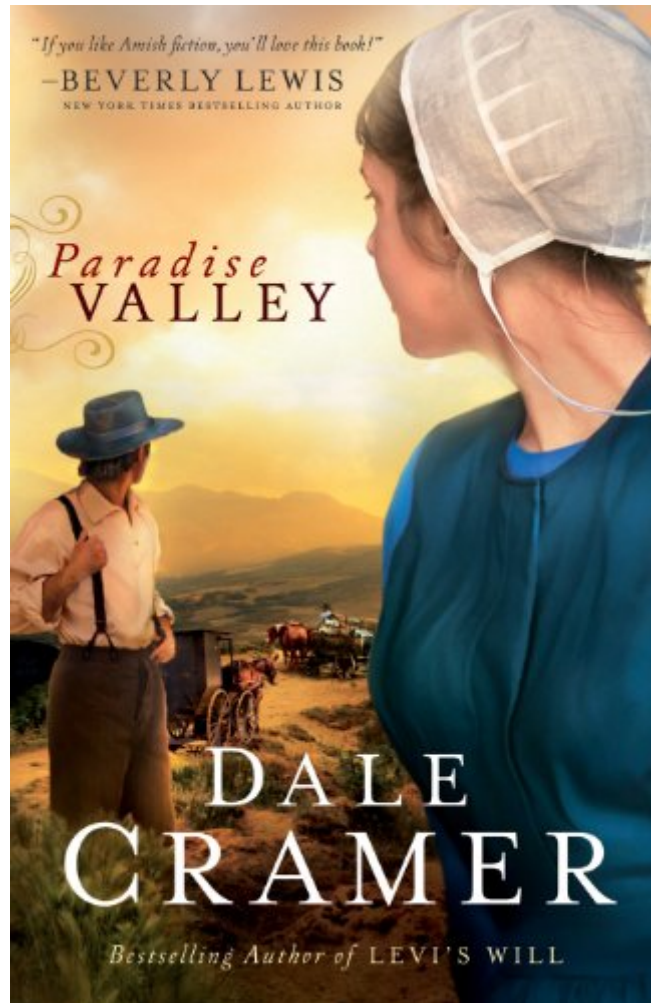


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Paradise Valley (The Daughters Of Caleb Bender Book #1)



Synopsis

An Amish settlement in Ohio has run afoul of a law requiring their children to attend public school. Caleb Bender and his neighbors are arrested for neglect, with the state ordering the children be placed in an institution. Among them are Caleb's teenage daughter, Rachel, and the boy she has her eye on, Jake Weaver. Romance blooms between the two when Rachel helps Jake escape the children's home. Searching for a place to relocate his family where no such laws apply, Caleb learns there's inexpensive land for sale in Mexico, a place called Paradise Valley. Despite rumors of instability in the wake of the Mexican revolution, the Amish community decides this is their answer. And since it was Caleb's idea, he and his family will be the pioneers. They will send for the others once he's established a foothold and assessed the situation. Caleb's daughters are thrown into turmoil. Rachel doesn't want to leave Jake. Her sister, Emma, who has been courting Levi Mullet, fears her dreams of marriage will be dashed. Miriam has never had a beau and is acutely aware there will be no prospects in Mexico. Once there, they meet Domingo, a young man and guide who takes a liking to Miriam, something her father would never approve. While Paradise Valley is everything they'd hoped it would be, it isn't long before the bandits start giving them trouble, threatening to upset the fledgling Amish settlement, even putting their lives in danger. Thankfully no one has been harmed so far, anyway.

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Customer Reviews

Dale Cramer is one of my favorite authors, and his book "Bad Ground" was a masterpiece of modern storytelling. Of late, he has turned his knowledge of the Amish into a career-saving move by telling tales set against that well-loved backdrop of Christian fiction. Personally, I'm not a fan of Amish stories, particularly when they provide an escapist mentality, but I knew going into "Paradise Valley" that Cramer would paint life with all its colors, dark and light. The story is set in 1922, and revolves around the Bender family. Their Amish way of life is threatened by local laws requiring they send their children to a government school instead of letting them work and learn on the farm. Soon the Benders are headed south, hoping for peace and freedom in Paradise Valley, a plot of land deep in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. There they will encounter ruthless banditos, rich hacienda owners, poor mestizos, and a culture that challenges their way of thinking. As always, Cramer creates characters that seem believable and nuanced. Dat, the family patriarch, is a stern but multi-faceted man, while his daughters are distinct in their personalities. Rachel is the central character, a young woman pining for the man she loves back home in the States. The issues of racism and pacifism are addressed with great skill, and the female aspects of the story show new texture in Cramer's art. My one caveat--and it's a large one, considering it's my usual complaint about Amish fiction--is that Cramer keeps everything nice and light, never really allowing his characters to face death, violence, or the issues that one would expect. Robert Morgan's "Gap Creek" has some similarities to this book, but did not flinch from the tragedies of life.

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