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Young adult romance explores cross-cultural complications

Early in her career, Debby Dodds caromed coast to coast doing stage shows, film and comedy improv. Now settled in Portland, this multi-talented writer and performer has been devoting her energy to writing her first Young Adult novel.

For subject matter, Dodds hearkened back to her own adolescence in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, home to a large Amish community. The story she comes up with, "Amish Guys Don't Call," draws on some of the cross-cultural juxtapositions she observed when she was growing up.

The Amish refer to everyone outside of their community as "English," no matter what their real ethnicity. So it just goes to figure that this book's "English" teen protagonist, recently arrived in Lancaster after her parents' divorce, falls for an Amish guy.

At first, Samantha Stone-song doesn't even realize it. A closeted nerd, Sam has been feeling pressure from her new circle of friends to prove that she can find a

cute boyfriend. She's never had a boyfriend before, but she can't admit this to her group of super-cool friends without being ostracized. So it seems to be a stroke of good luck when Zach, a "mature" guy already out of school, singles her out as the girl he is interested in.

She does notice that Zach has a few quaint quirks, but as they get to know one another and really like and trust each other, Zach confesses to her that he has been keeping his Amish roots a secret. He has been engaging in Rumspringa, the traditional rite of passage that allows Amish teens a period of greater freedom before they commit to the Amish way of life as adults.

But now Zach is reluctant to return to his family's

farm. Instead, he wants to go to college. As a result of these decisions, he is being formally shunned by his family and community.

Sam has some secrets of her own. Since her parents' divorce, her mother has become fairly promiscuous, while her father has been completely out of touch.

It is also stressful to be in the most popular clique in school; Sam is always worried that her new friends will reject her if they discover she's a brainiac and a virgin, so she tries to be someone she is not in order to fit in.

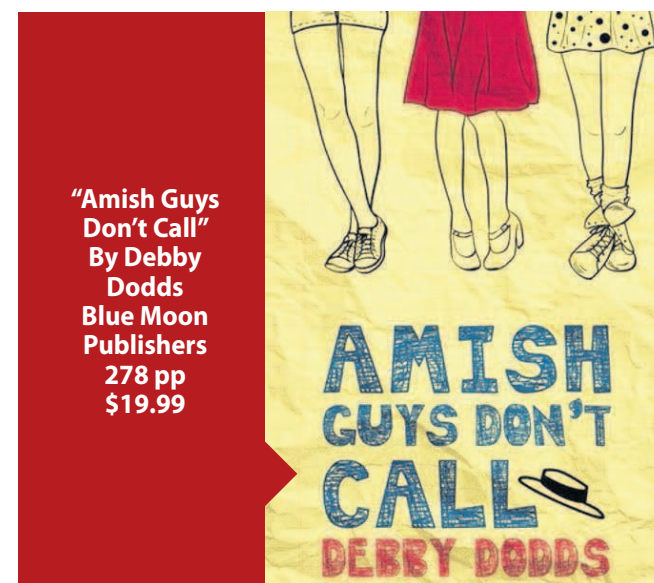
As her anxiety escalates, she returns to a bad habit she developed in her old hometown: shoplifting to relieve stress.

Dodds writes with honesty and humor about this point in Sam's life. She does a nice job of developing the unlikely romance between Zach and Sam, and she successfully creates dimensionality in all of her characters. And she incorporates some of the realities of today's youth

— cyberbullying, substance use, single-parent families and minimal parental oversight — without being heavy-handed.

Dodds has more trouble handling the resolution of these story lines — hence a rather ungainly pile-up of an ending — but, overall, "Amish Guys Don't Call" is a lively and appealing read.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.



"Amish Guys Don't Call"
By Debby Dodds
Blue Moon Publishers
278 pp
\$19.99

GOODREADS.COM

Crossword Answer

A	V	A	S	T	B	A	H	C	U	R	B	N	A	M	E				
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