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Blood of the Prodigal (Ohio Amish Mystery Series #1)

P.L. Gaus
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When his childhood friend, Pastor Caleb Troyer, approaches Professor Michael Branden for help, Branden takes on a bizarre kidnapping case. Ten-year-old Jeremiah Miller has been kidnapped from an Old Order Amish settlement, but his grandfather, Bishop Miller, only wants to know if the boy is safe—because the Bishop already knows the kidnapper!

Cast out from the Order, Jonah Miller has taken his son and left a note that promises the boy's return by harvest. Things become complicated, however, when Jonah's body is found—in brand-new, traditional Amish clothing—less than half a mile from the Bishop's home. Who has the boy now? And why are the Bishop and his Council still withholding information? Is the boy's uncle, Jeff Hostettler, bent on revenge for his sister's long-ago death? What is Donna Beachey, Jonah's old schoolteacher, hiding about her past with Jonah? What intimations is waitress Ester Yoder pointing to when she talks about the Bishop running out of land? And what possessed Jonah, if he was returning home, to keep his truck only to ditch it in a river nearby?

With too many question and seemingly no solution, Professor Branden and his wife decide to retrace Jonah's last days alive by finding out where and when he bought his new clothing. Meanwhile, Sheriff Robertson and Deputy Niell track down Jonah's alias through his license registration and locate his workplace in Marblehead. Deputy Niell and Professor Branden team up and travel to Marblehead to investigate different leads, but it is only when Niell shares his new information with Professor Branden that the pieces fall into place and the kidnapping and murder are finally solved.

The first of a planned series of Professor Branden/Holmes County mysteries, this story is written in the tradition of Tony Hillerman: Gaus presents a deeper understanding of an American sub-culture and why—though it interacts with mainstream American society—it stubbornly chooses to remain separate and follow its own unique doctrines. Enthusiasts of mysteries, American sub-cultures, or those interested in learning more about Amish ways will find much to glean from Gaus' work.

NELLY HEITMAN (April 15, 1999)

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