



Hopeful

Shelley Shepard Gray

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If Miriam helps Junior court Mary Kathryn, she'll get to spend a lot of time with him, but she might lose him in the process. Are these few stolen moments worth a lifetime of sacrifice? Is Miriam right to even hope for the life she dreams of?

Hopeful Details

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From Reader Review Hopeful for online ebook

Beth says

I received this book from Litfuse Publicity for no charge in exchange for my honest review of this book. The opinions expressed here are my own.

Book Description:

In the Amish town of Sugarcreek, love comes in many forms. But will it come at all for Miriam? Miriam Zehr has worked at the Sugarcreek Inn longer than she cares to admit. The restaurant is a favorite of town residents as well as the many tourists who come to taste the famous Amish fare. Though she always tries to have a smile for every customer, deep down Miriam knows something's missing: a family of her own. Miriam has never felt particularly beautiful, especially because she's always been a bit heavier than other girls her age. When Junior, the man she's pined for all her life, suddenly seeks her out, she's thrilled to be noticed . . . until she realizes he's only asking her to help get the attention of Mary Kathryn Hershberger, her pretty friend.

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My Thoughts:

Hopeful is the first book in Shelley Shepard Gray's newest series Return to Sugarcreek. This is the first book by Shelley Shepard Gray I have had the joy of reading. Miriam is always running late, everyone knows it. She works at Sugarcreek Inn and has for quite a while. She knows she wants more out of life than her job but just hasn't found it. Miriam has always felt less than the other girls in her district. Her family pushes her to find a man and get married. Miriam has really only had feelings for one man, Junior. They have known each other for many years but Junior and Miriam have never really spoken. When Junior approaches Miriam to talk to her she thinks he has finally decided she is the one but finds out he is interested in her friend, Mary Kate. Miriam agrees to try to help Junior court her but Mary Kate wants nothing to do with him. Mary Kate recently moved to Sugarcreek and it looking to leave at the end of the school year. She moved to get away from a possessive boyfriend. As Miriam hopes Junior will notice her, Mary Kate wishes he wouldn't notice her.

As my readers know, Amish Fiction is one of my favorite genres and thankfully I have had a few to read lately. Hopeful is the first book by Shelley Shepard Gray I have had read and I really enjoyed it. I haven't read any of the other novels based in Sugarcreek but I didn't feel like I was missing anything picking up this book. Shelley Shepard Gray writes with authority on the Amish, Sugarcreek Ohio, other Amish cities, and teaching. I really enjoyed all the characters but Miriam was my favorite. I could relate to her in many ways especially her feelings of inadequacy and her willingness to help anyone who needed her. She has a big heart and really put her heart and soul into everything she did. I found myself taken in with this book from the start and could not put it down. I cannot wait to read the other books in this series! I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys Amish Fiction, you will not be disappointed. I give this book 4.5 STARS.

Kristi says

Miriam Zehr is a single Amish woman in her twenties. Even though she seems happy working at the Sugarcreek Inn she longs to be married and have her own family. She has liked Junior Beiler for as long as she can remember and is excited when he asks to see her. Miriam is in for quite the disappointment when she finds Junior only wants to see her because of her best friend, Mary Katherine, whom he would like to court. Miriam is heartbroken but agrees to help Junior in his effort to court Mary Katherine.

What a great book this was! It was easy to get into and from the first page I felt as if I had known the characters forever. The characters are all likable and "real" but I could especially relate to Miriam. She is the type of girl you would want to be friends with. I'm sure everyone knows someone who is like her. I liked Junior too even though I wanted to ask what he was thinking at times.

The story flows smoothly from beginning to end. I found myself wanting to read faster to find out what happens but at the same time wanting to read slower so the book wouldn't end. I really enjoyed the time I spent with these characters.

I am definitely recommending this book to anyone who likes Amish fiction, Christian fiction or just a good clean book to read.

Kathleen (Kat) Smith says

Webster's dictionary defines hopeful as exciting hope; promising advantage or success and in her latest series, *Return to Sugarcreek*, Shelley Shephard Gray does just that for two remarkable characters in her book *Hopeful*. Miriam Zehr wants to have hope. Being twenty-five among the Amish and without any romantic aspects in her future, she is considered a bit of an outcast by both friends and her family. That make Miriam all the more subconscious about being a little overweight and not the prettiest young woman in her opinion. In fact, no one has ever given Miriam a passing glance. She finds solace in working as a waitress and baker at the Sugarcreek Inn, but even there she comes up short, she can't even make it to work on time. It's a good thing she is such a great baker and hard worker or she would have lost her job awhile ago. But something has to change for her.

When Junior Beiler arrives at the Inn and asks to meet with Miriam at her house after work, she finally feels that God is about to answer her prayers. She thinks Junior has come to court her! She has had her eye on Junior for quite some time and is finally willing to believe something good is coming her way. Even her parents are thrilled to hear that Junior is making plans to come to the house to talk to Miriam, However, when Junior arrives all he wants to know is if Miriam can help set him up with her best friend Mary Kate. In one instant, all her hopes and dreams are dashed in pieces. Yet Miriam will never let anyone know that she set herself up believing for one minute that Junior was interested in her and plays it off in front of her parents and Junior. To Junior, she is willing to be that "friend" he needs to get to Mary Kate, but she can't let her parents and family think that Junior doesn't want to court her, so she begins to live a double life of sorts, not being honest to anyone but most of all not even herself.

Judith Graber has learned after her last miscarriage that she can no longer have any babies and she wonders

just what kind of wife can she be to Ben, if she can't give him the family he has wanted. No matter how much Ben assures her that his only concern is for her to get better, no amount of love seems to be enough for Judith to come to terms with only being a wife to Ben and not a mother of his children. She's isn't even willing to consider adoption. Knowing many women who have lost babies, she believes she might find the answer with another doctor, but what if this is the choice God has in store for her, to remain childless. Can she live with that fact forever?

I received *Hopeful* by Shelley Shepard Gray compliments of Litfuse Publicity and Avon Inspire for my honest review. I did not receive any monetary compensation and the opinions expressed in this review are strictly my own. I found myself relating to Miriam's character quite a bit, willing to put her true feelings on the back burner to make everyone else happy. She is undoubtedly a people pleaser. I can see her struggle with her own self image and when things don't work out the way she likes, it seriously affects her self esteem. She finds herself second guessing herself at virtually every turn. I see so much of myself in Miriam's character, I felt like Shelley was writing about me. For me, this was one of the closest character parallels I've ever come across in a novel. It was like watching myself in this novel. I love how it turned out, and I won't give this one away, but trust me you'll want to check this one out. I personally give this a 5 out of 5 stars.

Cynthia Fernstaedt says

Entering Sugarcreek, in Shelley Shepard Gray's *Hopeful*, we meet is Miriam Zehr, as she is rushing to work. How often we all find ourselves rushing and not seeing what God has blessed us with in our lives. Junior Beiler, laden with the responsibility of raising his 7 siblings after the early deaths of their parents. Aren't we also often so concentrated on our responsibilities, we are unable to see those who God has placed in our lives? Mary Kate Herschberger and Judith Knox, both suffering with pain and fear from recent events in their lives; not unlike any other person who has turned their pain into shame. These characters lives meet and intertwine through chance, through friendship and in God's timing. *Hopeful*, gives us insight into the beauty of hope and what can happen when, even the smallest flicker of hope is carried in our hearts. Shelley takes us into the simple lives of an Amish community and shares how they too are not immune to life's complexities and problems.

Cathy Cermele says

I had waited for the release of this book for quite sometime and had fully intended to read it over the course of a few days, perhaps a week.

But once I began to read and was transported back to Sugarcreek, I could not put this book down.

Miriam Zehr is both known and well liked by all in her community. She has a lot of friends, including Junior Beiler and schoolteacher Mary Kathryn Herschberger.

The story focuses on the lives of these three young people who have hopes and dreams that at times seem out of their reach.

Shelley Shepard Gray brings new characters to life and brings back beloved characters from her *Seasons of Sugarcreek* series.

This is one of those books that you will want to share with your mothers, sisters, daughters and friends that enjoy a wholesome and a very well written book

Deborah says

In the Amish town of Sugarcreek, love comes in many forms. But will it come at all for Miriam?

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Miriam has never felt particularly beautiful, especially because she's always been a bit heavier than other girls her age. When Junior, the man she's pined for all her life, suddenly seeks her out, she's thrilled to be noticed . . . until she realizes he's only asking her to help get the attention of Mary Kathryn Hershberger, her pretty friend.

If Miriam helps Junior court Mary Kathryn, she'll get to spend a lot of time with him, but she might lose him in the process. Are these few stolen moments worth a lifetime of sacrifice? Is Miriam right to even hope for the life she dreams of?

My Review:

Going into this book, I had a lot of ideas about how I would feel about the story. I've been in Miriam's shoes, and I've often wondered if men are capable only of looking at a woman and seeing her based on how she looks. But Gray delves so much deeper than just outlining the problem and writing a boy-gets-girl story.

For Junior and Miriam, it all boils down to who they were as people; never about superficial things like looks or weight. I really appreciated how Gray put Miriam out there and showed us how she really felt about always being the wallflower to prettier girls and forever being in the background when it came to attention from boys. She is the kind of girl I would want to be friends with because her character understood what it means to truly see a person and what they have inside, instead of what they appear to be at face value.

This book was provided by the publisher through Litfuse Nest for free in exchange for an honest review.

Taylor says

Hopeful by Shelley Shepard Gray is a tender story written with a group of honest voices that carry its story. Many things are happening in Sugarcreek, and Gray does such a wonderful job at showcasing each trial and difficult circumstance that each person goes through. Hopeful is the first of this new series to look out for and to get lost in. Get ready to fall in love with Sugarcreek and the people who call it home.

My Thoughts

This year might be the year of the Amish genre of my 2014 reading. It's a genre that is a little out of my usual zone and I am still getting the hang of the German language that is incorporated into the story. So far all is going swell!

When I first started this book I had no expectations. (Sometimes that is the best way to go about reading a book.) This book is a fast read. It only has 256 pages, so it's a perfect weekend read or even a perfect in between book. You will be surprised how enjoyable this book is once you get into it. I couldn't believe how much I loved this story and it's characters.

I found myself to really like both the main characters - Miriam and Junior. I couldn't help but relate to Miriam so much when it came to personal attributes. There were even times that I couldn't help but be encouraged by her selflessness. I related a lot to Junior as well, as the eldest I understood his burden of that role. Miriam and Junior's relationship was anything but perfect. It was full of unrequited and blind love. Now the question throughout the rest of the story is will they have any type of relationship? By the time you get halfway through the book you'll be rooting for something that involves the "L" word, trust me!

There was also a group of secondary characters which I believe Gray is going to incorporate into the rest of her Sugarcreek series. These characters were just as developed and had issues and past mysteries that were causing them hindrance from having a normal life. I really liked this additional point of view. I thought it was well done and didn't stray that much from the Miriam and Junior plotline. If anything it only made this book much more fuller. Fuller in the sense that I felt that I was apart of this little Amish/Englisher community that wasn't just full of two people and their comedic relationship, but full of people that know Miriam and Junior and have lives of their own. I am very much looking forward to seeing how Gray uses these characters through the rest of her series.

If you are looking for a book that can lift your moods and give you a overall good feeling this is a perfect book. I would even recommend this book for younger girls (mostly teens) because the ages of Miriam and Junior is around early twenties. There is a lot of discussions about relationships and how one views oneself that can come from reading this book. It could be a great mother-daughter book. Or sister-sister. Or friend-friend. ;)

Rating: 4 out of 4 bookshelves

Disclaimer: I received a free copy for an honest review from Litfuse Publicity Group.

JoJo Sutis says

I absolutely love love love the first book in the Return to Sugarcreek series!

I immediately feel in love with main character, Miriam.

Her personality, warm smile, and kindness makes her BFF material...she's definitely one of my fave characters in fiction!

This storyline was super fun! Miriam is crushing on Junior, but he wants her to play Cupid for him and match him up with her good friend, Mary-Kate!

Mary- Katherine seems almost the opposite of Miriam, very self-absorbed in ways- but her mysterious past had me empathizing with her, although, Miriam was my favorite!

Junior has his own set of responsibilities in caring for his siblings after the death of his parents.

He's very mature, level-headed and practical in ways, but does he really know his own heart and will he give Miriam the chance at love, I think she deserves???

You'll have to read to find out!!!

Definitely the start of what I anticipate to be a fave new series!!!!

Maggie says

I was first attracted to this book because of the basic premise that closely resembled English courting, which is very different from what I see in the usual Amish fiction. Usually you don't see the boy pursuing the girl as much as Junior goes after Mary Kate. This is what we usually see in much younger people in the English world. This lends a kind of divergence to this book, where the main characters are acting as adults at their jobs or in caring for their families but are very much still juveniles when it comes to courting and relationships. It was sweet to see something in adults that we usually only see in young kids anymore.

I most identified with Miriam in this book. I too was never a skinny girl and always felt left out. I wondered at first why Miriam didn't clarify the situation with her parents, but after reading more I realized that she was probably so tired of feeling like she had disappointed them. This is even more apparent when she finds herself helping Junior's youngest sister and relishing the whirlwind that the larger family constantly lives in.

I was interested to see the topic lean towards obsession and stalking, something that probably is not talked much about in the Amish world. While I am not pleased to see the real world problems intruding in their lives, I'm glad that Gray has included aspects of our "fancy" lives that could definitely take place in the "plain" world.

I enjoyed this book and am looking forward to the next book in the Return to Sugarcreek series.

I received a copy of this book in order to provide a review. All thoughts are my own.

Jalynn Patterson says

About the Book:

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About the Author:

Shelley Shepard Gray is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author, a finalist for the American Christian Fiction Writers prestigious Carol Award, and a two-time HOLT Medallion winner. She lives in

southern Ohio, where she writes full-time, bakes too much, and can often be found walking her dachshunds on her town's bike trail.

My Review:

Poor Miriam Zehr is a twenty something, the only child left in her group of siblings that still remains unattached and if all that wasn't enough she has just about given up any hope that God is even going to make that dream come true. She has prayed and waited for years for the man meant for her to come waltzing in her life but to no avail. At least not until the day that Junior walked up to her during her shift at the Sugarcreek Inn to ask her if it would be okay for him to stop by her house later on that day after her shift.

Of course she said yes, how could she of ever said any different. The guy that she was holding out hope for after all these years is finally beginning to notice her. Or at least that is what she thinks anyway. She soon learns his reason for wanting to talk with her and it all has to do with his crush and fascination with Miriam's good friend, Mary Kate. She feels like such a fool. She also soon learns that Mary Kate has something in her past that continues to haunt her. something that isn't so quiet or willing to stay in her past.

I loved this book and I have only touched on a few things about it. It is a fairly quick read that will leave your head spinning because there is so much life to the characters and tons of twists and turns. You are going to love it!

****Disclosure**** This book was sent to me free of charge for my honest review from Litfuse Publicity.

Jennifer Smith says

I'd thought I was burned out on Amish stories, but this book was an enjoyable read. I found myself liking the two main characters--Miriam and Junior--in spite of their flaws. Miriam had a likable personality and sweet innocence that reminded me of a few people I've known in real life. Though Junior had a habit of being somewhat insensitive, he did not come across as a bad person.

I think most romance readers will infer who ends up with who at the end of this book, but skip over the next paragraph if you don't want even the hint of a spoiler. :)

Not only was this story strong in that the main characters had obvious flaws--physical and otherwise--and yet were likable, the the hero also chased the wrong girl for almost the entire book. I love that the author was able to pull this off, leave us with a satisfying ending, and still keep it believable.

There was one thing I didn't like: (And actually, readers of the Seasons of Sugarcreek series--which I have not read--might actually enjoy it.) A subplot is thrown in involving a couple named Judith and Ben. Their story has nothing to do with the characters or main plot of the novel, which I found distracting. Every time I got to those parts, I found myself reading a little faster to get through them. As I said, I may have felt differently if I'd been familiar with the characters.

My thoughts as a writer:

Not too long ago I read an article about creating situations where your character makes a bad decision (which adds conflict to the story, something a book definitely needs) and yet retains readers' sympathy. For instance, if a character does something crazy, instead of the readers rolling their eyes and thinking, 'What a moron,'

you want them to think, 'I might do the same thing in that situation--or I at least understand why he did that.'

The author does a great job implementing this concept on page 35. Miriam lets her parents think something that isn't true. The reader knows this is a bad choice, yet can say they might do the same thing in the same situation. This allows for an extra layer of conflict without losing the trust or admiration of the reader.

Another thing I've seen discussed lately is putting conflict--even if only small doses--in every scene of the book. In this book, I noticed a few scenes where Miriam's boss gives her gentle reprimands that don't have long-lasting implications in the story. They do, however, make the scenes stronger.

Lisa says

Junior (Albert) Beiler, oldest brother of eight children and the head of the house since the death of their parents; he is responsible, hard working, and loyal to his family and friends. He has worked hard to keep the family together, not allowing various extended family members to divide the eight of them up.

Miriam Zehr is determined and distracted, a friend to everyone, and a self proclaimed wall flower. She has a good heart and would do anything for a friend. She wants more from life than just working; she wants what many of her friends have- love, a family and a life. She is convinced that she needs to leave Sugarcreek to find it since the one person she has always had a crush on does not notice her at all.

The road to love for Junior and Miriam is a sweet and heartwarming one. They both want more in their lives and are struggling with how to find it. Miriam is helping Junior's youngest sister with reading and she loves Kaylene, but it makes it hard knowing that junior does not return her feelings. Along the way Junior realizes that he has been looking for the wrong thing. The sub-plots are hard facts of life, thought provoking and handled with grace. This is the first in a new series and one that I will surely be following.

I received an advanced reader copy of this book in exchange for my honest review

Lorraine says

You won't be able to put this book down!!! The two main characters in this book are Miriam Zehr and Junior (Albert) Beiler.

Miriam has a wonderful, giving spirit and is liked by everyone. She works as a cook and waitress at the Sugarcreek Inn and, though she is a hard worker, she just can never seem to get to work on time. Miriam has wanted Junior to notice her all her life.

Junior is a hard working man who took on the role of head of household after the death of their parents. There are eight Beiler children of which Junior was child number two. All of his siblings are grown now except the youngest, little eight year old Kaylene.

One day at the restaurant Miriam see's Junior with one of his friends sitting at a table motioning for her. She went to the table with coffee pot in hand. Junior wanted to come by her house and talk to her. Could her

dreams be finally coming true? Is the man she longs for finally noticing her?

Hopeful is a book about just that, hope. Miriam's hope for a future with Junior. Junior's hope for...what? Read this wonderfully written book by USA Today bestselling author Shelley Shepard Gray to find out. You won't want to put it down!

J.C. Morrows says

“HOPEFUL” is the long-anticipated first book in Shelley Shepard Gray’s Return to Sugarcreek series!

Looks like the mystery bug has rubbed off on Shelley. After writing the original Seasons of Sugarcreek series as romance, “Hopeful” is a step in a different direction. Not a complete turn, just a step.

Don’t worry, there’s still PLENTY of romance. But there is also a definite air of mystery surrounding Mary Kate Hershberger – the community’s new schoolteacher.

I wish the synopsis had given me a bit more warning that I was reading a suspense/mystery. Not that I would not have read the book – I would have anyway, it just would have been nice to know going in.

Isn’t it nice that you have me? You are fore-warned. But DEFINITELY read it! It’s a terrific story! And the mystery/suspense woven around Mary Kate is done extremely well.

It has been a long time since a book kept me up half the night simply because I could not put it down. And not just because of the suspense either – I found myself desperate to find out what happened between Junior, Mary Kate and Miriam.

And I wasn’t about to stop reading until I found out!

I do think that either Shelley or her editor perhaps mixed up a few things about the Amish... or maybe it’s simply artistic license – As far as I know, from my own research, the Amish do not toss off comments about calling relatives like it is a common occurrence. It’s anything but - for them. And I was not aware that Amish ever retired. But I could be wrong – or it could be that Miriam’s parents worked for a company that required them to retire at a certain age. Whatever it was, it didn’t really detract from the story...more like caught my attention and had me going “Hmm...”

Maybe that was the idea. Sneaky... And clever.

It’s a GREAT story and a COZY and INTRIGUING read and Shelley Shepard Gray is DEFINITELY one of my all-time favorite authors! Now I just have to go back and read her other suspense/mystery series.

Disclaimer: I was provided the book free in exchange for an honest review.

Cindy says

When a book can make me laugh, cry, love, hope, and appreciate values, then it has done its job. Hopeful by Shelley Shepard Gray has all the qualities that a book needs to keep you reading for more. The hope and faith you see throughout these pages makes you just feel good. Miriam is hopeful in so many ways and shares her love with everyone. The way she steps up to help Kay and also Mary Kate during their times of trouble shows what a true person Miriam is. This book was very hard to put down when it was time to fix dinner. A book full of HOPE! A definite must read!
