

**What People Are Saying about  
Laura V. Hilton and *Firestorm*...**

“*Firestorm* is Laura Hilton’s best accomplishment to date! I became so deeply involved with Gabe’s life that I found myself in tears several times. Penned with such raw and primal depth and sensitivity, I melted emotionally. My heart ached as one tragedy transcended to another. Amish fiction at its very best!”

—Nancee Marchinowski  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
[perspectivesbynancee.blogspot.com](http://perspectivesbynancee.blogspot.com)

“*Firestorm* is a great story about faith and trust! It was interesting to read about the Amish in a little-known settlement area. As always, Laura Hilton does a wonderful job bringing her characters to life. I was easily swept away in Gabe and Bridget’s story and couldn’t put the book down! I strongly recommend *Firestorm* to anyone who loves Amish or inspirational fiction.”

—Cecilia Lynn  
Goodreads reviewer

“If you haven’t read the Amish genre because you think you can’t relate to them, I’m sorry to tell you that you are wrong. The Amish are just like us—human beings who go through life trials that include temptation, birth, loss, death, grief, marriage, teasing, financial struggle, and health issues, as well as natural disasters like floods, fires, and storms, and so much more. Laura V. Hilton writes an action-packed book that keeps you on the edge of your seat! The characters come alive in scenes that seem to place you right there in the moment. Emotions, thoughts and dialogue all pull the reader in with each turn of the page. I know I wanted more of Gabe and Bridget’s story. I can’t wait for book two in the Amish of Mackinac County series.”

—Tina Watson  
Founder, Amish Book Previews on Facebook

“Another captivating and emotional read by Laura V. Hilton with *Firestorm*. I always look forward to reading a Laura Hilton book and this one didn’t disappoint. *Firestorm* is the first in the series set in Mackinac County, Michigan. This action-packed story is filled with strong characters, vividly descriptive scenes, and dialogue that kept this reader from putting it down. Readers will appreciate the depth, wisdom, and God’s unfailing love and greatness, even during the devastating times that Laura interlaces into her plot—along with Amish proverbs and biblical Scriptures.”

—Marilyn Ridgway  
Goodreads reviewer

“Laura V. Hilton tackles another Amish fireman’s story. Action gets as hot romantically as the local fires and rescues this man races daringly toward. It’s an Amish romantic/suspense novel that feeds the flames of burning emotions.”

—Alan Daugherty  
Weekly columnist, *The News-Banner*

“What a great read that isn’t just a mundane Amish book. I love that Laura Hilton’s novels are grittier, and that they delve more deeply into the characters’ heartbreaks and triumphs. This is the first in a new series and I can’t wait for the next one. Not a fluffy read, but one that has you turning pages and not able to put it down. The romance between Bridget and Gabe reflects the vulnerability of young love. All in all, a very enjoyable read.”

—Lucy Reynolds  
Goodreads reviewer

“I love how Laura Hilton shares about the research that goes into her books, because she makes the settings seem more authentic, which, in turn, helps bring the characters to life. This story took its sweet time drawing me in, like a good family friend. I found that I could relate to the characters when it seemed they just couldn’t catch a break, which seemed to mirror my week. Sure they are just characters in a book, but they could be real people working toward a goal as they overcome roadblocks and detours along the way. Fathers providing and doing what they feel is best for their families, but then realizing something is missing. Young adults thinking they have it all figured out, but then discovering that they missed a step. I am jealous that they get to figure out these issues and resolve them, but then I also hope we get to visit them again to see how they incorporate these lessons into their next big roadblocks.”

—*Christine Bonner*  
Sheffield Lake, Ohio



a novel by  
LAURA V.  
HILTON

*FIRE  
STORM*

*Where There's Smoke, There Is Fire*  
*The Amish of Mackinac County*

  
WHITAKER  
HOUSE

*Publisher's Note:*

This novel is a work of fiction. References to real events, organizations, or places are used in a fictional context. Any resemblances to actual persons, living or dead, are entirely coincidental.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

## **FIRESTORM**

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data (Pending)**

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Thanks to Jenna for taking on the bulk of the cooking while I approached my deadline.

Dear Reader:

I read a series of books a year or so ago that were set in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. As a Michigan native, I was curious, and I researched but found nothing about Upper-Peninsula Amish, except for a notation that one community had tried and failed. So, I contacted the author. She told me that she'd never been there, and her research had all been based on hearsay. Figuring there was nothing to see, I didn't make plans to visit the Upper Peninsula for myself.

Then God intervened. My son who is in the United States Coast Guard was stationed in the Upper Peninsula during the summer of 2017. He reported seeing Amish driving around in buggies, and he confessed to feeling "like a stalker" as he followed one buggy and drove through the surrounding area. He even sent me some pictures. (Shhhh.)

Yes, there *are* Amish in Michigan's Upper Peninsula—at least, there were when this book was written.

As a Michigan native, I used some terms in this story that may not be familiar to non-Michiganders. A Yooper is someone who lives in the Upper Peninsula. A Troll is someone from the Lower Peninsula. Pasties are kind of like Hot Pockets, except that they're meat pies made with root vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, and rutabagas. They are so good. And "the straits" refers to the area of the Great Lakes connecting Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

As for the wildfire, the earliest wildfire I could find any documentation on in the Upper Peninsula was in April. It is generally a snowy area—trust me. I lived near the Muskegon area and saw snowdrifts as late in the year as May. We occasionally saw over six feet of snow on the ground at one time. So, to get the wildfire when I wanted/needed the wildfire, I used artistic license. Yes, fires really happened in Michigan's history, just not in the month mentioned in the book.

Thanks for reading *Firestorm*!

Laura V. Hilton

## GLOSSARY OF AMISH TERMS AND PHRASES

<i>ach:</i>	oh
<i>aent/aenti:</i>	aunt/auntie
<i>“ain’t so?”:</i>	a phrase commonly used at the end of a sentence to invite agreement
<i>Ausbund:</i>	Amish hymnal used in the worship services, containing lyrics only
<i>boppli:</i>	baby/babies
<i>bu:</i>	boy
<i>buwe:</i>	boys
<i>daed:</i>	dad
<i>“Danki”:</i>	“Thank you”
<i>der Herr:</i>	the Lord
<i>Gott:</i>	God
<i>grossmammi:</i>	grandmother
<i>daadi:</i>	grandfather
<i>dawdi-haus:</i>	a home constructed for the grandparents to live in once they retire
<i>dochter:</i>	daughter
<i>dummchen:</i>	a silly person
<i>ehemann:</i>	husband
<i>Englisch:</i>	non-Amish
<i>Englischer:</i>	a non-Amish person
<i>frau:</i>	wife

<i>grossdaedi</i> :	grandfather
<i>gut</i> :	good
<i>haus</i> :	house
<i>“Ich liebe dich”</i> :	“I love you”
<i>jab</i> :	yes
<i>kapp</i> :	prayer covering or cap
<i>kinner</i> :	children
<i>koffee</i> :	coffee
<i>kum</i> :	come
<i>liebbling</i> :	darling
<i>maidal</i> :	young woman
<i>mamm</i> :	mom
<i>mammi</i> :	grandmother
<i>morgen</i> :	morning
<i>nacht</i> :	night
<i>nein</i> :	no
<i>“off in den kopf”</i> :	“off in the head”; crazy
<i>onkel</i> :	uncle
<i>ordnung</i> :	guidelines for daily living
<i>ser gut</i> :	very good
<i>sohn</i> :	son
<i>verboden</i> :	forbidden
<i>welkum</i> :	welcome
<i>wunderbaar</i> :	wonderful
<i>youngies</i> :	young unmarried individuals in the Amish community

# 1

## *Mackinac County, Michigan*

**I**t was a nacht-mare. Lightning flashed across the black sky. Thunder boomed so close that vibrations shook the ground. Rain, mixed with pebble-sized hail, pelted the van's windows with enough force, it seemed the glass might not withstand the impact.

Bridget Behr stared in dismay at the haus Daed had bought. Illuminated periodically by the bright flashes of lightning, along with the beams of the headlamps of the vehicle that had brought them here, the building appeared gray. Run-down. Forsaken. Abandoned.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad during the day.

Or maybe it'd be worse.

"It's a nacht-mare. A nacht-mare, I tell you!" She hadn't meant to blurt out those words aloud. Her parents, her older brother, and the driver all stared at her. Still, her family had kum here seeking a safe haven, and they'd found *this*. Unbelievable.

Daed grunted. His frown spoke volumes. *Don't converse in our language around Englishers*, he was saying. Also, *We're doing this for you, Bridget*.

Maybe she should be grateful instead of assuming the worst. She had probably been reading too many mystery novels by flashlight while curled up cozily under her covers. But this seriously had "creepy," "scary," and "unnerving" written all over it.

A complete disaster.

Granted, there probably wasn't a dead body hidden halfway under a bed. There weren't any beds, because the moving truck bearing all their worldly possessions wouldn't arrive until tomorrow. Provided the bridge across the Straits of Mackinac was open. It'd been closed down for hours today due to gale-force winds.

The driver cleared his throat. "I can take you to the house next door, if you wish. Things might appear more attractive in the morning light."

There didn't appear to be a haus next door. Just a thick expanse of ever so many trees. Maybe home to bears. Wolves. Cougars.

Bridget shivered. The book she'd read most recently had featured the hero battling grizzlies in a high-stakes adventure.

"Jah...yes. The neighbors' would be fine." Daed surveyed the spotlighted wreckage once more as he tugged at his beard. "Let this be a lesson to you, kinner. Never buy a property sight unseen."

Hadn't Bridget argued that very point when Daed had announced his plans?

Daed had ignored her. Other than to say, "We can't stay here, Bridget. It's not safe. Not for you, not for your sisters, not even for your mamm."

Indeed.

At least Daed had semi-admitted his mistake, albeit in a roundabout way.

Bridget sighed and leaned back against the van seat. Getting as far away as possible from the atrocity that was to be her new home.

"The next-door neighbors...are they Amish or Englisch?" Mamm clutched the cushion of her seat as if worried it might catapult her out toward the forsaken-looking haus.

The driver chuckled. Not a comforting sound. It almost sounded sinister. "Amish."

That was gut, ain't so?

Mamm relaxed.

Bridget glanced over her shoulder into the rear seat of the van, where her two younger sisters and her younger brother slept. Seated next to her, her older brother stared out the window and shook his head. He'd have plenty to say away from Daed's hearing, nein doubt.

"Off we go, then," the driver said. "Neighbors live about half a mile down the road." He adjusted the gearshift and drove off.

Long before Bridget could mentally prepare herself for meeting strangers, the driver pulled the van in front of another dark haus.

At least this one appeared to be in better shape. The window glass was still intact.

Wait. Nein windows? That meant the new haus was already home to any number of creatures. And now thoroughly drenched, thanks to the driving rain.

“Daed—”

The driver cleared his throat. “Should be unlocked. No one locks doors around here. The family is in Mio visiting relatives. Probably won’t mind your staying overnight.”

A sensation of unease slithered up Bridget’s spine. A sharp contrast to their home in Ohio, where the Amish locked their residences because of all the tourists always about. And because of the stalker. Around here, were strangers *welkum* to just barge in and camp out *over-nacht*?

“Thank you.” Daed handed the man some money. “Appreciate your picking us up at the bus station.”

“No problem. Welcome to the area.” The driver laughed as he pocketed the cash. “Of course, you might not like it as much once the snow starts flying, in a week or so. Might want to go back where you came from.”

There was a thought. They may have removed themselves from one type of danger, but what if they’d jumped from the frying pan straight into the fire? Bridget waited for Daed’s response.

Daed grunted.

After a few moments of silence, the driver coughed. “I’ll wait to be sure the house is unlocked.”

Bridget climbed out of the van, then reached back inside to help her youngest sister, Roseanna. The heavy rain soaked Bridget’s dress and kapp, turning her into a cold, soggy mess. Too bad their hand luggage hadn’t made it to the right bus going north. But they had received assurance it would be found and delivered as soon as possible. Maybe the family who lived in this haus wouldn’t mind their borrowing something dry to sleep in.

Daed led the way up the porch steps and opened the door. He flicked on the small flashlight he always carried in his pocket.

“Where are we?” Roseanna rubbed her eyes. “Is this our new home? I don’t recognize the furniture.”

From upstairs came the sound of a door closing. A man appeared at the top of the steps, holding a flashlight lantern. He had crazy bed head and nein clothes, other than some psychedelic-looking lime-green pajama pants.

He stared down at them and blinked.

Bridget lowered her head, her cheeks heating. But then she darted a glance upward again, fascinated by the sight.

“Uh...there’s a lantern on the table,” the man in the lime-green pajamas said. “Go ahead and light it.” He set down the flashlight at the top of the stairs and then disappeared inside a door.

Seconds later, he reappeared, tugging an undershirt over his head as he scrambled down the stairs.



Gabriel Lapp stumbled to a stop halfway down the stairs, turned a second time, and went back up to grab the flashlight he’d left behind. It wasn’t every day he woke from a sound sleep to find a family of seven standing in his living room.

Technically speaking, it wasn’t his living room. It belonged to the Zooks, who’d left town two days ago. But he’d already been with them a month. Surely, the family would’ve mentioned something to him if they were expecting company while they were gone.

He scooped up the flashlight, then turned and eyed the hunting rifle hanging above the front door. The rifle Samuel Zook kept loaded and ready. The older man and the oldest-looking bu—his sohn, probably—stood between Gabriel and the rifle. Not that Gabriel would use it, but—

“He said you were Amish.” The older woman wrung her hands as she stared at Gabriel’s pajama pants.

“I am Amish. Gabriel Lapp. Gabe, to those who know me. This is the Zooks’ home, but they’re in Mio, so I’m staying here.” For now. Until he could escape this frigid land for the warmth and sunshine of Florida. And it wasn’t even winter yet. But it was November, and the locals said they sometimes had snow as early as September. Gabe couldn’t imagine. He lit the lantern on the table, since it seemed nobody else was going to.

The woman’s wary expression hadn’t changed. But why was she the one ill at ease? She wasn’t having her temporary home invaded by a large family from who knows where.

“Hosea Behr,” the oldest man said. “This is my frau, Elisabeth; our sohns, Noah and Jonah; and our dochters, Bridget, Shiloh, and Roseanna.”

Gabe nodded as the names went in one ear and out the other. He didn’t need to know these people. Not if he would be out of here before the first snowfall of the season, as he planned.

Granted, the likelihood of that happening seemed unlikely. Gabe had helped his Englisch boss, Patrick, fix his snowblower just the day before. According to Patrick, snow was in the seven-day forecast. Gabe shivered.

His gaze skimmed over the group, and locked on the green eyes of the golden-honey-brown-haired girl—woman—staring back at him. Pretty, that one.

He struggled to recall her name. And came up with...nothing.

He shook his head. “I’m sorry. The Zooks must’ve told me you’d be coming, and I forgot.” But he was 99.9 percent positive they hadn’t mentioned it before they’d left, two days ago. And they certainly hadn’t made any preparations for company. Nein menu planned. Nein extra bedding set out. Nein instructions. Nothing. Except for the candy jar crammed with homemade goodies, all of which were already gone. Gabe had inhaled them. Nein point in even thinking about them. It only made his stomach rumble. “But seems to me the first step would be to find you places to sleep to-nacht, and we’ll figure things out in the morgen.”

The older man nodded. What was his name, again? An Old-Testament prophet, ain’t so? Obadiah? “We’d be obliged. And, actually, the Zooks don’t know us. We bought the place next door.”

“Next door?” Gabe scratched his head. “You mean....” Nein. Surely, they didn’t mean the haus in such disrepair.

“Afraid so,” the oldest sohn muttered. “We bought it sight unseen.”

Pure foolishness. Gabe shook his head. “Well, maybe the preachers will organize a frolic to get the haus whipped into shape.” He shrugged. “Or maybe they’ll take one look and suggest tearing it down and starting over from scratch. That would be my recommendation.”

In which case, Green Eyes would be in close proximity for a while.

“They actually used it as a ‘haunted haus’ for Halloween, three and a half weeks ago, you know,” Gabe added, “and for gut reason.” He looked at Green Eyes and winked. “Do you believe in ghosts?”



Bridget stared at Gabe. At least his handsome looks made him very pleasant to gawk at, even if he sounded like a foolish English *bu* when he spoke.

Daed frowned at Gabe. "We'll be staying in our new home tomorrow nacht."

Hopefully, Daed would take a trip to a local lumberyard or hardware shop beforehand, to cover those open windows. Bridget didn't want any bats flying in and roosting in her bedroom. Or owls swooping inside in pursuit of mice.

Gabe shrugged again. "Suit yourself. But you should know there's a big hole in the floor of one of the second-floor bedrooms. If you don't watch your step, you could fall right through." A slight grin appeared on his face, as if he thought the whole thing was a joke.

Daed's frown deepened. He grimaced, glanced at Mamm, then cast his eyes at the floor.

"Best thing to do now is get some sleep," Gabe added. "Things are bound to look better in the morgen. It'll be an adventure, for sure." He gestured overhead. "My room is the first door on the left, but the rest of the rooms are up for grabs, and the beds are made up with clean sheets. The Zooks' dochters occupy the second room on the right. Might be the most comfortable for the girls. Preacher Zook and his frau have the room across from mine. The other room is...uh, well, there's a hide-a-bed in there. Or a fold-up sleeper sofa. Whatever it's called. Might have to move the sewing table out of the way."

His eyes flickered around the room, then lit on Bridget. Lingered. "Gut nacht, all. See you in the morgen, Green Eyes." He added another wink.

Just like the stalker in Ohio used to do.

Gabe was ever so bold, but Bridget didn't get the same uneasy vibes from him as she had from the creepy man back home. Gabe seemed more like a...

*A flirt.*

Bridget shivered and looked away.

If she wasn't careful, he might stir up a lot of gossip.