

*New York Times* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# BEVERLY LEWIS



The  
Orchard

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To  
Darla Demahy  
for your faithful prayers  
and sweet encouragement—  
despite two back-to-back hurricanes!

Who loves a garden still his Eden keeps;  
Perennial pleasures plants, and wholesome harvests  
reaps.

—Amos Bronson Alcott, “The Garden,” *Tablets*, 1868

# Prologue

**APRIL 16, 1970**

**I**n the early morning light, I looked out one of my third-floor dormer windows and treasured the springtime rebirth taking place as far as my eyes could see. The orchard was a sea of frilly pink peach blossoms, fifty rolling acres of fruit trees. I wondered how the garden of Eden could have been any more lovely, and I thanked God for the beauty below.

Eager to breathe in the familiar fragrance of the orchard, I raised the window as birdsong beckoned to me. But I also wanted to feel the cool morning dew on my bare feet before doing chores. So, already dressed, I gave my waist-length, light brown hair a good brushing, then twisted and pinned it into a thick bun—not bothering to put on a bandanna.

I slipped down the two flights of stairs in my family's home, then walked out the side door and across the yard and beyond. Unhurried, I wandered past the blooming peach trees, along the grassy strips that separated their rows. Time seemed to slow to the easy ticking of a heavenly clock. Honestly, I was so thankful

not to live like our few English neighbors scattered here and there amongst us. Such a racket came from their big tractors and other farming equipment! *Ach*, it was bad enough that planes streaked our skies, trucks and cars crowded the highways, and folk in the city of Lancaster rushed helter-skelter.

But here? My heart drank in the peace of this lovely place, the soft blossoms dusting the atmosphere with their sweet peachy scent—like honey. As a young girl, I'd declared that the Lord God himself must surely dwell in our orchard—the most splendid spot on earth.

"If I could, I'd stay here forever," I whispered, ever so content.

From behind me, I heard swift footsteps and assumed it was my oldest brother coming to check on the swath of newly planted semi-dwarf apple trees down near Harvest Drive. But to my surprise it wasn't Jonah but Evan, my twin.

"Whatcha doin' up so early, Ellie?" he asked, stopping to roll up his black pant legs. "You nearly beat the dawn." He straightened, a whole head taller than me, almost as tall as our older brothers, Jonah and Rudy—both married with growing families and places of their own.

"It's so fresh and dewy this time of day," I said. "Ain't so?"

Evan nodded, a sparkle in his blue eyes the same shade as mine. "No wonder Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden in the cool of the day—and no better place for a Hostetler to be on such a fine Thursday morning."

"I'm sad for everyone who doesn't have an orchard to come home to!"

"You remind me of *Dawdi* Hezekiah, comin' out here to ramble through the rows."

"*Jah*." I smiled, happy that *Dat's* elderly father lived in the small *Dawdi Haus* addition to our home just as he had for nearly

two decades—since well before *Mammi* passed away three years ago. “Well, he’s the one who planted most of these trees back when. They’re his children, in a way.”

Evan gave me a look that suggested I was *ferhoodled*. “Do ya realize how many of these trees’ll be gone and new ones planted by the time I’m as old as Dawdi is now? The smaller trees bear fruit only up to twenty-five years, ya know.”

“Well, since Dat’s handin’ these acres over to your care when he retires, it’ll be up to you to see to all that someday.” I didn’t need to remind Evan that being the youngest son was a truly special blessing when it came to taking over the land—and in our case, an orchard, too. *A blessing for sure*, I thought, envying my brother a little. If I’d been born the younger twin and a boy, I’d have been chosen to run the orchard in the future. But alas, women didn’t have much say in those matters. It had always been that way amongst the People.

We walked for a while, and Evan kept glancing at the sky, now brushed with golden streaks. Something had to be on his mind for him to come out here before breakfast.

At last he said, “I’m plannin’ to go to Jack Herr’s burial service tomorrow afternoon in Carlisle, at the Ashland Cemetery Soldiers’ Lot.”

I had known who Jack was—our farm neighbor’s son—but hearing Evan talk like this confirmed what I’d long suspected. He and Jack had become friends. “I’m surprised, I guess . . . ya wanting to go . . . since that would be frowned on, *jah?*” We both knew that anything related to the military was forbidden.

Evan halted between the rows of new apple trees. “And for that reason, you must keep mum.”

“I won’t say anything, but are ya sure you oughta go?” I’d heard of Jack’s death from *Mamm* several days earlier, but I

hadn't read his obituary for myself. Too many young men were dying in Vietnam. It was heartbreaking.

Evan frowned and nodded. "Well, Jack was my best English friend, so I wanna be there." He sighed loudly, walking a bit farther without saying more. Then when he spoke again, it was nearly in a whisper. "I still can't believe he's gone." He glanced toward the road beyond the orchard. "Jack gave up his life for our country—for people like you and me—so I'm gonna pay my respects," he said flatly.

So many families round Lancaster County had lost sons or brothers, even husbands, to this dreadful war. But none had been Amish. Our father, like all Old Order Amishmen here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, held a strong belief in non-resistance, which meant he didn't approve of going to war under any circumstances. Dat said it went against the Lord's ways for the People to choose violence, and this fight wasn't ours anyway since America wasn't our true home. We were only passing through. "*We're pilgrims and sojourners whose final destination is heaven,*" he liked to say.

"Dat *will* be displeased if he finds out, though," Evan added, his expression melting into misery, "so just remember to keep this to yourself."

I bobbed my head in agreement, then impulsively asked, "But why must ya be friends with outsiders, anyway?"

"Aw, Ellie, just 'cause you don't have any English friends doesn't mean I can't have a few." He pushed his straw hat down on his corn-yellow hair.

"I don't understand why ya need fancy friends, though. You used to be *gut* friends with Solomon Bontrager, remember?"

"I was curious, so I dipped my toe in the outside world even before I turned fifteen. Wanted to know what I was missin'."

For quite a while now, I'd pondered Evan's desire to spend time with a handful of English fellows—mostly Jack and his friends. At nineteen, and unlike me, my brother hadn't started baptismal instruction, deciding instead to stay in *Rumschpringe*, the season prior to baptism when our youth began to socialize with their friends, sometimes outside the confines of the church. I had no idea why Evan wanted to continue with this stage of his life. Even so, he knew Dat had always advised us to choose our friends wisely, which naturally meant amongst the People. Some teens were known to push the boundaries, though, causing heartache for their parents.

"Take Jack's younger sister, Cheryl, for instance," Evan said now. "She's real nice, and you'd know it, too, if ya ever wanted to give her half a chance. Neighbor that she is." He paused. "I really like her."

This surprised me. Evan had shown only a smidgen of interest in the Amish girls in our church community, but he'd never said much about Cheryl Herr, either. And though I was sure she was fine for an *Englischer*, what did she and I have in common except for having older brothers?

"I have my own friends, Evan."

"Only two that I know of—Leah Bontrager and Cousin Ruthann."

"Well, I'm not as outgoin' as you, so I don't need a bunch of friends."

Stealing a glance at my grieving brother, I wished I hadn't pushed myself into the conversation. After all, we'd been talking about Jack's burial service. "*Killed in a hopeless war*," I'd heard some womenfolk murmur. It was such a tragedy. "I'm awful sorry, Evan. I should've kept my thoughts to myself."

He leaned down and picked up a handful of freshly fallen

pink blossoms. For a moment, he appeared to be pondering something.

“What’re ya doin’?” I asked him.

He looked at me without saying. Then at last, he smiled. “Hold out your hands.”

I stepped closer, opening my palms, and he placed the few blossoms there like he did when we were little, knowing how much I loved them and everything about the orchard.

“Remember when I’d put them in my hair?” I asked.

“Wasn’t that long ago, really,” he said, eyes soft and gentle.

For fun, I sprinkled a few on my head, glad I hadn’t worn my bandanna yet today.

“Now you’re the pertiest Amish girl in Bird-in-Hand,” Evan said. “I daresay you could have any fella your heart desires.”

I broke into a smile. “Ach, Evan, I only care ’bout one boy.”

“And who would that be?”

“Ain’t tellin’.”

Evan chuckled, shaking his head.

“Anyway,” I said wistfully, “the day I marry is the day I leave the orchard behind.”

Evan nodded, a look of empathy on his face.

“Kinda strange that it’ll be the best day *and* the worst,” I added.

He looked at me. “For your sake, I wish it could be different, Ellie. Maybe we could manage the orchard together . . . if things work out that way.”

*And miss out on love and having my own family?* I thought, though I was moved by his caring. Truly, I couldn’t have asked for a better brother. If anyone deserved to inherit the orchard, it was Evan.

“All of this’ll be in your capable hands,” I replied.

“Remember, you can always visit,” he said, a twinkle in his eyes.

He reached for the blossoms in my hair, but I ducked and scooted away. Laughing, he patted his straw hat. “I’ll be seein’ ya at breakfast.” He gestured toward the right, then went on ahead up the walkway of thick grass between the trees.

Already missing the banter, I watched him go as I imagined him running the orchard when Dat retired in a few years. No one loved the orchard and the work involved quite as much as Evan—except, of course, me. Through the years, we’d spent long hours together out here, especially during the springtime and the harvest, talking and laughing as we worked from sunrise to sundown.

I thought then of my best friend, Leah, who lived two farms up from us. I couldn’t imagine losing her like Evan had lost his friend Jack. Goodness, I’d known Leah was meant to be my friend clear back when we met as youngsters. At recess that first day of school, she’d whispered to me that her favorite thing to do was sit on her covered porch while it rained. It was as if lightning had struck, because there was no way she could’ve known one of my favorite things was exactly that, too.

Shaking the remaining blossoms from my hair, I walked back to the house and looked toward our newly painted white barn and the carriage shed nearby. A plump red robin flew across to its nest high in one of the two oak trees Dat planted the day Evan and I were born, and in that moment a frightening thought crossed my mind—something else Leah had told me in a whisper.

On July first there’d be a military draft lottery drawing for nineteen-year-old boys. Even for our Amish fellows, although I was sure most if not all of them had registered as conscientious objectors. I shuddered to think of it. How many more young men would have to die like Jack Herr?

I hurried past our family’s fruit store and up the walkway toward the house, my heart filled with dread.



**F**rom Ellie's spot in the backyard, where she was hanging a quilt on the clothesline, she could see her twin trudging home from Jack Herr's burial service. He was meandering this way through the north side of the orchard, out of view from the house, his shoulders stooped and head bowed. The sight of him made her sad.

*Evan's carrying a weight of sorrow*, she thought, her heart soft toward him.

She glanced back at the house and wondered if it was safe for her to run out and say something kind to lift her brother's spirits. But she certainly didn't want to call attention to him. Only a few minutes ago, she'd heard a car in the near distance, and still up in her sewing room, Mamm might have heard it, too. No doubt Evan had traveled to and from Carlisle with one of the English neighbor boys.

Her back and neck muscles tense, she kept on with the task of draping bed quilts over the clothesline for their springtime airing. She wished Evan would glance up so she could at least wave or give him a thoughtful smile, but he proceeded to slog toward the yard, eyes on the ground.

*My poor brother.*

Evan turned toward the barn, and Ellie inhaled with relief. *Surely he'll pull off his black coat and nice shoes and slip Dat's overalls on to groom Nelly or Captain.* That chore helped him unwind sometimes.

It wasn't long now till supptime, and Dat and Dawdi Hezekiah would be arriving home from the horse auction. Far as she knew, she was the only one aware Evan had left. Jonah would know, though, since he and Evan worked in the orchard together. But that didn't mean Evan had told their brother where he was going.

She slipped off to the stable and found Evan sitting on a three-legged stool in the farthest corner from the stable door, leaning forward, hands covering his face.

"*Bruder?*" she whispered as she crept in. "*You allrecht?*"

He looked up to reveal a tearstained face and removed his straw hat. Then he pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his nose. "*Ach, ya caught me blubberin' my eyes out.*"

"Maybe splash some cold water on your face at the well pump before ya go inside the house?"

"*Jah, and I'll get out of these here gut clothes, too,*" he muttered, looking somewhat dazed as he stood. "*Honestly, the burial service was the worst thing ever. Jack's family was so solemn. Some were crying. An American flag was draped over the casket, and the military men removed it and folded it real special-like into a tight triangle. And after a bugle played a sad tune, one of the men handed the flag to Jack's weeping mother.*" Evan swallowed hard.

At the thought of Jack's grieving mother, Ellie pressed her lips together to keep her composure, then drew a deep breath. "*My thoughts were with ya the whole time you were gone.*"

Evan looked at her, eyes rimmed in red. “Kind of ya, Ellie, but my sorrow’s nothin’ compared to the Herr family’s.” His voice broke. Then, coughing, he seemed to gather himself. He told her about Jack’s great sense of humor and how he always finished his farm chores quickly and was kind to his younger brother, Chuck. “And he was a loyal friend, to be sure. Never seemed to mind that I was Plain and he was fancy when we were out together.”

Ellie listened, saying nothing.

“Jack sent me letters in care of the post office, and he told me he was mighty proud of his ability to fight for this country. He wanted to be a help to his fellow soldiers.” Shaking his head, Evan slowly walked past Nelly’s and Captain’s stalls, then pushed open the stable door and headed for the house.

Feeling ever so sad, Ellie hoped Mamm wasn’t in the kitchen checking on the roast beef in the cookstove. Evan was in no frame of mind for a talking-to from either parent. Not today.



During the meal that evening, Ellie was thankful for Dawdi’s animated talk about the auction. She tried not to fidget or let her thoughts give her away as she recalled her conversation in the barn with Evan earlier. Now and then, she glanced across the table at him, conscious of his unusual silence. *Has Dat or Mamm noticed?*

Evan’s eyes met hers, and she sensed his own relief at Dawdi’s talking just now.

Dat sat erect in his chair at the head of the table, an obvious indentation in his graying brown hair where he’d worn his straw hat all day. When he passed Mamm’s roast beef platter to

Evan for seconds, his gaze lingered on her quiet brother. She held her breath as Dawdi continued describing one of the frisky thoroughbred horses he'd had his eye on "for your Dat here to purchase."

Evan cracked a quick smile, more than likely for Dat's benefit.

When Dawdi stopped talking to dig into the meat on his plate, Mamm said, "Anyone savin' room for dessert? I made a butterscotch pie." She lived for desserts—making and eating them—which Ellie appreciated, having a sweet tooth of her own.

"Oh *jah*. Always," Ellie said, her mouth already watering at the sight of the pie on the counter. *Evan's favorite*, she thought, glad Mamm had made it today.

"I'll make extra-big slices," Mamm said to the obvious pleasure of Ellie's brother, whose dour expression brightened slightly. Now Dawdi was clapping his big callused hands and grinning at Evan as Mamm rose to cut the pie.

"What all'd you accomplish in the orchard today, son?" Dat asked, looking straight at him.

"Jonah and I spread fertilizer round the new trees," Evan said, glancing at Ellie.

Dat nodded slowly, studying Evan but good. "How far'd ya get?"

"Far as we could. Was a lot of work."

Dat looked puzzled, making Ellie want to change the subject so he wouldn't ask further questions. But Dawdi chimed in before she could.

"Keepin' an orchard healthy is always a lot of work."

"And mighty worth it," Dat said before taking another bite of his beef.

A clatter of carriage wheels came from the lane, and Ellie

turned to look out the window. There was her closest cousin, strawberry blond Ruthann Kurtz. Moments later she was tying up Bullwhip, her father's road horse, at the hitching post. She liked to drop by in the evening, and Ellie was always happy to see her.

Evan excused himself to go to the side door and step out. He called "Hullo, cousin," which he typically did whenever Ruthann arrived at the tail end of their supper. Her family ate earlier, and besides, their plump cousin loved Mamm's desserts as much as the rest of them did.

Dat moved his chair back from the head of the table, locking eyes with Mamm, still looking befuddled.

*Whew, Ellie thought, Ruthann's come in the nick of time.*