good-naturedly, giving him a thumbs-up. She unlatched the tailgate and smacked her hands across her jeans in an effort to erase the dust she’d accrued during their long hours of driving with the windows down.

“Hey mom! You should see the beehive up here.” He pointed to a gigantic paper wasp hive in the corner of the porch ceiling.

Jen jumped off the porch, squealing as Jeff picked up a stick to poke at the hive. “Jeffrey Allen! Don’t you dare!”

“Did you find the key?” Becky called, trying to distract Jeff from the beehive.

“You don’t need it,” he said, innocently trying to hide the stick behind his back. “The door’s open.”

“Leave it alone,” warned Becky just as he was about to give the hive a good whack.

“Aww,” mumbled Jeff, dropping the stick and shuffling with his hands in his pockets. “Do you have eyes in the back of your head or something?” He grumbled, stepping up next to her as she pulled some boxes toward the edge of the tailgate of her old beat-up Chevy.

“Here,” she said, handing him a smaller box. “Why don’t you two help me and take some of these boxes in the house. And no, I don’t have eyes in the back of my head. I just know you awfully well.” She smiled indulgently at him, ruffling his thick hair.

Jen grabbed a box and started hauling it to the porch. “Too bad we sold our mower. Maybe we should get a cow!” Hopefully, she looked back at her mother.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you like the grass?” Becky laughed as she pushed more boxes near the end of the truck making it easier for the kids to grab them.

“Grass?” Jeff asked dubiously, struggling with his load. “If it were any taller, it would be over my head!”

Sensing an opportunity to pick on her brother, Jen blurted, “What do you mean, ‘would be’? It already is.” Somewhat sensitive about his size, he glared ferociously at her and she stifled any more comments she might have had.

“Come on,” Becky said repressing a grin as she slapped him on the back. “Let’s all get along now. We’ve got a lot of work to do, and I’m going to need lots of help. Here,” she handed a box of cleaning supplies to Jen, and a broom and mop to Jeff. “Please take these into the kitchen.”

They did as they were told, quietly quarreling amongst themselves as they left her to stack things on the porch. Becky was just setting down another load when she heard a loud crash and screams coming from the kitchen. Immediately dropping everything and with her heart in her throat, she raced into the house expecting something terrible. A large box of pots and pans lay ominously in the middle of the tiny kitchen and several lids had rolled over toward the antique refrigerator. This had obviously been the loud crash she had heard outside. Nudging the upset box with her toe, she wondered momentarily if a large poisonous spider had hitched a ride from their previous home and had scared them.

Looking wildly around the kitchen, she was surprised to see both kids standing on the chipped white Formica counter, their faces white with terror. “What is it?”

Jen pointed to the small utility closet at the end of the room while she clutched Jeff’s arm with the other. “There’s an animal in there!” She said, shuddering with horror. “I think it’s a huge rat.”

“Of all the things we have to have in the house, it’s got to be a *rat*.” Becky said shuddering convulsively, her lips stretched in a thin line. She hated rats and mice more than anything, and was always disgusted whenever she had to deal with them for some reason or other.

Cautiously, she grabbed a broom and tiptoed to the door, listening intently for any sound inside. Jeff shrugged off his sister's hand and lightly jumped down off the counter, interested in seeing for himself what was in the closet.

"Do you hear anything?" he whispered.

Becky shook her head and gently twisted the knob, ready to use the broom as a weapon and squash whatever it was. Slowly, she pulled the creaky door open. Taking a deep breath, she peeped inside and caught sight of tiny brown eyes looking back at her. Opening the door all the way, she found to her surprise and immense relief, a pair of baby raccoons.

"Oh look," she said, motioning for Jen to come down from her perch and look.

"They're so cute," Jeff said, poking his head inside the door so he wouldn't miss a chance to see what had caused all the fuss. "Can we keep them?" he asked, looking up hopefully.

"No way," Jen said, finally getting up the nerve to climb down. "That thing scared me to death."

"I wonder how they got in," Becky mumbled, looking around the closet.

"Maybe through there," Jeff said, pointing to the broken floor register. When he stepped in to get a closer look, one of the raccoons backed up to the wall and hissed menacingly at him.

"I think we're not going to get to keep either of these little critters," Becky said, pulling him out of the closet by the back of his shirt. "Go open the front door and I'll try to sweep them out. Jen, get the mop and head them off if they try to escape." Obediently, Jen grabbed the mop as Becky started sweeping both hissing and angry raccoons out the door. Finally, after three mishaps with one of the raccoons almost getting away and Jen re-climbing onto the counter while screaming, they managed to sweep them both to freedom. Laughing, they hurriedly shut the door before the coons could come back in.

"Jeff," Becky said, turning to him. "Get the tool box out of the front of the truck and see if you can try to fix that register so they can't get back in that way." Jeff's face lit up, happy to have a

‘man’s job’ to do.

“We don’t have much more to do,” Becky sighed, as she and Jen went outside to finish unpacking the truck.

Her face red with exertion, Jen swept a few strands of hair back and stood erect, trying to un-kink her back after lugging a large box into the front room. “I sure am glad we decided to have those yard sales before we moved.”

Becky puffed and tried to navigate around the room with her vision blocked by the load of boxes in her arms. “Oh come on, don’t you think it would have been interesting for you, Jeff, and me to carry in a couch?” She laughed as she and Jen slid down the wall and finally slumped to the floor, relaxing.

With an air of delight and pride, Jeff came in and joined them, his grin splitting his face in half. “I tried to fix that register the best I could. I don’t think they’ll be back. Duct tape fixes everything.”

Becky clapped him on the back. “Thanks. And thank you too Jen. I appreciate both of your help.” She leaned back and closed her eyes, drained.

Contentedly, they sat for a few minutes, hoping this could be the last move.

“Mom,” Jen said, her alarmed voice breaking the silence. “Someone’s here.” Groaning, Becky stood up and arched her back just in time to see an old flat bed farm truck coming up the rutted drive.

“It could be the guy we’re renting from.” Quickly, she tucked a few stray hairs behind her ears and dusted off her jeans, trying to look presentable to whoever it was. As it neared the house, the truck turned off the driveway to park in the long grass right in front of their door.

A bent over old man in greasy overalls managed to get out and limp up the steps, chewing on a weed. He spat it out and knocked before he entered the room, uninvited. Alarmed, Becky stood with her hands on her hips, ready to push the fragile looking man out the door if necessary.

“Howdy,” he drawled, eyeing her and the two kids. “Name’s Pickles.” He stuck out a grubby, calloused hand her way, obviously

intending to shake.

Becky took his hand and gave it a light squeeze and a gentle shake, afraid she would hurt him. “You’re the landlord?” She asked, looking over his shoulder at her open-mouthed kids.

He ran his hands up and down his overalls straps, amused. “Yup,” he said, glancing around at all the boxes. “This all ya got?”

“Yup,” Jeff mimicked humorously before Becky could answer. She shot him a warning look, her scowl deepening as he shrugged his shoulders and smiled like a Cheshire cat.

“That’s my kind of boy,” the old man grinned, scratching his bald head. “Ya got a year lease and yer rent is due the first of the month,” he said, getting right to the point. “I live right down the road to the left if ya be needin’ anything, just give me a holler. Glad ya made it,” he stuck his hand out again.

Liking his simple, country ways, Becky found herself pumping his hand up and down a little more enthusiastically this time. “There is one thing we need, if you wouldn’t mind. I don’t have a lawnmower.” She hinted with raised eyebrows as she walked him out to the porch.

A look of pure astonishment passed across his weathered features as he scratched his head again. He thought a moment before answering. “Well ya ain’t got to worry about the grass. It’ll die in a few weeks.”

Becky followed him to his truck, not quite ready to give up. “You don’t have one? We’d really like to cut the grass.”

Jen snorted, close at her mother’s heels. She hated being left out of conversations. “Yeah, we can’t find Jeff if he steps off the path.” Becky nudged her in the ribs, making her squeak.

“Sure I got one,” he said, climbing into his truck. “Bye.” He waved as he put the old truck in gear and drove off, another long weed clutched between his teeth.

Stunned, they watched him leave, a trail of dust clouds hanging in the air. “I think that means he’ll bring it tomorrow,” Jeff said after a moment, joining them on the porch. Amused, they burst into laughter at their neighbor’s odd ways.

Becky ran a hand over her face, her eyes twinkling merrily.

Lonely Hearts

“Who’s hungry?”

Always anxious to eat, Jeff gave a loud whoop as he jumped in the air. “I’m starving! What’re we going to have?”

She shrugged, looking from one happy child to the other. “I thought we’d just go out for something tonight, what do you think?” Grinning at their exuberant ‘yes’, she clapped Jeff on his shoulder and grabbed her purse. “Let’s go!”

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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