

the Wish



BEVERLY
LEWIS



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Beverly Lewis, *The Wish*
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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

Names: Lewis, Beverly, author.

Title: The wish / Beverly Lewis.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2016]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016017639 | ISBN 9780764218897 (hardcover : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780764212499 (softcover) | ISBN 9780764218903 (large print : softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Amish—Pennsylvania—Lancaster County—Fiction. | Female friendship—Fiction. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3562.E9383 W57 2016 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016017639>

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

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

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Barbara,
my sister
and
dearest friend.



There is nothing on this earth
to be prized more than true friendship.

—Thomas Aquinas

Prologue

*S*ome people are simply born into the wrong family, I thought, recalling my disappointing morning. My parents were older, and being the only child in the house since my sole sibling, Mahlon, married seven years ago, I'd come to believe that all the other families in our Plain community were more close-knit and interesting than my own.

Then, when the Gingeriches moved into the farmhouse near us, it seemed like an answer to prayer. Quickly, they became as close as any of my blood kin here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Closer, really.

So I could hardly wait to visit them whenever possible. And this fine October afternoon—a Lord's Day set apart for reflection and visiting family—was no different.

The sky was the color of *Mammi* Speicher's Blue Willow plates and just as sparkling, too. No matter the weather or my circumstances, though, the divine peace of the Lord's Day reminded me to count my blessings. *Dawdi* Benuel, my father's father, had urged me to do the same.

Only this morning Dawdi had asked, "Do ya realize you spend

more daylight hours over at the Gingeriches' than ya do round here, Leona?" We were feeding the livestock.

Neither my father nor mother had ever voiced this, not being ones to share their feelings much. But I supposed Dawdi Benuel was right and had every reason to say so. In that single look from him, standing there beside the feeding trough, I had witnessed a hint of frustration, perhaps even disapproval—not that it could change my affection for Gloria Gingerich and her family.

My mind jolted back to the present as, unexpectedly, I heard someone coming on the opposite side of the road. Nearing, I saw it was my lanky cousin, Orchard John, looking nearly like a large crow in his black broadfall trousers and *Mutze*—frock coat.

"Leona," he called, "if you're headed to see Gloria, she's not home." He crossed the road to me. "Seems odd 'cause they're all home 'cept her. How's that figure?" He grimaced and shook his head.

Since John had been courting my seventeen-year-old friend for nearly a year now, I assumed he had a right to wonder. "Did they say where she is? You could've waited for her to return, maybe."

"Not sure when she'll be back." John gave me a wave as he kept going, clearly peeved at coming all this way for naught. His father's one-hundred-and-fifty-acre orchard of fifteen varieties of apples, as well as cherries, prune plums, and peaches, was more than a mile away on Farmdale Road, so I couldn't fault him. Even so, it wondered me why he hadn't made plans with Gloria beforehand, like usual.

As for me, I would be content to visit with Gloria's mother for the time being. Jeannie Gingerich's big blue eyes always lit up when I knocked on the back door, and her warm greeting made me smile. Oh, such a *babblich* and vibrant woman, seemingly interested in whatever I had in mind to tell her. Still youthful and perty, too—no more than forty, surely. All the things my own *Mamma* wasn't.

And Gloria's father, Arkansas Joe, was charming in his own right, always making me feel comfortable in the house, drawing me into conversation—unlike my own *Dad*—joking with me, kidding me like he did his own children.

The perfect family . . .

Slowing my pace, I breathed in the damp, woody scent of autumn and savored the view of sugar maples aflame with deep crimson along the road where it dipped, then crossed over a creek.

I caught sight of the Gingeriches' redbrick house ahead and hurried my steps, anticipating the prospect of spending time there. This was the home where I'd played Dutch Blitz, baked apple dapple for dessert, and made faceless dolls out of leftover dress fabric. Oh, the many fun-filled days we'd shared together!

A family of five deer moved through a thicket of leaves in the woodland over yonder and then scampered out of sight. *Forever friends are sometimes closer than kinfolk*, I thought. *A blessing, for certain!*

And after these wonderfully happy years living side by side, I had every reason to believe the future with my dear sister-friend would be as bright as the afternoon sun.

CHAPTER 1

The farmhouse that Arkansas Joe Gingerich had rented upon first coming to Colerain Township was one of only a handful of brick structures in the area, a rarity on Maple Shade Road. The plot of land was small compared to others on that stretch of country road, although there were plentiful outbuildings, all painted white—a solid corncrib and woodshed, a spacious separate stable, and a one-level barn. Like other Amish families, the Gingeriches had a pulley clothesline, the highest one Leona Speicher had ever seen. On *der Weschdaag*, when strong breezes blew, the clothes pinned to the line seemed to flap against the sky.

Leona headed up the paved lane, itching to set foot inside the gleaming house again. A *cheerful haven*, she often thought of it.

An arbor of grapevines was still green despite the arrival of fall, and on the back porch, golden mums lined up along the steps in large clay pots, some of them painted in stripes or polka dots.

Two pearly white barn kittens scampered away as Jeannie Gingerich greeted Leona with a welcoming embrace, as if she hadn't seen her in weeks. "*Wunnerbaar-gut* to see ya," she said, smiling and ushering Leona inside. "What would ya like to snack

on till Gloria gets herself home—cookies, pumpkin bread . . . or both?”

“*Denki*, a cookie’s fine.”

“Just one?” Jeannie grinned as she scooted the plateful of cookies over next to Leona.

The sound of Adam’s deep voice drifted from the front room. Orchard John had been right about everyone but Gloria being home.

“Is that Leona I hear?” Adam called warmly, momentarily ducking his head into the kitchen to greet her.

Leona smiled and blushed, cautious not to let her giddiness at his attention show. After all, Jeannie and her husband couldn’t possibly know that Adam had seen her home last Singing for the first time. Even if they *did* know, Adam likely wouldn’t want to make much of it, young as they both were.

Leona chose a cookie and wished Adam had stayed put in the front room—she’d blushed in front of his mother, for goodness’ sake!

Jeannie, however, gave no sign that she’d noticed anything unusual and quickly set Leona at ease by bringing up a sisters’ day gathering—this one a quilting bee—Leona might enjoy attending next week with her and Gloria. “That is, if you’re not workin’ at Maggie’s Country Store.” Jeannie leaned her elbows on the table, her eyes intent on Leona. “I could drop by and pick you and your Mamma up, if you’re both free.”

“You know how my mother feels ’bout big doin’s.”

“Well, maybe *you* could go.”

Leona could tell Jeannie really wanted her along and said she’d have to talk to her sister-in-law boss, the owner of the shop.

She realized anew how rarely she thought of spending time with her own small family in this same enthusiastic way. Did her parents feel the same toward her? Today, for instance, they’d

talked of going to visit Leona's brother, Mahlon, and his family, not even asking if she wished to go along. She had mixed feelings about it—shouldn't she *want* to be with her real family?

Shouldn't they want to be with me?

Although, in their defense, they must have guessed where she'd rather be this afternoon.

Leona glanced up at the large kitchen calendar, with its photograph of a tall lighthouse on the edge of a cliff, white waves crashing below. Gloria's mother seemed to like lighthouses; there were three small statuettes on display in the hutch across the room from them.

"Have ya ever been inside a lighthouse?" Leona asked, suddenly curious.

"Only once—clear out in Oregon, if you can imagine that." Jeannie described in great detail traveling northwest in a twelve-passenger van, sharing the cost with other families. "This was before Adam and Gloria were born," added Jeannie. "My husband and I were newlyweds and decided to spend the night at Haceta Head Lighthouse Keeper's House. We could hear the waves beating against the cliff below . . . so different than hearing the mules brayin' in the barn."

Leona could scarcely relate to such an adventure, never having traveled away from the East Coast. Mahlon's wife, Maggie, was the only one she knew with travel aspirations, perhaps as far as Virginia for the Colonial Christmas tour of the Jamestown Settlement. Apparently, her sister-in-law had read about it in a travel book from the library.

Maggie and her fancies, thought Leona. Maggie certainly saw things differently than most area folk. She had an eye for pretty things, one that well served her boutique of home-crafted items. There, Maggie sold dozens of pretty candles in all different shapes, sizes, and scents, as well as gas lamps that looked so

much like electric ones that even *Englischers* were fooled. For an Amishwoman, Maggie certainly had a knack for knowing what appealed to her customers. It was only in her shop that Maggie was able to indulge her tastes, Leona knew. Truly, Maggie was the closest thing to a sister she had, at least amongst relatives. They weren't close at all in age, but Leona enjoyed her company, especially at the shop, and looked up to her.

Going to the sink for some water, Leona noticed a gray carriage turning into the lane with Preacher Miller at the reins in his wide-brimmed black felt hat. Gloria, of all people, was sitting on the seat behind him, her dog, Brownie, a beagle-cocker spaniel mix, panting at the window. "Lookee who's here!" Leona said, and Jeannie rose to see, apparently surprised her daughter was being escorted home by the minister.

Jeannie called to her husband. "Joe! Preacher Miller's come to see ya."

Right quick, footsteps came from the front room, and Arkansas Joe strode into the kitchen. He caught Leona's eye, giving her his usual winning smile. "There's our second girl," he said before putting on his shoes and dashing toward the back door, shoving it open. "Hullo, Preacher!" Joe announced, but Leona could detect a strange shakiness beneath his typically confident tone.

"My father could prob'ly sell cars to the Amish," Gloria had once told her. "Everyone likes him." It had seemed like a strange comment at the time, one Leona didn't find all that complimentary. Still, she couldn't deny Joe's personality.

"I hope everything's all right," Leona said softly, wondering how Jeannie knew the minister had come particularly to visit Joe.

"Let's not borrow trouble." Jeannie sighed deeply and made her way to the back door to meet Gloria as she came up the steps. "Aren't *you* special, getting a ride with the preacher?"

“Just happened to be going the same way,” Gloria said, entering the kitchen. “He likes to help out when he can.”

Overhearing this, Leona agreed silently, recalling a number of times the kindly man had offered her and Mamma a ride, as well. But there was a tension now between Gloria and her mother, and Leona sensed something lurking beneath their smiles.

Gloria hurried to Leona. “I was over at your place . . . wanted you to go walkin’ with Brownie and me,” she explained. “But not a soul was home.”

“My parents went to visit Mahlon and Maggie and the children.” Leona found it odd that she hadn’t crossed paths with Gloria on the way here. Had Gloria run into her beau, Orchard John? *Maybe she cut through the back meadow. . . .*

Motioning for Leona to head upstairs with her, Gloria led the way to her room, which was situated at the far end of the narrow hall, past a spacious spare bedroom and a small sewing room. But it wasn’t her afternoon walk she had on her mind. “*Kumme*,” Gloria whispered, leading Leona to the window. They peered down at her father and Preacher Miller standing at the base of the windmill.

“See that?” Gloria asked. She sounded frightened, as if watching something terrible unfold.

Leona squinted down and saw Brownie wag his tail at the minister, who absently reached to give him a pat. “Looks like a pleasant enough visit, ain’t so?”

Gloria squeezed her hand. “If only that was all . . .” Her eyes were bright with tears.

“What’s wrong, Gloria?”

She shook her head. “*Ach*, maybe I’m just tired, is all.”

Her voice sounded so strangely flat, Leona was suddenly afraid to pry further . . . but she was certain Gloria wasn’t saying all she knew.