

BEVERLY LEWIS



The PHOTOGRAPH



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lewis, Beverly.

The photograph / Beverly Lewis.

pages ; cm

Summary: "In a 1980s Amish community, three sisters face a time of transition in their family, and each searches for a way to define her own future"— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1728-9 (hardcover : acid-free paper)

ISBN 978-0-7642-1247-5 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-7642-1729-6 (large-print)

1. Amish—Fiction. 2. Sisters—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3562.E9383P48 2015

813'.54—dc23

2015009450

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This story is a work of fiction. With the exception of recognized historical figures and events, all characters and events are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cover design by Dan Thornberg, Design Source Creative Services
Art direction by Paul Higdon

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Beverly Lewis, *The Photograph*

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To
Carole Billingsley,
whose prayers and love
are twofold blessings.

Now and then, in this workaday world, things do happen in the delightful storybook fashion, and what a comfort that is.

—From *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott

Prologue

EDEN VALLEY, 1980

TRUTH BE TOLD, I was taught never to feel sorry for myself. “*Nothin’ helpful comes from pity,*” Mamma often said, expecting me and my siblings to be grateful and cheerful, no matter what came our way. I confess to missing her and *Dat* terribly as we continue life without them. Yet I’ve scarcely time to dwell on the past. My youngest sister, Lily, has caused me no small amount of concern since our widowed mother succumbed to pneumonia last winter.

I recall one of those frosty January days when I stepped into Mamma’s bedroom and saw her standing with eighteen-year-old Lily near the sunlit window. Our mother was swathed all in white from head to foot and had somehow managed to pull herself up from her sickbed to don her best organdy *Kapp*, matted hair all *strubblich* beneath. She was talking quietly to Lily, her untied bathrobe hanging from her frail shoulders.

“*Just look at those critter tracks in the new snow.*” Mamma pointed out the window, then turned to face Lily, still not noticing

me. *“My dear girl, be ever so careful what tracks you make, and where they might lead those who follow.”*

It wasn't new, this sort of talk from our mother. But this time, Lily's lower lip quivered, and she looked with sad eyes through the windowpane, saying nary a word.

Little did she or any of us know that precious Mamma would leave this old world behind just three short weeks later. Leaving Lily for me to look after, trying diligently to keep her on the straight and narrow path.

Our older sister, Frona, had been fretting over Lily just as I was. She especially worried over what was to become of the three of us, since we were still unmarried and living in the farmhouse where we grew up, here in Lancaster County's Eden Valley. Living there on borrowed time, since our brother Menno had inherited the place from our parents.

“Tonight we'll have some answers,” Frona informed me after breakfast this mid-May morning. “I just hope we like what we hear.”

The youngest of our four older married brothers, Menno had worked the land there since Dat's passing, helping Mamma and then us to keep things going. While he was often around the farm, he didn't often set foot in the house, other than for the occasional noon meal, but he'd told Frona he was eager to drop by after supper for a talk. By the look of gloom on her face, I felt she needed assurance all would go well. “It's awful *gut* of Menno to check in on us, remember,” I replied.

“Ain't sure what's up,” Frona said, frowning again. “But I have my suspicions.”

“Well, I guess we'll know soon enough.” I set about making my delicious peanut butter balls, Menno's favorite, wanting to offer him some when he arrived.

I've learned in my twenty years that a person really has no idea how life's going to play out. Things often start out fine and then take a hard turn. Dat and Mamma, healthy as they seemed, left us in their prime. *Jah*, I knew firsthand that when hard times came, you needed something to cling to. In my parents' case, it was their trust in our heavenly Father. 'Twas the same for me.

Unfortunately, it wasn't true for pretty Lily. Mamma had always been her rock during such times, and without her around, Lily seemed lost. We all were, in our own way, just not nearly as openly, nor as desperately.

At night, when Lily curled her slender body next to mine as we huddled like spoons to keep warm in the bed we'd shared since childhood, I'd hear her talking to herself and crying softly. The words might have been prayers, but if so, they were nothing akin to the ones Mamma had taught us. Sometimes Lily could say the most senseless things, honestly, and I tried my best not to take them to heart.

"All the fun in life is passin' me by," Lily had said soon after Mamma died. *"I work hard from sunup to sundown, and for what? Just to start all over the same way tomorrow."*

"But work can be fun," I reminded her.

"Maybe for you and Frona."

I let it go, remembering what Mamma's lifelong friend Naomi Mast had once said: *"It's better not to ponder too much what folks say when they're grieving."*



"Time to go an' greet your devoted patrons, Eva," said Frona, trying to shoo me out the side door to my candy shop that morning. It was built onto one end of the house—all Dat's doing, although Mamma had been in agreement, back when I was only

twelve and already creating the kinds of tasty candies a person couldn't seem to stop thinking about.

"You've found your calling, Eva," my father once said, beaming. *"And we're the happy—and hungry—receivers!"*

Even as a girl, I often lost track of time while creating new recipes, always trying to outdo myself with tantalizing confections to tempt the tongue. Some said my candies were like a riveting series of books—you couldn't wait to get your hands on the next one. And right quick, there were more orders for homemade fudge and crystal sticks than I had room for in our kitchen, large though it was. So my father had taken it on himself to build the sunny and welcoming candy shop, with its attached area for a small work kitchen. The very first time I stepped inside and looked around, I felt like I'd died and gone to Glory.

"For me, Dat?" I'd said.

My father kissed my forehead. *"All for you, little Eva."*

I smiled back at him, one of a thousand happy memories.

"You're daydreaming again." Frona was staring at me, waving in front of my face. "You have customers!"

"Soon as I wash my hands," I told her.

"Be sure to bring back the gossip, ya hear?"

"Why don't ya just come hear it for yourself?" I turned on my heel to head for the sink. "And while you're at it, you could help over there, too."

Frona snapped her long white dish towel into the air. "I've plenty to do here, believe me. Anyway, I saw Dienners' boy out there in line."

"Can't imagine why."

Frona gave me a knowing grin.

I lathered up real good, then rinsed and dried my hands. It wasn't for her to know what was or wasn't in my heart for twenty-

year-old Alfred Dienner. After all, he was the first fellow to ask me to go riding, four years ago when I was but sixteen. Alfred was real nice and not bad looking, either, but he planned to farm, and I couldn't bear the thought of being a farmer's wife.

Stuck in a farmer's crowded kitchen . . .

"Best hurry," Frona said, her eyes softening. "We need every cent to pay for new gardening tools." Plain as a plate, my sister was also a worrywart.

I recalled the times Menno and our other brothers—Emmanuel, Stephen, and Rufus—had encouraged Frona to worry less and trust *Gott* more. "For goodness' sake, we'll be fine," I told Frona. "I promise."

"*You* promise?" Frona moved to the back door and looked out the window, dish towel hanging limply over her arm. The sun shone onto her smooth, round cheek. She looked as vexed as ever, despite her pretty green cape dress and matching apron, the hems nearly brushing her ankles.

"We've always managed to pay our bills on time."

Frona blinked her gray-blue eyes at me behind her thick glasses. She'd taken it upon herself to wear Mamma's old pair, saying they helped her see everything she'd been missing. "*Puh!* I've never understood why you're so *hallich*," Frona huffed, like being happy was something to be ashamed of. She leaned her plump self against the windowsill and glowered.

"Mamma loved watchin' the birds, remember? Our heavenly Father looks after even the lowly sparrow."

Frona puffed her cheeks and blew air, then plodded over to the gas-powered fridge. Opening it, she merely stared inside. After a time, she made a sound clear down in the back of her throat and looked back at me. It was as if a gray shadow passed over her.

What's she so worried about?

While Frona was prone to fret, especially over the future, I

wasn't exactly immune to that sin. Dat frequently reminded us that problems were designed to strengthen our faith. "*In everything, give thanks,*" he would say.

So, in memory of dear Dat, I was determined to count our blessings—family, friends, and fudge. Then and there, I chose to believe that whatever was on Frona's mind just now, I needn't think twice about. Our Father in heaven would take care of us. Besides, most things a person worries over never come to pass.

CHAPTER ONE



EVA ESCH STOOD BEHIND the wooden counter greeting each of her candy customers on the warmest morning so far of this budding month of May. Sunlight filled the neat and tidy shop that Friday, and between sale transactions, she happily scurried about, arranging the taffy and the well-formed peanut butter balls in an attractive array. Her father, Vernon Esch, had purposely designed the counter to face the windows, so young Eva could see her customers arrive. “*Not too high and not too low,*” he’d said of it, having her stand just so as he pulled out his measuring tape with a flourish. At her tender age, it was important to take into consideration any growth spurt she might experience; Dat had insisted Eva just might be as tall as Mamma one day.

She realized anew how considerate their father had always been, gone now four long years. With the recollection lingering, she looked up and caught sight of tall, very blond Alfred Diener. Heavens, he must have been staring at her.

Politely, she smiled back, and Alfred didn't look away as a more timid young man might. His warm hazel eyes held her gaze, and his face brightened, his lips parting.

Has he come to ask me out? Eva wondered.

Alfred stood waiting, turning a slip of paper over and over in his hands. His strapping frame evidenced long hours of hard work at his father's farm on Stony Hill Road. His face was already tan, his manner confident. Whoever ended up married to Alfred would surely be well cared for, raising a brood of future farmers and little dishwashers.

Directly in front of Alfred, two of Eva's kindly neighbors, sixty-year-old Sylvia Lantz and her thirty-year-old daughter-in-law, Josie, talked in *Deutsch* as they made their way up the steps beneath the plain green awning. Above the shop door was the hand-painted sign, *The Sweet Tooth*.

Josie and her husband, Sam, and their school-age children resided in Sylvia's farmhouse, where the senior Lantzes had worked the land and nurtured nine children, eight of whom had survived to adulthood. The youngest Lantz girl had drowned one summer years ago, and two others—Tilly and Ruth—had left the Plain community for the world, living somewhere in Massachusetts near the coast, according to the grapevine. Eva really didn't know all of the details.

What she *did* know was that whenever she tried her best not to look Alfred's way just now, she could still see him out of the corner of her eye. If he offered an invitation, *should* she accept?

As it turned out, both Sylvia and Josie wanted the small white chocolate fingers, as Eva liked to call them. The petite bars melted in your mouth, more than making up for their lack of size with rich flavor.

"Can't resist 'em," Sylvia said with a glance at Josie. "I'll have three dozen, please."

"I sure hope there'll be enough left," Josie said, covering her mouth to smother the laughter.

"You know me better'n that." Sylvia's plump face turned pink. "I'll be happy to share with ya if Eva runs out."

Eva smiled at the banter between them, a bit envious as she watched Josie gently touch her mother-in-law's arm.

"*Mei Mann* will be ever so grateful," Josie replied, a mischievous glint in her pale blue eyes. "Your sweets are truly the best, Eva."

"*Jah*, 'tis a gift, makin' these candies like ya do." Sylvia nodded her head, grinning at Eva. "The most delicious, *wunnerbaar-gut* treats ever, hope ya know."

Josie smiled, too. "*Ach*, I'd give almost anything to be able to make these delicious goodies. My husband would be over the moon."

Eva blushed; it was impossible to ignore Alfred next in line. Even so, she took care to bag up first Sylvia's order, then Josie's, the two women talking about their "perty springtime flowers," and Sylvia marveling aloud about her fifty-year-old rhubarb patch that had once again sprung to life.

Eva wondered if she, too, might someday enjoy a close relationship with a mother-in-law. She certainly yearned for such a connection. Fearing she might betray her private thoughts to Alfred, she purposely looked down at the counter when he stepped up, tall and straight. His voice was confident and clear as he gave his order, then waited politely.

"Will that be all, then?" she asked, noticing his white shirt and black broadfall trousers, like he was going to Preaching and not off to work.

"Oh, and I'd like some hard peppermint candies, too," he said, leaning on the counter as if he might have more to say.

Here it comes, she thought, daring to raise her eyes. She spoke just as he opened his mouth. "Anything else?" She pointed at the

glass display case and mentioned the freshly made peanut butter balls. But he shrugged and said maybe another time.

When she went to gather up his order, he followed her over, of all things, and stood watching. Goodness, but Eva was thankful for the steady stream of customers. Anything to keep her busy. Then again, she was afraid someone might suspect her and Alfred of being a courting couple. If not that, then certainly of being sweet on each other. Sure, they'd gone riding together a half-dozen times during the past few years, and they'd played volleyball on the same team, too. She also recalled a picnic in Central Park near downtown Lancaster, where she provided the meal, but none of that meant they were serious. Alfred was quite aware that a handful of other fellows had taken her out, as well. *All of them married now*, Eva thought grimly.

"Denki, Alfred, for comin' by—"

"Eva, slow down a minute," he said. "Your customers will wait."

She felt her face warm as Alfred proceeded, in front of everyone, to invite her to play Ping-Pong with him at his cousin's house.

Leaning over the work counter, she lowered her voice and replied, "You're askin' me here. . . ." She glanced behind him.

"Jah, 'tis all right." His eyes were smiling as he held her gaze. "So, will ya?"

She noticed their neighbor to the north pretending to study the homemade ribbon candy in the glass display case behind them. Eva felt positively mortified—what was Alfred thinking? The grapevine would have them engaged by day's end.

If I hesitate, will he stay and try to persuade me?

Pleasant and well-mannered as Alfred Dienner was, she wouldn't put that past him. *But, goodness—like a dog on a bone!*

"Um, that'll be fine," she whispered to him.

"*Des gut*, then," Alfred said with a nod.

She placed his order in a large sack and recited the total.
“Enjoy the candy. Some very *gut* choices.”

Alfred counted out the payment and dropped two quarters in the tip jar. “I hope I can make it last awhile.” He gripped the bag of candy and, before turning to go, winked at her. *In front of everyone!*