

Katie's Journey to Love

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Chapter One

Katie Raber awoke well before dawn in the stillness of the old Amish farmhouse. Something seemed wrong. . . unfamiliar. Where was she? The question raced through her mind. The familiar shape of her upstairs bedroom was gone. Where the dresser should have been there was a window, and where the dark outline of the dresser was there used to be a closet door. She sat up in bed, listening as a door banged downstairs. The sound was soon followed by the muffled voices of people stirring below. There was also a soft clatter of dishes being moved and *Mamm's* voice being overlaid with the deeper tones of a man.

Katie lay back in bed and smiled. Of course! *Mamm* had married Jesse Mast last week. The wedding had been held at Bishop Jonas Miller's place, with all the relatives and friends gathered for the great day. In the evening, the community youth had sung old hymns until after nine o'clock.

Today was the Friday after Thanksgiving, and the whole family was together for the first time since the wedding. They had given *Mamm* and Jesse some time alone, including Thanksgiving Day.

The newlyweds hadn't gone off on some honeymoon like an *Englisha* couple would, so they were entitled to extra consideration—what with children from both sides of the families joining the new union and with a farm to take care of. Katie had also taken the week off from work at Byler's Store and had spent Thanksgiving Day with her Mennonite friend Margaret.

Mabel, Jesse's oldest daughter, had thrown a royal fit about being bossed around by *Mamm* last night when they'd all arrived after supper. And all *Mamm* had said was "It's time for bed, children." But thankfully Mabel had eventually calmed down. She'd been a wild card ever since *Mamm* had accepted Jesse's offer of marriage. At first Mabel had refused to even consider *Mamm* as her new *mamm*. It wasn't until *Mamm* was well into her engagement with Jesse before the feelings between *Mamm* and Mabel thawed out even a little. And even then Mabel gave in only after her *daett* brought great pressure to bear on her.

Katie took several deep breaths. The feelings of hope and joy that had been rushing over her at the memory of *Mamm* and Jesse saying their vows were fast disappearing. She really had to stop letting thoughts of Mabel's bad attitude affect her this way. After all, this should be a *wunderbah* new beginning for all of them. For one thing, she would no longer be known as odd widow Emma Raber's daughter, the strange girl with a yet stranger *mamm*. The wedding would surely change all of that.

Certainly Jesse and *Mamm* were persuaded things would turn out well for all of them. The past was behind them. Even *Mamm's* past that had caused her to be thought strange by the Amish community—all because of that crush she'd once had on Daniel Kauffman, the most popular boy around when she'd been a teenager. *Mamm* had held on to her foolish hope that Daniel would return her affections right up to the moment he said his vows with Miriam Esh. *Mamm* had dashed out of the services

and drove her buggy right past the couple and the astonished eyes of the bishop himself. She'd never lived down that action or gotten over the bitterness of the memory of Daniel.

Mamm had frozen her heart. In fact, she'd married Ezra without expecting she would ever again feel love for a man. When her heart had opened to Ezra after their daughter's birth, it was made all the worse when he'd died suddenly. His early death had driven *Mamm* back into her shell. That Jesse Mast had been able to break through was a miracle indeed.

Now the joy was coming back. Katie belonged in this family—Jesse's five children and her. *Yah*, it was still a little unfamiliar, just like the room she hadn't recognized this morning. But she was here, and she was part of this family now. True, it didn't seem quite right that she should have this room that had been Mabel's. But Jesse had insisted. Katie was the eldest, so she deserved her own room. Katie dared not look at Mabel when he'd made that announcement.

At the wedding, everything had seemed to fall into place. There had been great love flowing from everybody. *Mamm's* brothers from Lancaster had all taken time to speak with their niece, and they wished her well in her new life. "You're a Mast now," they'd teased, even though she really wasn't. She was still a Raber. *Mamm* marrying Jesse wouldn't change that. Only her own marriage would change her name.

That thought turned her mind to the dashing Ben Stoll, the boy she had her heart set on. He hadn't paid her any attention at the wedding. He'd taken Tina Hochstetler to the table at the evening hymn singing. Katie had been left with no choice but to sit with her young cousin James, who lived in Lancaster. At sixteen, he was too scared to take a strange girl to the table. She mustn't think about Ben now, Katie told herself. There were other boys in the world besides him, even though her heart would never be quite

convinced of that. Maybe she could get over her crush on him if she tried hard enough. *Mamm* had found love beyond Daniel Kauffman, had she not?

Right now what she could be thankful for was that all of Jesse's children—except Mabel—had accepted *Mamm* and her with open arms. The change had been slow at times. Mabel hadn't been the only one of Jesse's children unwilling at first to accept the idea of a new *mamm* keeping house for them. But they had eventually come around. And Mabel had also—sort of—after she'd been told by her *daett* to straighten out her attitude and accept Emma as her *mamm*.

Well, even if Mabel made trouble for her, Katie was still much better off than she had been before. She now knew what it felt like to be included in the Amish community and spoken to as if she were a normal human being. Of course, it hadn't been just the wedding that had accomplished that. It had really started when she accepted an invitation to a Mennonite youth gathering. There she'd become friends with girls like Margaret Kargel and Sharon Watson. Both girls had come to *Mamm's* wedding at her special invitation. They were the only Mennonites there besides Esther Kuntz, who worked at Byler's Store with Katie.

Neither Jesse nor *Mamm* had any Mennonites in their immediate family. All the brothers and sisters on both sides of their families were Amish. That had made Katie's relationship with the Mennonite girls a troublesome matter for *Mamm*. Jesse too seemed a bit concerned about it, though not as great as *Mamm*.

She would continue to leave that matter in *Da Hab's* hands, Katie decided. Much *gut* had come out of her friendships with Margaret and Sharon. And *Da Hab* had blessed them in spite of *Mamm's* fears. How that all made sense, Katie still didn't know. And she might never know. It was enough that both *Mamm* and

she were finding their way out of a life lived alone with closed-off hearts.

Back in the “old” days, *Mamm* had forbidden Katie from participating in the usual *rumspringa* the rest of the Amish young people in the community took part in. But to *Mamm*, *rumspringa* was a mild offense compared to attending Mennonite youth gatherings. But Katie had continued to go to them. She sighed and threw off the bedcovers. She knew Jesse and *Mamm* wanted her to stop attending, but she would have to see. *Da Hab* had been with her so far, and she would keep believing He would be in the future. It was true that living with Jesse and his family was going to be a great joy in its own right. Jesse had told her before *Mamm*'s wedding, “I love you, Katie. Just as much as I love Mabel and Carolyn or any of my boys. You'll be living at my house as my own daughter.”

She was so thankful for that, and she appreciated the man from the bottom of her heart. That wasn't something a person just walked away from. She now had the chance to grow up for a few years with a *daett* who cared about her. There might now be less reason for her to attend the Mennonite youth gatherings, though she would always keep up her friendships with Margaret and Sharon.

Katie walked over to the unfamiliar dresser. She opened the top drawer and ran her hands around the front edge. She found the matches and lit the kerosene lamp. The flickering flame had just caught when Jesse hollered up the stairs, “Time to get up, boys!”

Katie smiled at the sound. *Mamm* sometimes yelled up the stairs at home, but she'd never heard a man yell the morning wake-up call. It sounded *gut*. She pulled on her work dress as footsteps rushed past her bedroom door. She finished putting in the last pin and took the lamp with her as she stepped into the hallway. The light played on the walls as she found her way downstairs. No one

was in the living room, so Katie peeked into the kitchen. *Mamm* had her back turned toward her as she worked over the stove.

“You should have called for me,” Katie told her.

Mamm turned around with a smile on her face. “*Gut* morning, Katie.”

“*Gut* morning to you.” Katie set the lamp on the kitchen table. “May I help with breakfast?”

A look of uncertainty replaced *Mamm*’s smile. “Perhaps we’d better wait until Mabel comes down before we get too far along. I don’t want to take over her kitchen on the first morning she’s here. Not without talking with her about it first.”

Katie sat on a kitchen chair. This was an unexpected turn of events, although she really shouldn’t be surprised now that she thought about it. *Mamm* had always been in charge at home, but now she was in another person’s kitchen—Mabel’s kitchen. “But you’re Jesse’s wife,” Katie protested. Everything has changed, she wanted to add, but she didn’t. *Mamm* looked troubled enough without adding undue pressure, and obviously everything hadn’t changed yet. There still would be bumps in the road. She could handle it.

Mamm was trying to smile. “*Yah*, I know. It takes some getting used to.”

“You should call Mabel,” Katie said. “She shouldn’t sleep in on the first morning we’re all together.”

Mamm lifted her head from the stove, seeming to ponder the suggestion for a moment. Then she went to the bottom of the stairs.

Yell loudly! Katie wanted to say. Wake the girl up!

“Mabel!” *Mamm* called up the stairs, her voice gentle.

Long moments passed, and *Mamm* looked ready to call again when the sound of a door opening came from upstairs.

“What do you want?” Mabel’s voice sounded irritated.

"I need your help in the kitchen," *Mamm* said.

The door closed upstairs without an answer.

Katie watched *Mamm's* face as she turned back and went to the stove.

Mamm glanced at Katie. "Perhaps you shouldn't be in here when Mabel comes down."

Katie looked away. Had she heard correctly? *Mamm* didn't want her in the kitchen? *Mamm* must have seen the look on Katie's face because she came over and gave Katie a quick hug. "It's not what you think, Katie. I'm not rejecting you. It's just that we must think about the larger picture right now. Mabel is used to running the household, and we need to give her an opportunity to adjust. It might be difficult enough for her with just me in here. And she might think ill of us if she finds you here too, both of us working in her kitchen. Especially because we didn't take the time to call her before we started breakfast."

Katie kept her eyes on the floor. What in the world was she supposed to do now? The pain was throbbing something awful in her heart. She'd never been told to leave the kitchen at home.

"Come on, Katie," *Mamm* whispered. "We need to think about how Mabel will see things. If we're both here, it will look like we've taken over."

"Where am I supposed to go? What am I supposed to do?" Katie got to her feet.

Mamm looked around but didn't offer a suggestion.

"I'll slip outside for a bit," Katie finally said, opening the wash-room door. Already she could hear Mabel's quick footsteps coming down the stairs. Katie walked past the faint outline of the wash-basin and towel in the darkness, and then she stepped outside. She stood on the porch with her arms folded and looked up at the splash of stars still visible in the heavens. Toward the east, dawn was breaking, the light still hidden in part by the corner of the

house. In the other direction, the barn windows were lit with the glow of gas lanterns as Jesse and his boys worked on their chores. Katie looked at the soft light spreading across the dark lawn for a long time as tears stung her eyes.

Not that long ago she would have been out in the barn with *Mamm* doing the few chores they had at their place. Their two cows, Molly and Bossy, had been brought over and would be milked along with Jesse's herd. She wouldn't be going to the barn again for chores anytime soon. Jesse and his boys would take care of the farm jobs. So much had changed, Katie thought. And so quickly. She hugged herself tightly as she heard faint sounds of laughter coming from inside the house. That was *Mamm's* voice laughing with Mabel. They were hitting it off big, apparently. Katie felt shut out. How could this be happening with all the hope that had filled her heart only moments ago? Surely *Mamm* hadn't planned on sending her out of the kitchen on the first day they were all here after the wedding. Katie told herself she needed to think the best possible thoughts right now or she was going to burst into tears and totally embarrass herself when she did go back inside.

Was all this part of *Da Hab's* way? No doubt He was continuing to lead her on paths she was unfamiliar with. Instead of being bitter, she should be thankful that *Mamm* was adjusting so well in her new role as Jesse's wife and as *mamm* to his five children—especially Mabel. Wasn't Mabel the hard case? Any progress in that area was all the more reason to give thanks. In the end, Katie decided, she would fit in somewhere. *Mamm* wouldn't forget her own daughter.

One thing was for sure. *Mamm* and she would never slip back into what they used to be. That was in the past—and would remain so. No more feelings of being passed over by everyone or going unnoticed in Amish youth gatherings. Some of that would

still happen, but she now had her wonderful memories of the evenings spent with the Mennonite youth to counter the aloneness. Margaret and Sharon had accepted her so quickly, and she'd met many others who were friendly too. Even the Mennonite boys who played beside her at the volleyball games—young men she'd never met before—had taken the time to say a few words of greeting and inquire how she was doing. They were all nice people who had welcomed her into their homes and hearts.

She had them to go back to in addition to whatever new blessings *Da Hab* had waiting for her with her new, expanded family. Mabel was the thorn with the rose, but Katie didn't wish to destroy the flower because of the pain that stung her hand. *Nee*, she would not. She took deep breaths of the cool morning air and gathered her courage to return inside.



Chapter Two

Thirty minutes later, Katie was on the way down from upstairs, taking firm steps, making sure each one creaked if possible. She'd sneaked up through the living room once she came in from outside through the front door. *Mamm* and Mabel had been talking in the kitchen, laughing as she'd tiptoed past the doorway. Sneaking up had seemed like the decent thing to do. She couldn't possibly have gone out to the barn with Jesse and his boys out there. That would have raised eyebrows. And barging back into the kitchen would have raised questions with Mabel she didn't wish to answer. *Yah*, I'm feeling hurt, Katie admitted. But I'm trying hard to do my part in this family, which included not provoking Mabel.

Only moments ago she'd heard Jesse and his boys come in from their chores and bang around in the washroom as they cleaned up. No one had called her, but how could they since even *Mamm* didn't know where she'd gone. Katie was content to let it appear to Mabel and the others that she'd overslept.

Mamm's face showed relief when Katie walked into the kitchen. "Gut morning," Mabel said, all smiles.

“*Gut* morning,” Katie replied.

Mabel was carrying a plate of eggs to the table, and she’d obviously been frying bacon. Mabel looked quite pleased, so *Mamm*’s decision about the morning routine must have had the desired effect. “Is there anything I can do to help?” Katie asked.

“I think we’re almost done,” Mabel said, managing a smile. “Maybe you can set the last of the table. *Daett* and the boys are almost inside.”

I know that, Katie wanted to say. Their loud chatter in the washroom was obvious. Mabel was treating her like a small child, offering her the lowest of tasks, one worthy of her youngest sister, Carolyn—not a soon-to-be-twenty young woman. But Katie kept smiling as she took the dishes to the table, thinking how much worse things could be this morning. Mabel’s red-faced outbursts before the wedding had been common occurrences. Even for a sixteen-year-old she hadn’t been afraid to make a spectacle of herself once her *daett* had chosen *Mamm* over the children’s choice of teacher Ruth Troyer.

The washroom door burst open, and Mabel’s two oldest brothers, Leroy and Willis, spilled in. They were soon followed by Jesse. Leroy and Willis stopped short at the sight of Katie and *Mamm*, as if they hadn’t been expecting them. *Yah*, this would definitely take some getting used to by everybody.

“*Gut* morning to everyone!” Jesse exclaimed over the silence of his sons. “What a sight for sore eyes you women are. Isn’t this wonderful? I can’t say how blessed we are that Emma and Katie have come to live with us. Have a seat boys, and stop staring like you’ve never seen women before.”

Leroy and Willis grunted and took their seats on the back bench. The two boys hadn’t been staring at *Mamm*, Katie thought. They’d been staring at her. It was the shock, no doubt, of seeing strange Emma Raber’s daughter in their house.

Katie smiled as she stood by the table, her hands clasped in front of her. She wasn't quite sure where she was supposed to sit. When no one said anything, she took a chair beside the one she assumed her *mamm* would sit in.

"Where are Carolyn and Joel?" Jesse asked, taking his seat at the front of the table.

"I'll call them!" Mabel jumped up to rush to the bottom of the stairs. She hollered up, "Carolyn, Joel!"

When there was only silence, Mabel took off up the stairs.

"How's Mabel doing?" Jesse asked *Mamm* when his daughter's footsteps had faded.

"Okay," *Mamm* said, taking the seat beside Jesse. She reached over and touched his arm.

Across the table, Leroy quickly stared up at the ceiling. A smile crept across Willis's face.

Mamm noticed and turned bright red as she pulled her hand away from Jesse's arm.

Jesse, taking it all in, laughed and took Emma's hand in his.

"Now, boys, this is your new *mamm*," Jesse said, his eyes twinkling. "Get used to it."

There was no doubt that Jesse was working to make *Mamm* feel comfortable. Katie allowed a smile to creep over her face.

Soon *Mamm* joined in the shared laughter. She leaned toward Jesse as footsteps came down the stairs. Mabel appeared, leading six-year-old Joel by the hand with Carolyn following close behind.

Katie held her breath. Would Mabel object to this open display of affection between *Mamm* and Jesse? Would all of *Mamm*'s careful work this morning be lost in seconds? Perhaps Mabel would see something in her *daett*'s actions to remind her of her lost *mamm*. Might this open wounds that hadn't yet healed?

Mabel paused for a moment as she took in *Mamm* and Jesse's postures. She grimaced but then glanced away. Without further

ado, she helped Joel into his chair, where he sat and rubbed his eyes. Carolyn took her place, smiling at *Mamm* and Jesse.

Jesse beamed back at Carolyn but he addressed all of them. “Do you think we should pray before the food gets cold?”

“*Yah*, let’s do,” Mabel spoke up. She had folded her hands in her lap like she didn’t quite know what to do with them. Jesse gave Mabel only the briefest of glances before they all bowed their heads.

“Dear *Gott im himmel*,” Jesse prayed, “You who made the heavens and the earth and all that is within them, look down again upon us this morning in mercy. We give You thanks for Your many and great blessings You have given to us all. You have brought joy and laughter back into our home. You have again allowed love to grow in my heart for Emma. You have not allowed either of us to stay in our former state of sorrow. Rather, You have given us new life again. For this we cannot give You sufficient thanks. Have mercy again today on our trespasses, and forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us.”

Katie stole a look at *Mamm*’s face. It carried a touch of red, which made sense. She too would be sending off flames of red if such words of thanksgiving and praise were being offered on her behalf. The years of living alone hadn’t been kind to *Mamm*. They had been long and lonely, full of suffering. Now the tide had turned and this was her time of miracles. *Mamm* hadn’t been sure that she was in love with Jesse before the wedding, but that had also been the case with Ezra, Katie’s *daett*, too. And just like with Ezra, Katie had no doubt that her *mamm*’s feelings for Jesse would match the love she had for *Daett*. With a man like Jesse, *Mamm* wouldn’t be able to help herself. Katie bowed her head again.

“...now be with us today, O great and holy Father,” Jesse said.

“Continue to bless us and to bestow Your grace upon our lives. In the name of Your dear Son, Jesus. Amen.”

They all raised their heads, and Leroy made a dive for the plate of eggs. Mabel slapped his hand, and he dropped the plate with a clatter, causing several eggs to slide off the platter onto the table.

“Enough of this,” Jesse corrected sternly. “You’re behaving like savages after such a *gut* start this morning.”

“He’s only being his usual self,” Mabel stated.

“Pick up the eggs from the table,” Jesse ordered Leroy. “And those will be yours. Next time be more careful. I’ve had enough of this.”

Leroy groaned but gathered up the eggs one by one and slipped them onto his plate.

Jesse turned to Emma with an apologetic grin. “I’m sorry about my children’s behavior. I guess you see why they need a *mamm* around.”

“I understand,” *Mamm* said quickly. “It’s okay.”

Jesse patted her on the arm. “Now, don’t be too easy on them. They’re also in your charge now, and they are to listen to you.” Jesse turned toward his children. “Did you hear that?” he asked.

They all nodded, including Mabel. She appeared subdued for a moment, and then she passed the bacon around. Breakfast settled down into a family routine. *Mamm* joined in where she could, but Mabel clearly was running things.

Katie watched to see what *Mamm* would do. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed Jesse was doing the same. When the plate of eggs came around to little Joel, Mabel reached out to help him.

Mamm said, “I’ll help him.”

Mabel blinked a few times and glanced at her *daett*. When Jesse nodded, Mabel backed down. She attempted a smile and said, “Of course. I’m so used to doing everything.”

“*Yah*, I understand.” *Mamm* smiled at Mabel. “How many eggs does Joel usually eat?”

“Two!” Joel announced.

After Mabel nodded, *Mamm* pulled two eggs off the serving plate and put them onto Joel’s.

Mabel looked so pleased *Mamm* had consulted her that Katie thought she would burst. But this is a *gut* thing, she reminded herself. She must not become bitter over *Mamm* and Mabel developing a good relationship.

When they were finished eating, Jesse bowed his head in silent prayer before standing to lead the way into the living room for morning devotions.

Mamm seemed to notice Katie for the first time since breakfast had begun. A troubled look crossed her face. As they both stood, *Mamm* reached over to squeeze Katie’s elbow as they walked together into the living room.

Katie whispered, “It’s okay, *Mamm*. I understand.”

Mamm’s face relaxed, and by the time she sat down on the hickory rocker beside Jesse, she was smiling again. Katie listened to Jesse read the morning scripture, a section out of Psalm 147: “Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God...”

That was so true, Katie thought. She was glad *Da Hab* had brought them so much joy.

“...he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart.”

Kate thought again how glad she was to finally have a *daett*. She was happy *Da Hab* was healing their hearts, and she was pleased He had given her a small part in it. Hopefully they would become a strong, loving family. No matter what, she would trust in *Da Hab* to lead the way.