



# EBB TIDE



BEVERLY  
LEWIS



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To Dee Ann Kralis Walker,  
my remarkable friend since high school.  
With love and gratitude.





Never give up,  
for that is just the place and time  
that the tide will turn.

—*Harriet Beecher Stowe*



# Prologue

PARADISE TOWNSHIP, PENNSYLVANIA: MAY 2014

I was born with wanderlust in my heart. . . .

The way Mamm told it, I'd had this so-called problem since I was a wee girl. Truth be known, I remember the first time I realized how big and beautiful God's world really is. I was just five years old and had wandered off to climb a tree while my family was picnicking near the banks of the rushing Susquehanna River. When my big brother Adam finally found me, instead of being frightened, I was laughing, fascinated by the water pounding against nearby boulders, and upset when he said we had to go home. It took some real effort for him to coax me down so he could carry me to safety.

Well, to my parents' disappointment, I'd been that way ever since, curious about nature and reading books about faraway places, struggling with "*a bad case of itchy feet*," as my sister Frannie liked to say. "*You're too restless for your own good, Sallie.*"

But honestly, sometimes other places just sounded more interesting than my own Plain community set in fertile farmland. Beautiful, *jah*, but with all the familiar landmarks—the same old everything. And, because of my hope to travel, to take at

least one *wunnerbaar-gut* trip, I'd put off joining church, which had become a worry for *Dat* and *Mamm*.

After all, with my nine older siblings already safely in the fold, I was the sole straggler. And now that I was nearly twenty, my parents' concern was all the more concentrated as spring blossomed and, with it, the realization of the trip I'd been saving for now for three long years. Much to my excitement, I had almost enough money to travel all the way to Australia, as far away as a girl like me could imagine. At present, I was wait-listed by my travel agent for an early June tour while I scraped together the last few dollars. One way or another, I would get on a tour sometime that month, I was told. "*So be ready,*" she'd said.

Australia might seem like a surprising choice to some, but I had daydreamed of going to the world's largest island since meeting a couple at market several years ago who invited me to visit them in Cairns if I ever had a chance to travel there. Immediately, I'd checked out library books on Australia—oh, the captivating pictures of sea life along the Great Barrier Reef and the Twelve Apostles in Victoria! There was nothing in Lancaster County that could rival any of those sights . . . halfway around the world as they were. If I could fly on a plane only once in my life, I was going to go as far as I could!

As to be expected, *Dat* and *Mamm* had not been thrilled about my desire to travel overseas—or my newly arrived passport with its full-color photo of me—but I'd assured them that the faith-based travel agency had agreed, at my request, to assign an older, well-traveled Christian roommate for me. And after that trip, I would settle down and bring my *Rumschpringe* to an end. Surely my memories of such an adventure would be enough to carry me onward.

Even so, from time to time these May evenings, I caught *Mamm* peering over her glasses at me as we sat on the back porch, slapping at flies. Certainly she was studying me even this moment, probably struggling to understand what made me tick.

“Another travel book, Sallie?” Mamm asked. “Thought you were goin’ to Australia.” Her white crochet hook flew over rows of variegated yarn in pastel yellow, green, and blue, a cradle afghan in the making for the newest grandbaby—due September, the month of baptism.

“I am, Mamm, but I couldn’t resist picking up this one at the library.” I showed her the front cover. “It’s about the Seychelles—a group of islands in the Indian Ocean.”

“Ach, where?” she asked, eyes wide.

I pointed to the flyleaf, where a map featured the cluster of one hundred sixteen islands near Madagascar.

Mamm sighed and glanced toward the side lawn, where a line of spruce trees towered black against the setting sun. “You’ve *always* got your sights set so far away, dear.”

A silence fell between us, and I wondered what she was thinking. My mother was a woman of many domestic talents—sewing, quilting, crocheting, needlepoint, you name it. She was also happy to go the second and third mile for our neighbors—Plain or fancy didn’t matter. “A *busy bee*,” my sister Frannie referred to her. In short, Mamm lived her life as though it mattered—to God and the People and everyone who knew her.

“You work real hard round here, Sallie,” she said after a while, “and at that restaurant up yonder, too.”

“*Jah*, I do like taking care of customers and juggling orders at the Old Barn Restaurant.”

“Still planning on makin’ your vow to almighty *Gott* this year?” she asked.

I nodded eagerly. “There’ll be plenty of time for baptismal classes once I get back from Australia.”

Mamm shook her head at the mention of my trip. “Ach, I’ll be glad when ya set all that behind ya.”

I recalled last year’s conversation when I’d said I needed yet another year to save up enough money for the coveted trip. Mamm had visibly wilted. “*Oh, Sallie . . . baptism ain’t somethin’*”

to put off. I didn't dillydally. I joined church the very month I turned eighteen."

Shrugging, I wondered if my next older sister, Frannie, had experienced similar questions before her baptism last fall, but I doubted it. She was as predictable and dutiful as our mother.

Sunlight glinted off the red base of the hummingbird feeder on the far end of the porch. I stared at it for the longest time, my hands jammed between my knees. Thankfully, at least one person in my life had never questioned my dreams—Cousin Essie Lapp, Mamm's unmarried first cousin who lived up the gentle rise from us.

I lifted my eyes to the cottage that overlooked a flagstone walkway and Essie's celebrated flower gardens of bluebells and Jacob's ladder, all terraced for easy weeding. Forty-two-year-old Essie lived alone with three cats, surrounded by her gardens, including those in two greenhouses. One of the structures was for growing melon plants, and the smaller one for the blossoms Essie liked to arrange to further brighten her cozy kitchen or front room. The greenhouses also provided the perfect spot to read travel books on a springtime evening with one of Essie's pets curled up nearby. The lush greenery, the humus-rich loam, and the fragrant scents of God's handiwork filled me with daydreams of faraway lands.

Then again, it didn't take much for me to daydream. I had been doing just that while dusting yesterday when I overheard Mamm in the kitchen telling Frannie that the time had come for Dat to turn over the farm to our married brother Allen, the youngest son. This had been planned for a year or so, but it hadn't come up in a while. During their conversation, Mamm had also hinted that she suspected Frannie was nearly engaged, which would leave just me to look after. *Not that I need close supervision*, I'd thought at the time. Frannie had spoken up in my behalf, bless her heart, mentioning that I might not be too keen on moving into the *Dawdi Haus* with Mamm and Dat once Allen took over

the main house. “*Sallie might wanna move up with Cousin Essie instead,*” Frannie had suggested.

Mamm hadn’t replied to that, and as I crept backward toward the stairs with my dustrag, I hoped she might actually consider Frannie’s remark. I’d always liked easygoing Essie, who smelled of rose petals and made the best-ever sticky buns in all of Paradise Township. Essie also embraced her faith in every way imaginable . . . didn’t just put it on when she wore her white organdy *Kapp* to Preaching. Yet for all of Essie’s wonderful qualities, she was still a *Maidel*, something no Amishwoman wanted to be.

*Mamm surely fears I’ll be just like her if I’m not baptized soon.*

My mother’s voice pushed through to me now as we sat there, the porch chairs creaking as we continued to rock. “I’m relieved you’re planning to take baptismal instruction this summer, Sallie. ’Tis the prayer of your father’s heart and mine.”

My throat tightened. “This is the year, Mamm,” I promised.

“For sure?” Mamm pinned me with her blue eyes even as a barn cat wandered onto the porch and rubbed its furry body against her stout ankle, below the hem of her purple dress and long black apron.

“*Jah, for sure.*”

I watched four ruby-throated hummingbirds compete for the extra-sweet syrup Frannie cooked up for them every few days. All of my relatives were either farmers or shopkeepers with wares appealing to tourists, while one of my uncles on my father’s side, Rudy Riehl, had broken the mold some by being a cattle farmer—though that wasn’t saying much. None of my kin had ever pressed the limits for adventure’s sake. Yet, even as a small girl, I would walk through the high grasses out past Cousin Essie’s property, wondering what life was like outside the confines of our secluded community.

This was the summer I would find out for myself. My skin tingled as I pondered it. It would be the start of Australia’s mild winter when I arrived in early June—one of the reasons I’d

chosen this particular time to travel there, hoping for a reduced rate.

Ach, my smile must have revealed my delight, because Mamm's eyebrows arched as if she second-guessed my word.

*You mustn't worry, Mamm. . . .*

Seeing the stable door ajar, I excused myself, taking my book with me as I scurried out to water the livestock, the barn kittens fleeing every which way before me like puffs of dandelion.



# 1

A heavy haze dipped onto the vast cornfield and meadowlands that Wednesday morning. It hung as thick as storm shutters and as far as the crease in the landscape where other houses and barns had been erected over the years for the expanding Joseph Riehl family. The May mist was visible through the beveled windows of the Riehls' three-story farmhouse, kept in the family for more than four generations.

At that early hour, there was no wind, a recipe for misery when mixed with the heat and high humidity of recent days.

As it had for some years now, the spacious farmhouse felt cramped to Sallie, especially her mother's kitchen, where Sallie stood over the gas range frying up her father's favorite breakfast while her sister Frannie made coffee. Sallie's day-in-day-out routine since the start of spring had already become sheer monotony, though she and Frannie were able to take turns making breakfast every other day. Sallie was persnickety about her food preparation in the light of the gas lamp as she fried up German sausage links and potatoes, both to her father's liking.

Mamm came downstairs wearing a dark green dress and matching apron, same color as Frannie's, which made all three of them smile. Mamm rushed about to ready the table for the family's ritual

of breakfast and Bible reading afterward. While she finished setting the table, Frannie poured the coffee and Sallie carried the large yellow oval platter to the table, the sausage and potatoes steaming hot from the black griddle. Setting it down near her father's usual place, Sallie quickly returned for a large tureen of stewed crackers in warm milk.

Dat carried his old straw hat, the color of corn silk, across the room and hung it on one of the dark wooden pegs. Then, removing his black work boots, he lumbered to the head of the table and lowered himself into the chair with a gentle moan. "No sense takin' unnecessary items to the *Dawdi Haus* when July comes, Anna Mae," he said, pushing his black suspenders off his brawny shoulders.

Mamm gave him a smile. "Thought of that, too."

Sallie was surprised that such a change was coming so soon. She'd felt sure there would be no need to vacate this house for Allen and his family till after silo filling in the fall. But considering her father's remark just now, it seemed he wasn't letting any grass grow beneath his callused feet.

Nothing yet had been said to Sallie about staying with Cousin Essie instead of moving next door, however. In fact, nothing had been said to Sallie at all. What she knew had come solely from Frannie, and the bits and pieces Sallie had overheard the day before yesterday. There was a spare room on the second floor of the *Dawdi Haus*, but she wasn't so keen on doubling up with Frannie when they'd had separate bedrooms for a few years now. And she was certain Frannie would agree.

"What's the hurry?" Sallie asked as she took her place next to Mamm, who folded her hands for the table blessing.

Dat promptly bowed his head for the silent prayer, then reached for his coffee, adding more cream before responding. "Putting it bluntly, as hot as it's bound to get this summer, I doubt I'll make it through the dog days, workin' so many hours," he said, his bushy eyebrows knit together.

“Allen’s young, Joseph,” Mamm said, casting a tender look his way. “He’ll be a big help round the farm. And with his and Kate’s family expanding in September, they need more room.”

Sallie appreciated Mamm’s tact. No need to point out that Dat’s arthritis was worsening.

Mamm looked across the table at Frannie and nudged Sallie gently. “By the way, your sister here has some news, too.”

Delight swept through Sallie even before Frannie could open her mouth. “I hope it’s what I’m thinkin’!” Sallie exclaimed.

Frannie’s pretty face suddenly went all rosy. “Jesse Stoltzfus asked me to marry him.” She bit her bottom lip. “We’re planning to tie the knot come November.”

“I’m so happy for ya!” Sallie wanted to give her a hug right then and there. “Such a nice fella, too,” she added, though that went without saying because everyone who knew Jesse thought well of him. The fine young man was working his way up the ladder at the harness shop just down Peach Lane.

Dat bobbed his head, gray eyes brightening. He looked rather dotingly at small-boned Frannie, her hair the shade of newly harvested wheat.

Abe Stoltzfus, Jesse’s father, and Dat had been mighty good friends since boyhood. When Frannie and Jesse began courting, Sallie had wondered if Dat and Abe hadn’t put their heads together about the romantic match. But time had made it clear that Jesse and Frannie were truly smitten.

Sallie honestly couldn’t say if she’d ever been *smitten*, but she figured if you had to wonder about it, you probably weren’t. She had never had a beau, though she had gone on dates here and there, most recently with good-natured Perry Zook. Their two or three wintertime outings had always been as part of a group, however.

Still, Sallie didn’t lament not having a beau. It had left her more time to work at the restaurant so that she wouldn’t come up short for her Australia fund.

“You’ll be one of my bridesmaids, won’t ya, Sallie?” Frannie asked, eyes questioning, though she didn’t have to plead.

“Well, I’d be downright befuddled if ya *didn’t* ask.”

Frannie nodded. “If Laura was still single, I’d ask her, too.” Their older sister had married more than two years ago and was a busy mother to three-month-old twin boys.

“Don’t forget Cousin Essie,” Sallie suggested, laughing.

“Girls . . . *girls*,” Mamm said, waving her hand.

Frannie shrugged dramatically. Likely she didn’t agree with Mamm’s disapproval. Certainly Sallie didn’t, knowing Essie was remarkably young at heart. Even so, it was true that single *young* people were the only ones expected to be chosen as Old Order Amish wedding attendants, or side-sitters.

“I daresay you’ll be baptized by the time I marry.” Frannie brightened all the more. “Surely *this* September.”

Even Dat perked up and looked Sallie’s way, hope on his countenance.

“*Jah*,” Sallie said. “I’ll be back home in plenty of time.”

“Back from where?” Dat asked.

“Australia,” Sallie reminded him softly. “If everything works out.”

“So, it’s Australia you’ve decided on?” he said.

Her face and neck grew warm. “It’s been Australia awhile now.”

“Not Ireland or the Bahamas or—”

“Ireland was years ago,” Frannie piped up.

Sallie sighed. At least they were having fun with it. “It’ll just be for two weeks,” she added, “once I get word.” Her travel agent had expected to hear of an opening anytime now. *Hopefully I’ll have my last few dollars by then.*

“Gone two weeks?” Dat exhaled as hard as when he pitched hay in the barn. At that moment, his face had an unexpectedly vulnerable look to it.

*He’s afraid I won’t return*, Sallie thought, taking a drink.

“Such a distance away, too,” Frannie said.

“Oodles of hours in the air . . . *ach!*” Mamm shook her head.

*Thirty hours with flight changes*, Sallie thought, but not even that somewhat daunting prospect was enough to dampen her enthusiasm.

At such times, Sallie wished her parents were less given to fretting. Still, she knew their concern was evidence of their love.

“You *like* bein’ Amish, don’t ya, daughter?” Dat asked.

Sallie paused. There was no question in her mind about eventually settling down and following the Plain ways. What else was there?

But her fear of losing the opportunity to travel had an almost panicky effect on her. “I *love* being Amish.” She glanced at Mamm, who was studying her. “This is just something I need to do.”

Frannie smiled and affectionately tilted her head at her. “Goodness . . . not sure I’d see it thataway, but I’ll be glad to hear all about your time away.”

Neither of her parents had anything to add to that. Dat took a final sip of his coffee. “We all have work to do, ain’t so?”

“Well, Sallie’s excused from redding up the kitchen this mornin’,” Mamm announced, getting up and going to the sink, where she turned on the spigot, glancing back at Sallie. “She made a very tasty breakfast, after all.”

Sallie’s relief blended with her frustration, and she wished she could soothe her family’s swirling worries. Joining church before she had a chance to see the moon rise over a white sandy beach or the sun set over a lagoon populated with lively dolphins would surely be a mistake.

*Two weeks in Australia in return for a lifetime as an Amishwoman seems a fair trade*, she thought. *Why is it so difficult for them to understand?*