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## Orchard (Weir)

[Summary](#) | [Author Bio](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Discussion Questions](#) | [Full Version](#) | [Print](#)***The Orchard: A Memoir****Theresa Weir, 2011**Grand Central Publishing**240 pp.**ISBN-13: 9780446584692*

## Summary

*The Orchard* is the story of a street-smart city girl who must adapt to a new life on an apple farm after she falls in love with Adrian Curtis, the golden boy of a prominent local family whose lives and orchards seem to be cursed.

Married after only three months, young Theresa finds life with Adrian on the farm far more difficult and dangerous than she expected. Rejected by her husband's family as an outsider, she slowly learns for herself about the isolated world of farming, pesticides, environmental destruction, and death, even as she falls more deeply in love with her husband, a man she at first hardly knew and the land that has been in his family for generations.

Theresa becomes a reluctant player in their attempt to keep the codling moth from destroying the orchard. Yet she and Adrian eventually come to know that their efforts will not only fail but will ultimately take an irreparable toll. (*From the publisher.*)

## Author Bio

- Aka—Anne Frasier
- Birth—ca. 1950s
- Where—Burlington, Iowa, USA
- Education—Artesia High School, Artesia, New Mexico
- Awards—Romantic Times Best Romantic-Adventure Writer Award; Romance Writers of America Award (RITA); Daphne du Maurier Award; Romantic Times Career Achievement Award.
- Currently—lives in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota

Theresa Weir is the real name of Anne Frasier, a *USA Today* bestselling author of nineteen novels that have spanned the genres of suspense, mystery, thriller, romantic suspense, paranormal, and memoir. Her books have been translated into twenty languages.

Weir's debut title was the cult phenomenon *Amazon Lily*, initially published by Pocket Books and later reissued by Bantam Books. Writing as Theresa Weir, she won a RITA for romantic suspense (*Cool Shade*), and a year later the Daphne du Maurier for paranormal romance (*Bad Karma*).

In her more recent Anne Frasier career, her thriller and suspense titles hit the *USA Today* list (*Hush*, *Sleep Tight*, *Play Dead*) and were featured in Mystery Guild, Literary Guild, and Book of the Month Club. *Hush* was both a RITA and Daphne du Maurier finalist. Well-known and respected in the mystery community, she served as hardcover judge for the Thriller presented by International Thriller Writers, and was guest of honor at the Diversicon 16 mystery/science fiction conference held in Minneapolis in 2008. Frasier books have received high praise from print publications and online review sites. Her short stories and poetry can be found in *Discount Noir*, *Once Upon a Crime*, and *The Lineup*, *Poems on Crime*. She is a member of Sisters in Crime, International Thriller Writers, and Crimespace.

### Life

Theresa Weir was born in Burlington, Iowa, a river town settled by German, Irish, and Dutch immigrants. Her blue-collar parents divorced when she was six, and the next twelve years were spent in poverty, moving to and from Florida, Iowa, California, Illinois, and New Mexico. She graduated from Artesia High School, Artesia, New Mexico.

After high school she worked as a waitress, a factory worker at Albuquerque's Levi Strauss (where she sewed the Levi's logo on the back pocket of jeans), followed by a secretarial position at Wally's LP Gas in Santa Fe, New Mexico. At age nineteen, she joined her uncle at his bar in rural Illinois across the Mississippi River from her birthplace of Burlington, Iowa. While tending bar at the Pilot House, she met an apple farmer and the two married three months later.

Shortly after moving to the farm, in the mid-1980s, Weir began writing. Her first manuscript, *Amazon Lily* (under Theresa Weir) was rejected by multiple agents and publishers because they believed that her hero was unlikable. Four years later, in 1988, she was offered a contract with Pocket Books—and her ground breaking, multi-award winning *Amazon Lily* was published.

The novel finally sold and went on to win the Romantic Times Best Romantic Adventure Writer Award, but Frasier continued to encounter editors who disliked her characters. In Frasier's words, her characters are "imperfect people who had problems, who didn't always make the right choices, but in the end triumphed." The characters have real, interesting problems, including a hero with agoraphobia and a heroine with an eating disorder.

Her work has continued to be popular with readers and fellow romance writers, however, and in 1999 she was awarded a Romance Writers of America RITA Award for Best Romantic Suspense for her novel *Cool Shade*. She has also been awarded the Daphne du Maurier award for romantic suspense, and she has been awarded

Romantic Times Career Achievement Award and been nominated for a Romantic Times Reviewers' Choice Award for *Long Night Moon*.

During her years of writing romance novels, Frasier's editors often asked her "to remove the blood and bodies" from her plots. She decided that instead it would be easier for her to remove the romance and focus more completely on the mystery of the story. After several years, she found a publisher willing to allow her to move her writing into this new direction. Although she has now stopped releasing new romance novels, her thrillers do contain elements of romance. (*Adapted from Wikipedia.*)

#### Book Reviews

[S]earing...the past is artfully juxtaposed with the present in this finely wrought work. Its haunting passages will linger long after the last page is turned.

***Boston Globe***

What do those perfectly round, shiny red apples really cost? This poignant memoir of love, labor, and dangerous pesticides reveals the terrible true price.

***Karen Holt - O Magazine***

Equal parts moving love story and environmental warning.

***Entertainment Weekly***

The use of heavy pesticides over decades on Midwestern farms forms the dark, moody leitmotiv of this affecting memoir set largely around a 1970s orchard by thriller writer Weir (aka Anne Frasier). As a 21-year-old from a divorced home who grew up in Miami and Albuquerque, with a talent for art but little prospects to educate herself, Weir gravitated toward the Midwest, where she worked as a waitress in her uncle's bar in Henderson County, Ill., just off the Iowa border; farmers dropped in for beer and a secret stash of porn her uncle kept in the back, their arms dusted with the herbicide they used in the fields. Smitten with young, handsome Adrian Curtis, the scion of a large apple orchard that seemed to be under a curse of bad luck, Weir soon married the serious, reticent young farmer and lived with him in a small cabin on his parents' farm, although she hadn't a clue about being a farm wife; moreover, her in-laws despised her as an outsider ("white trash") and nobody expected her to last long. Nonetheless, the marriage endured happily, two healthy children were born, and Weir improbably managed to start a career as a writer. But then both Adrian and his father were diagnosed with and died from cancer. Afraid of further contaminating themselves, Weir and her two children eventually moved out of the county. Weir, now living in Minneapolis, narrates a truly disquieting tale of familial dislocation and rupture.

***Publishers Weekly***

A foreboding memoir of the author's early marriage into an agricultural family, and her emotional navigation between rootlessness and heritage.... The strongest feature of the book is the determined loyalty that allows Weir to discover beauty amid strife, as well as the touching conclusion.

***Kirkus Reviews***

## Discussion Questions

1. The author's decision to move to Illinois and help her uncle with his bar was made on a whim. Have you ever made a decision that seemed small and insignificant at the time, but in the end redesigned your life?
2. How might the lack of adult guidance in the author's childhood have laid the groundwork for her decision to get married so quickly?
3. Why did the author stay on the farm, especially in the beginning? Could her unconventional upbringing have led to an acceptance of a situation many women wouldn't have tolerated? How did her mother's rocky relationships play into Theresa's unclear view of marriage?
4. Would you have stayed given similar circumstances?
5. The author is never quite sure why Adrian married her. Was it passive aggressive behavior on his part? Did he want to annoy his mother? Was he attracted to someone who represented the freedom he could never have? Or was it something else?
6. Did the author's ambivalence toward her mother-in-law antagonize the situation? Should the author have tried harder to fit in?
7. A scion is a rogue branch that is unlike the rest of the tree. How were the author and her husband both scions? Was one more of a scion than the other?
8. Some cultures believe that no one can really own the land. Should farmers be monitored more closely and held accountable for farming practices? Do they have a responsibility that extends beyond themselves? Or should they be able to do whatever they want with the land they own?
9. *The Orchard* reads a little like a dark fairy tale. What are some similarities between *The Orchard* and a fairy tale?
10. In one scene, we're given insight into what drives Ruth. In many ways she's a product of her time, her generation, her childhood, and her environment. Her behavior would have been considered acceptable in certain circles, and her battle was not only for the farm, but for her newly found identity. Did you ever feel sympathy for her as the life she'd worked so hard to build collapsed?
11. We know that salesmen once drank the herbicide they were selling as a way of demonstrating the product's "safety", but do you think Lily really existed?
12. What scene impacted you the most?
13. In the final scene, do the roses have significance beyond a simple gift of flowers?

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
## The Orchard (Weir) -...

14. Did you learn anything new about apples? If so, what? Will you ever look at an apple the same way again?

*(Questions issued by publisher.)*

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#### Awards:

Librarians' Best Books of 2011 for *The Orchard*.

#### Personal Information:

Born 1954, married, children, one son, one daughter. **Addresses:** Home: St. Paul, MN. E-mail: [annefrasier@comcast.net](mailto:annefrasier@comcast.net)

#### Career Information:

Romance and mystery writer

#### Writings:

- *The Orchard* (memoir), Grand Central (New York, NY), 2011.

#### NOVELS

- *Amazon Lily*, Pocket (New York, NY), 1988.
- *Forever Man*, Silhouette (Buffalo, NY), 1988.
- *Loving Jenny*, Silhouette (Buffalo, NY), 1989.
- *Iguana Bay*, Silhouette (Buffalo, NY), 1990.
- *Pictures of Emily*, Silhouette (Buffalo, NY), 1990.
- *Forever*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Last Summer*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1992.
- *One Fine Day*, Fanfare, 1994.
- *Long Night Moon*, Fanfare, 1994.
- *American Dreamer*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Cool Shade*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Some Kind of Magic*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Bad Karma*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1999.

#### NOVELS; UNDER PSEUDONYM ANNE FRASIER

- *Hush*, Onyx (New York, NY), 2002.
- *Sleep Tight*, Onyx (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Pity Dead*, Onyx (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Before I Wake*, Penguin/Putnam (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Fate Immortal*, New American Library (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Garden of Darkness*, Onyx (New York, NY), 2007.
- (Editor) *Deadly Treats: Halloween Tales of Mystery, Magic, and Mayhem*, Nodin Press (Minneapolis, MN), 2011.

**Sidelights:**

Romance novelist Theresa Weir is known for creating heroes that do not fit the usual mold. As she told Anne Marble in an interview for the *All about Romance* Web site, her first book "was turned down again and again. I received some incredibly hostile letters--most of which I took quite personally. The recurring theme in the letters was this: 'They hated my hero.'"

Eventually her book *Amazon Lily*, featuring a hard-drinking, foul-mouthed antihero escorting a social worker into the Amazon jungle, was published and won the *RT Book Reviews* Best New Adventure Writer award. Weir has gone on to publish both romances and mysteries that stretch the supposed boundaries of these genres, including a number of books under the pen name Anne Frasier.

*Long Night Moon* features a budding romance between a sleazy tabloid journalist and a socialite. Suspecting that Sara Ivy's perfect life and marriage are not all they seem, Nash Audubon first tries to dig up dirt on her and then, frustrated, actually splices two photos together to make it appear that Sara is having an affair. Her enraged husband takes out his rage on Sara, then tries to have Nash beaten up.

Oddly enough, this leads to a budding and dangerous romance between the two, which Weir chronicles in "the compelling and lyrical writing style that has made her such a powerful author," according to *RT Book Reviews* Web site reviewer Jill M. Smith.

In *American Dreamer* Weir provides "a subtle but shattering bucolic love poem of the American heartland," in the words of a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. When Lark Leopold, a sexual assault survivor, travels to Iowa to conduct a government study on the confinement of cows, she falls for Nathan Senatra, a farmer with a strong environmentalist streak. However, Nathan has wounds of his own stemming from a nasty divorce that nearly cost him everything. Then Lark finds the body of Nathan's ex-wife floating in his pond, and the two would-be lovers are forced to confront their fears and pains, with Nathan's former brother-in-law breathing down their necks.

*Cool Shade* features an agoraphobic hero, Eddie Berlin. When Maddie Smith comes to town to investigate the disappearance of her estranged sister Enid, she discovers that Enid has become a prostitute and Eddie was one of her clients. Eventually, she infiltrates Eddie's house, and she finds herself falling for him while she tries to unravel his secrets.

A different kind of suspicion appears in *Bad Karma*. When the police chief of Egypt, Missouri, calls in psychic Cleo Tyler to help find the town's lost master key, officer Daniel Sinclair is disgusted. Sensing a con, he decides to keep a sharp eye on Cleo, who begins to have her own doubts as she senses dark secrets behind the town's pleasant facade. The result, according to Connie Ramestall in *Book Bug on the Web*, is "a character-driven story line that provides a veritable roller-coaster ride of emotion right to the very end."

Strange and otherworldly undercurrents also figure in *Some Kind of Magic*. When Claire receives a voodoo doll for her thirtieth birthday, she wishes for a more exciting life, only to find herself kidnapped by Dylan. Dylan turns out to be more of a puzzle than he seemed, and soon these two are engaged in a highly erotic and dangerous game of cat-and-mouse, with each gaining and losing control, though at times it seems the voodoo doll itself may be manipulating events.

As Anne Frasier, Weir has also written a number of mysteries featuring dark and frightening themes. Though these mysteries are filled with brutal and sadistic murderers, *Hush* features one of the worst.

According to a *Publishers Weekly* contributor, "few serial killers penned by suspense writers today are as warped or as fully realized as the Madonna Murderer," who preys on baby boys and their unwed mothers. One victim, Ivy Dunlap, survives these attacks, although her son does not, and eventually Ivy becomes a criminal psychologist. When the killer reemerges after a sixteen-year hiatus, Dunlap teams up with Detective Max Irving to finally bring him to justice.

*Sleep Tight* centers on a serial killer in search of the perfect woman who plucks out the eyes of his victims. Again, the killer is truly horrible and much of the detail is particularly graphic, but Frasier goes even further in *Play Dead*, which features necrophilia and zombification in Savannah, Georgia. As a reviewer put it in *Publishers Weekly*, Frasier "has perfected the art of making a reader's skin crawl."

Weir's next mystery, *Pale Immortal* was also written as Anne Frasier. The novel's namesake, the Pale Immortal, was a serial killer who haunted the town of Tuonela, Wisconsin one hundred years ago. Now, when the corpse of a young girl is discovered on the side of the road, the locals suspect he has risen from the dead to kill again.

Reviewing the work on the *SpineTingler* Web site, contributor Sandra Rutlan lauded: "*Pale Immortal* is the kind that lingers. The characters are rich, complex. The story is masterfully spun. The deeper issues at play in the book resonate. It seems a bit early for predictions, but I'm betting this book will be on my top ten reads of 2008." Martina Bexis, a contributor to the *BookLoons* Web site, observed, "*Pale Immortal* is one of those nifty, page-turning thrillers that keeps you reading non-stop till you turn the last page. And Anne Frasier is a writer talented at creating vividly fractured characters and a dark, disturbing atmosphere and theme. As she's done so well in previous books, she sets the tone for menace and fear."

In Weir's memoir, *The Orchard*, she recounts her marriage to an apple farmer, Adrian Curtis. To Weir's unpleasant surprise, life with Adrian on his family's farm was nothing like what she expected it to be. Not only were his in-laws hostile to her, she soon discovered that they were using illegal and toxic chemicals on their farm. When asked by Pat Dennis, a contributor to the *A View from the Loft* Web site, why she chose to write a

memoir. Weir responded: "It's something I always thought I would do; it was just a matter of when and how. Fiction writing was my only means of support, so I had to figure out a way to live while writing a memoir. My strategy was to sell my house in Saint Paul and live off the proceeds of that sale while I wrote. That's what I did."

Reviewing the work in *USA Today*, contributor Craig Wilson wrote: "The memoir is so beautifully written the reader's often swept along, despite a tale that is so gloomy you might want to begin drinking before noon. Lonely farm life. Small-minded people. Crazy mother." *Toronto Globe and Mail* contributor Kathleen Byrne described the work as a "small, unquiet book that reverberates queerly, like a slow-release bomb." Byrne also asserted: "*The Orchard* is being hailed, perhaps inevitably, as on par with Rachel Carson's 1962 classic *Silent Spring*. It isn't. ... But you might think of this as a complement to it, the personal story that drives home the truth behind the numbing mass of statistics that Carson so awfully wields." *Booklist* contributor Carol Haggas remarked: "Weir's own story is as harrowing as they come, yet filled with an uncanny self-awareness." *Maclean's* contributor Patricia Dawn Robertson described the work as a "marvelously Gothic book."

#### Related Information:

#### BOOKS

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- *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada), September 23, 2011. Kathleen Byrne, review of *The Orchard*.
- *Library Journal*, May 15, 1997. Kristin Ramsdell, review of *American Dreamer*, p. 69.
- *Maclean's*, October 3, 2011. Patricia Dawn Robertson, review of *The Orchard*, p. 69.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 20, 1993. review of *Amazon Lily*, p. 52; August 2, 1999. review of *American Dreamer*, p. 72; April 15, 2002. review of *Hush*, p. 47; March 17, 2003. review of *Sleep Tight*, p. 60; May 17, 2004. review of *Play Dead*, p. 39; August 8, 2011. review of *The Orchard*, p. 37; August 22, 2011. "Deadly Treats," p. 50.
- *Rambles*, October 14, 2004. Virginia Macisaac, review of *Play Dead*.
- *Star Tribune*, October 12, 2011. Kathryn Lang, review of *The Orchard*, p. 1E.
- *USA Today*, September 18, 2011. Craig Wilson, review of *The Orchard*.

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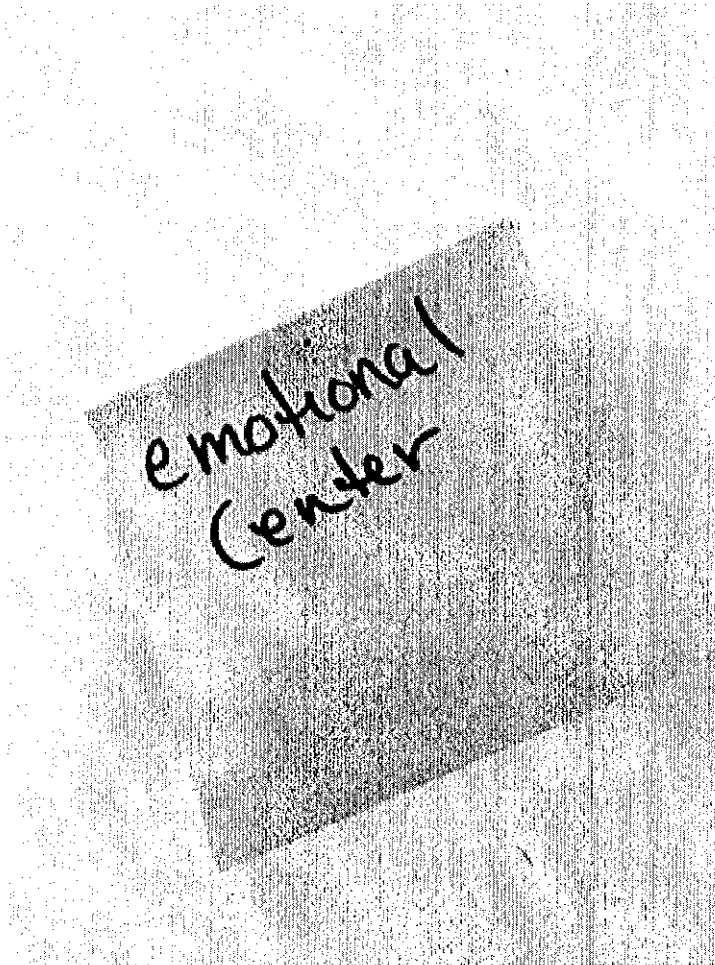
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