

## Praise for *A Daughter's Choice*

“A Plain woman who doesn’t know her place’—that’s how Henrietta Miller describes herself. Her devotion to animals means she doesn’t quite fit with expectations, especially in the eyes of her bishop father. When Nicholas Byler, a veterinary assistant with opinions as strong as Hen’s, arrives in town, their spirited clashes kindle a connection neither expects. With warmth and insight, Kelly Irvin delivers a quietly powerful tale of love, identity, and finding where one’s heart truly belongs.”

—Suzanne Woods Fisher, bestselling author of *A Healing Touch*

“Henrietta Miller had my heart the minute she refused to let a man boss her around. Now that is a woman I can identify with! In *A Daughter's Choice*, Kelly Irvin tugs the reader into a conservative Amish community, and then drops an opinionated heroine with a steel backbone right in the middle of it all. You will fall in love with all of these characters, especially Hen! Irvin is a master storyteller, and this is a story you won’t want to miss.”

—Patricia Johns, *Publishers Weekly* bestselling author



THE HEART *of* THE AMISH

# A Daughter's Choice

KELLY IRVIN



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Printed in the United States of America.

*To my little animal lovers Brooklyn, Carson,  
Henry, and Stanton, love always.*

GRANDMA



# GLOSSARY OF PENNSYLVANIA DEUTSCH\*

*aamen*: amen

*ach*: oh

*aenti*: aunt

*bopli, boplin*: baby, babies

*bruder, brieder*: brother, brothers

*bu, buwe*: boy, boys

*daadi*: grandpa

*daed*: father

*dat*: dad

*dawdi haus*: attached home for parents when they retire

*denki*: thank you

*dochder, dechder*: daughter, daughters

*dumkoph*: blockhead

*eck*: corner table where newly married couple sits during wedding reception

*Englischer*: English or non-Amish person

*eppy*: cookie

*fraa*: wife

*gaul*: horse

*gelassenheit*: a German word, yielding fully to God's will and forsaking all selfishness

*gern gschehme*: you're welcome

*Gmay*: church district

*Gott*: God

*groossmammi*: grandmother

*guder daag*: good day

*guder mariye*: good morning

*guder nammidaad*: good afternoon

*guder nacht*: good night

*gut*: good

*hallo*: hello

*hochmut*: pride

*hund*: dog

*Ich bin gut*: I'm good

*jab*: yes

*kaffi*: coffee

*kapp*: prayer cap or head covering worn by Amish women

*kind, kinner*: child, children

*kinnskind, kinnskinner*: grandchild, grandchildren

*kossins*: cousins

*lieb*: love

*maedel, maed*: girl, girls

*mamm*: mom

*mammi*: grandma

*mann*: husband

*mei naame iss*: my name is

*meidung*: also called shunning or the ban. Community members avoid contact with an individual found to have committed a serious infraction of their district's rules.

*mudder*: mother

*narrisch*: foolish, crazy

*nee*: no

*neis*: niece

*onkel*: uncle

*Ordnung*: written and unwritten rules in an Amish district

*rumspringa*: period of “running around” for Amish youth before they decide whether they want to be baptized into the Amish faith and seek a mate

*schee dich zu dreff*: it's nice to meet you

*schtumm*: stupid

*schweschder, schweschdre*: sister, sisters

*sei so gut*: please (be so kind)

*sub*: son

*wie bischt?*: how are you?

*wunderbarr*: wonderful

\*The German dialect commonly referred to as Pennsylvania Dutch is not a written language and varies depending on the location and origin of the Amish settlement. These spellings are approximations. Most Amish children learn English after they start school. They also learn high German, which is used in their Sunday services.

# CHAPTER 1



Raising goats and raising children didn't seem all that different. Not that Henrietta Miller had any children of her own. Yet.

"Stop that, Petunia." Henrietta nudged the baby goat—aptly called a kid—away from her voluminous skirt. Too little too late. Hay, dirt, and goat hair decorated her apron, even though the sun had just kissed the April morning sky. Hen's younger sister Ruby would *tsk* over the frying bacon at breakfast. Her dad would scowl over his first cup of coffee. No matter. "Behave yourself. No amount of cute will get you fed first, my sweet."

The kid was used to getting her way. After all, Hen had been bottle-feeding her since it became apparent that her mother didn't have enough milk for Petunia and her twin, Penny. Her big chocolate eyes full of hope, she led the small herd in an enthusiastic chorus of squeaky bleats. All the kids jumped, skipped, hopped, and tumbled to their own music. Their antics were a comedy routine that never failed to make Hen laugh.

Even the manure smelled like perfume on this fine day in southwest Pennsylvania. The dairy goat herd was healthy and happy. Hen's family had plenty of milk to sell and for making cheese, yogurt, caramel candies, and Hen's favorite—goat milk fudge. And soap, of course. The tourists loved the goat milk soap. "I know, I know. I'm hurrying, you sweet beasties, I'm hurrying. I'll be back in a jiffy, I promise."

She closed the pen, latched it, dodged Tigger, a tiger-striped kitten that insisted on being underfoot anytime a sip of milk was remotely possible, and zipped across the grass to the large shed where she kept the does. Immediately Sam, the rooster, took the kitten's place. His *cock-a-doodle-doo* could wake the dead in the next state. "Come on, Sam, I know this is

your territory. I promise not to steal it.”

His response? To crow again. “Seriously? Move it, chatterbox. Go find Sassy.” Sassy was the matron and top egg layer in the chicken coop. She’d put Sam in his place. “I’ve got work to do.”

Sam deigned to trot from her path, only to take up his march behind her. He was the king of the yard—in his mind.

Feeling like the animal pied piper, Hen picked up her pace. She was behind this morning. She still needed to milk the mama goats, clip their hooves, and shave their udders. Then they could be returned to their kids after a night apart. That allowed Hen to gather a nice haul of milk and the kids to drink their fill during the day.

“Hen, Hen, come quick!”

Hen glanced up from unhooking the shed door’s latch. Her sister Philomena—who knew why their parents had given such a tiny girl such an enormous name?—dashed across the yard toward her. Yellow-Belly-Buster, the dog they shared, ran circles around her. “I have to milk the mamas. You’ll have to wait. While you’re waiting, run get your coat. It’s April, not July.”

The five-year-old was always in too big a hurry for coats. At least she had shoes on. Spring in Pennsylvania meant they could still see their breath and find ice on the water tanks at dawn. Mena always wanted Hen to do everything in a hurry. Catch night crawlers. Feed frogs at the pond. Get her a cookie. Climb a tree. *Now* was never soon enough.

“It’s not that cold. Jack’s worse.” Philomena scooped up Tigger and plopped him on her skinny shoulders. “He’s still not eating. *Dat* called the vet.”

Philomena was a mini Hen. She insisted on caring for the animals—much to their brothers’ chagrin. They claimed the little girl was mostly in the way. Hen had more patience. “We probably need to adjust his diet. He’s getting old—even for a Morgan. I’ve been reading up on it.”

“What if he’s got bad colic?” Philomena’s lower lip trembled. Her blue eyes were teary behind the thick lenses of her brown-rimmed glasses. “Or what if it’s Cushing’s disease?”

“Don’t borrow trouble, *lieb*. Jack’s digestion doesn’t work as *gut* as it used to. We just need to give him some extra lovin’.” Hen strode across the yard double-time. She squeezed the tiny tornado of a child in a big hug.

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Their elderly horse was well into his early thirties—a nice long life for a Morgan—a breed prized for their longevity. Which was good, because he was a member of the family. The older Miller children had learned to drive a buggy with Jack in the lead. The twins still needed their turn, as well as Mena, who would be the last. “We’ll get him fixed up.”

Jack’s troubled neigh greeted Hen as soon she entered the barn. Their mare Lucy whinnied in response. She was expecting and getting close to foaling, so Dad had started bringing her into the barn at night to protect her from the cold and allow him to keep an eye on her better. Jack’s predicament probably stressed her too.

Philomena, Buster, and Tigger, who’d decided he preferred walking, trailed behind Hen. Sam chose to stay outside. He didn’t care for the barn. Which was good. The horses didn’t need his incessant crowing and preening.

Jack didn’t look happy at Hen’s approach. This was a huge red flag. Hen adored Jack, and he adored her. “Come on, buddy, it’s me. Your best bud.”

He shook his head and stomped his feet.

“I get it. You don’t feel gut. You’re grumpy. You’ll be fine, I promise.”

“I hope you’re right.”

Dad didn’t sound particularly happy either. He stood in Jack’s stall, his hand smoothing the Morgan’s withers as he murmured in the horse’s ear. Jack had his head lowered. He didn’t raise it as Hen and her entourage moved closer. His normally shiny bay coat had turned dull. His supper of fresh hay from the previous evening lay uneaten, and his water bucket was still full.

“Mena says he’s worse.” Hen opened the stall door. Ignoring the disappointed woofs and meows, she allowed only Mena to follow before she closed it again. “He hasn’t pooped in two days.”

“I’m aware.” Concern deepened the lines around Dad’s brown eyes behind smudged wire-rimmed glasses that had slid down his nose. “I hear rumblings in his intestines. I reckon he has gas pains he can’t pass.”

“I can walk him.” Mena thrust herself between Hen and their father. “Jack likes me. He’ll walk for me.”

“You’re supposed to be helping your *schweschder* make breakfast.” His expression flared with a combination of frustration and resignation. He sighed. “Go, now. After breakfast, you’ll help her with the dishes, mop the floor, and sew your new dresses. The one you have on is too short.”

“Dat—”

“Don’t backtalk me, *kind*.”

“But—”

“Mena, do as Dat says.” Hen placed her hands on the girl’s skinny shoulders and propelled her toward the stall door. “Save me a piece of toast and some apple preserves, *sei so gut*.”

Her face filled with disappointment, Mena trudged through the open door and out of the barn.

“I’ve told you before you don’t want to be a bad influence on her, Henrietta.” Dad was the only one who called Hen by her full name. He smoothed both hands across the stallion’s back. The horse dipped his head and nickered. “It’s bad enough that you ignore your household chores. Don’t encourage Philomena to do the same.”

*Here we go.* In other words, he didn’t want Mena to grow up unsuitable to be a Plain wife. The right man would come along for Hen. She was sure of it. God had a plan. At least that’s what Dad had said in the endless number of messages he delivered in church since drawing the lot to become bishop of their Smicksburg north church district. God had a plan for everyone.

Which meant God’s plan had included Mom’s death from an allergic reaction to an antibiotic given to her for a urinary tract infection compounded by the flu. Philomena had only been two years old. Too young to even remember her mother.

No one died from a UTI. What kind of plan was that?

The question pestered Hen nightly when she curled up in bed with Buster at her feet and Tigger nestled on her pillow, but she’d never had the guts to pose it to her father.

“Are you listening to me, *Dochder*?”

“*Jah*, Dat.”

“Ruby and her special friend will no doubt marry soon. That will leave you in charge of the house until . . .”

His uncertainty written all over his prematurely lined face, Dad faced Hen. His thoughts were so obvious they stung like a horde of wasps. He didn’t believe Hen would ever marry. Her sister, younger by two years, would marry first. It happened. The oldest didn’t always find a mate first.

“I’ll marry one day.”

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"Can you see yourself?" Dad waved his hands at her. "Dirt on your face and your apron. Goat manure on the hem of your dress." He sniffed. "It's barely dawn, and you already stink. Do you even know how to darn a sock?"

"Of course I do. *Mamm* taught me." Hen froze. She took a big chance bringing up her mother. Even after three years, Dad tended to roll up tighter than a roly-poly bug when she or her siblings mentioned Mom. As if they could pretend she hadn't gone from their lives far too soon. Mom had taught Hen to do everything a woman needed to know. And then some. The *then some* didn't cancel out her womanliness. "The goat herd brings in gut money that helps us feed and clothe our family."

Dad's Adam's apple bobbed. A second or two passed as if he considered his response. Would his lips move with the word *mamm*? "The fact that your *mamm* isn't with us anymore isn't an excuse for letting yourself go. Neither is your goat herd an excuse for turning yourself into a tomboy. Or flaunting your opinion in front of your elders."

At least he uttered the word *mamm*. But that wasn't the real bone Dad wanted to pick with Hen today. He was upset because of her impromptu speech urging the expansion to a secondary business with Angora goats. She'd interrupted Dad while he sat at a picnic table with the other men after church Sunday discussing new ways to earn income as farms became less profitable. Instead of serving the sandwiches and walking away, she'd waxed enthusiastically about opening new doors to new products, like wool and yarn. Her cheeks warmed. His scowl was engraved on her brain. Not just discomfort but embarrassment. "I'm sorry, Dat."

"But not sorry enough to curb your tongue or mend your ways. You're twenty-two. When was the last time you went to a singing?"

Hen searched her memory. It hadn't been that long. Had it? What was the point? Goofy sixteen-year-old boys acting silly, trying to impress girls who were hopping around like popcorn seeds in oil in a hot cast-iron pan worrying about which boys would give them buggy rides home. Hen could drive her own buggy, thank you very much. "It's been a month or two."

"Lying is a sin."

"I mean a year or two."

"Or three."

"Let me take Jack for a walk. He needs to pass some of that gas. It may be all he needs to feel better."

“Your schwescheder is going to help out at the school now that the teacher’s assistant has married.” Dad handed her the halter. “You’ll need to take over in the house starting on Monday.”

A daughter didn’t contradict her father. Hen swallowed angry words. “But the goats need me.”

“Your *brieder* will take care of them. They’re livestock. They won’t know the difference.”

That wasn’t true. Dad knew better. He was punishing her. Hen bit her tongue until she tasted salty blood. Her brothers didn’t care about the goats the way she did. They were far more interested in working with Dad training horses. “For how long?”

“Until school is out. Understood?”

The end of April. Not so long. “Jah, understood.”

Hen quickly put the halter on Jack. His ears didn’t perk up. In fact he peered at her with accusatory eyes. She patted his muzzle. He whinnied. “Come on, *bu*, let’s go.”

She led him from the stall and headed for the barn doors. He usually had her scampering to keep up. Jack preferred the great outdoors. Today she had to encourage him to keep moving.

Buster’s barking didn’t help. The dog raced toward them, his concerned woofs gaining volume. “Buster, stop it. What’s wrong with you?”

“Where are you going with that horse?”

Hen raised her hand to her forehead to shield her eyes from the sun creeping above the horizon. A young man tall enough to loom over her five-foot-eight body stood in her path. That explained the barking. “Buster, hush.” The dog halted next to Jack. His bark died until it became a low growl in his throat. “That’s enough, *hund*.”

Hen squinted at the newcomer. Chestnut hair sticking out from under his straw hat, pale complexion, gray eyes. Body hidden in a black wool coat. Definitely not someone she’d met before. “Who are you?”

“I’m the vet’s new assistant.” He stepped into the shadow cast by the barn. “Nicholas Byler. If that’s the horse Bishop Miller called Dr. McDonald about, you best get him back in his stall.”

“What do you mean? Doc’s new assistant?” Hen swallowed a deluge of angry words. She’d applied for that job. She had all the knowledge needed. She’d lived on a farm with goats, cows, pigs, chickens, dogs, cats,

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and horses her entire life. And no one loved animals more than she did. “I didn’t think he’d filled that position yet.”

“He hired me last week.” Nicholas’ forehead wrinkled. His eyebrows rose. “I started on Monday, but you don’t need to worry. I know what I’m doing. You need to take that horse back to his stall. I’ll examine him and then consult with Dr. McDonald. We’ll determine the best course of treatment.”

Doubtful. No way this stranger knew as much as Hen did. But he had one thing going for him. He was a man. That had to be it. Heat roasting Hen’s cheeks. She dismissed a surly comment on Doc McDonald’s poor judgment. “This is Jack, and he needs some exercise.” The man’s know-it-all tone coupled with his assumption she’d do whatever he said was like walking barefoot through a burr patch. “He’ll pass some gas and be right as rain.”

“You’re wrong.” Nicholas Byler didn’t move out of Hen’s way. This stranger was bossy, and he lacked manners. “The last thing he needs is vigorous exercise.”

“No one said anything about vigorous exercise. A nice walk in the corral.”

“He needs to go back in the barn so I can examine him properly.”  
A ginormous burr patch.

## CHAPTER 2



This woman apparently didn't know lima beans about caring for a geriatric horse. Nicholas Byler heaved a breath. No excuse existed for not taking proper care of animals. Neither did that give a person an excuse for being rude. She was bossy, and she lacked manners. His clenched jaw hurt. The gangly woman whose rumpled prayer cap didn't cover her brown hair was clad in a stained lilac dress and gray coat buttoned wrong. She probably didn't know any better. Not that ignorance was an excuse.

"I need to examine him before we decide if a walk is the best medicine." Nicholas forced a smile. "You don't want to make the poor thing's pain worse, do you?"

"Sei so gut, don't talk to me like I'm ignorant." The woman's dark brown eyes flashed. In a minute she'd stomp her foot. "The first time I rode Jack, I was in diapers. I've been taking care of him since I was old enough to walk."

"Then you should know to call the vet at the first sign of colic and wait for him before you decide to treat the horse yourself." Nicholas advanced toward her. He reached for the lead line. She backed up. A bit like a finicky mare that needed to be reassured. But not at all like any Plain woman Nicholas had ever met. "I'll take him back inside if you want to go get your *daed*. I assume Bishop Miller is your *dat*."

"He is." She still hadn't released the lead line. "You just said yourself you're not a vet. Where's Dr. McDonald?"

Nicholas had laughed the first time Dr. McDonald introduced himself. Which hadn't gone over well. Surely Nicholas wasn't the only one

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who found the name McDonald—as in Old McDonald had a farm—a funny, if suitable name, for a veterinarian. “He’s delivering a breach calf at the Shiracks’ farm.”

“Fine. I’ll take Jack back to his stall.” She patted the horse’s muzzle and then turned him back toward the barn. “I’m sure Dr. McDonald will come as soon as he can.”

Nicholas opened his mouth to contradict her, then closed it. A bespectacled man sporting a dark brown beard streaked with silver strode through the barn’s open doors. “You must be Nicholas.”

“I am. You’re Bishop Miller?”

“Adam.” The bishop jerked his head toward the barn. “Henrietta, we’ll let Nicholas examine the *gaul* before you walk him.”

The stubborn woman had a name. Henrietta murmured in the horse’s ear. Jack nuzzled her cheek. A person couldn’t fault her loving touch. The horse obviously adored her. That would go a long way toward his recovery.

Nicholas followed them to the barn. A quick, deep inhale of the familiar scents of hay, horses, and manure steadied his mind. A white-and-black cat halted in his path, drilled Nicholas with a fierce scowl, hissed, and shot into the last stall. A beautiful sorrel raised her head and whinnied as if to welcome him.

“Don’t mind Willow. She has a new litter of kittens she’s protecting,” Henrietta called out. “And Lucy is expecting. She’s bigger than a house and not happy about it. The other three horses are ones Dat is training for *Englischers*.”

“I see. Your daed has his hands full, then.”

She shrugged and nodded, apparently done sharing.

Nicholas didn’t need to talk to do his job. He examined Jack, took his temperature, listened to his digestive system, and asked a series of questions—most of which Adam answered after shooting a frown at his daughter, quieting her.

“How much time does he spend out to pasture?”

“If we’re not using him for the buggy, quite a bit, I suppose.”

“Horses are grazers. He’s probably eating fresh grass more than he should. Morgans are notorious for being overweight. And as he’s gotten older, his ability to digest the fresh greens is reduced.”

“Jack’s not fat—”

“Henrietta.”

The woman quieted in the face of her father’s stern gaze.

Nicholas examined Jack’s teeth. Not good. “Given his age and the state of his teeth, it’s not surprising he’s developed colic. His teeth are so worn down, he can’t chew the stocks of hay anymore.”

“We’ve never had a horse live this long.” Adam adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses up his nose. His hands were chapped and red. “I’ve had a few with dental problems, but not so that they couldn’t eat. It’s not like we can give him dentures.”

“True. Start soaking and chopping up his hay. Add beet pulp to his diet. I reckon he weighs about a thousand pounds, so give him fifteen pounds or so a day while reducing his forage by 25 percent. Give him smaller meals a few times a day.”

“What about the pain?” Unlike most Plain children, Henrietta hadn’t learned to keep quiet in her elders’ presence. Or maybe it was only because she cared so much about Jack that she couldn’t force herself to remain silent. Someone whose love for animals rivaled Nicholas’. “He’s not going to eat as long as he’s in pain.”

“Dr. McDonald will have to give you the pain medication.” If only Nicholas could go to veterinary medicine college, then he could prescribe drugs. But that was off the table—for now. His father had sent him to Smicksburg to care for his grandfather. Family came first. Nicholas would make do with what he learned from books and working with English vets. “As soon as he gets done at the Shiracks’.”

No point in telling them his employer had given Nicholas a cell phone to use for as long as he worked for him. Dr. McDonald said communication was critical when animals’ lives hung in the balance. Not only because livestock played an important role in an agricultural economy, but also because animals often were considered members of the family.

Becoming a veterinarian would mean Nicholas would have to leave his faith, his family, and his community. Having a cell phone was a step in that direction. His bishop back home would say one small step on the road to hell. What else could he say? On the other hand, maybe only a weak faith would be swayed by a piece of electronic equipment.

Or was that Satan talking?

“I’ll go into town to the tractor supply store for the beet pulp.”

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Henrietta's morose expression had disappeared, replaced by pure concern for the animal. Maybe her reservations about Nicholas' expertise had been allayed. "I can stop by Dr. McDonald's and double-check with him if you want, Dat. I'll have to pick up the medication anyway."

Or maybe not.

"I'll pass my notes on to Dr. McDonald as soon as he returns to the clinic." Nicholas replaced his stethoscope in his backpack. "If you can point me to the faucet, I'd like to wash my hands before I head out."

"Dochder, go tell your schwescheder we have a visitor for breakfast. And get cleaned up before you touch the food."

Did Henrietta even try to hide the horror that rippled across her face? "Nicholas probably has other stops to make, what with Dr. McDonald being occupied."

Nicholas had no desire to go where he so obviously wasn't wanted. "I should get back to the clinic. We have regular appointments waiting."

With another frown aimed at his daughter, Adam shook his head. "I reckon you left home without breakfast this morning. You have time to eat."

Nicholas' sister had made breakfast, but Dr. McDonald's call had meant Nicholas didn't have time to eat. His stomach rumbled.

A smile replaced Adam's scowl. "Decision made."

When the bishop smiled, he looked like a completely different person. Younger. Less burdened.

"After breakfast I'll go to town." Henrietta had a one-track mind. "The boys are already milking the goats."

"No you won't." His smile was gone as quickly as it came, and Adam's tone suggested his words held a message for his daughter that was for her alone. "I'll make the trip to town. You have floors to mop."

"But Dat—"

"Dochder."

Henrietta kissed Jack's forehead. Head held high, her posture stiff, she slipped past Jack. She took her time latching the stall. "I'll be back later, Jack, to take you for a walk."

How could a person argue with sheer stubbornness when it involved caring for an ailing animal? Since he was old enough to walk, Nicholas had been just as devoted to animals. He named chickens, hogs, and cows—to his father's chagrin. It was hard to slaughter livestock and eat them after

Nicholas gave them names and let them follow him around all day long.

Adam's rueful smile said he had plenty of experience dealing with a similar situation. "The sink's over here."

Nicholas followed him to the front of the barn. The bishop said nothing while Nicholas washed up. He gave a smile back—albeit a pained one—as he offered Nicholas a holey towel. "Henrietta loves her animals."

"I can't fault her for that." Nicholas dried his hands and draped the towel over the sink. "Her concern for the horse's health is admirable. I wish all people were as dedicated to their animals' well-being."

Adam's gaze was fixed somewhere over Nicholas' shoulders. His troubled expression matched clouded eyes. Even a man like Nicholas could read that look.

His new bishop was worried, and the why had something to do with Henrietta.