

# THE NARROW WAY

## Chapter One



After a morning of goodbyes, tears, and shuffling boxes, Martha Miller tossed her new house keys on her bed and searched through the apartment. The space was large and bright, with two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living area. There was plenty of room for all her treasures: even more when you considered that Martha had no treasures. After all, she was Amish.

With her footsteps echoing over the polished wooden floors, Martha moved to the refrigerator in search of a celebratory lunch. She found a block of moldy cheese and half a can of whipped cream, and though the meal was a far cry from the lemonade and meat pies of her childhood celebrations, Martha sat on the floor and nibbled the edges of the cheese, feeling the stir of adventure in her heart.

Her housemate, Sheryl Garner, an *Englischer* who took the second and far larger bedroom, was working the whole afternoon. On the four occasions they

had met, Sheryl struck Martha as a nice, although softly rebellious, *Englischer* girl. She had short hair that was pink on the ends, a nose ring, and lipstick so bright it would put the sun to shame.

Sheryl had given Martha the keys that morning and told her to get comfortable. She had also mentioned that tomorrow they would go shopping. Martha stopped nibbling on the cheese and looked down at her plain dress. She could wear the clothes of an *Englischer* now, the jeans and the shirts with the funny slogans, and although she felt a childlike glee at the very idea, she would miss the security of her simple dresses, her prayer *kapp* and bonnet, and her woolen cloak. She wondered what she might buy with the money stashed in the bottom of her purse.

Martha wanted to have a chocolate business, and she had started by selling her treats at the local farmers' markets. She had made enough from the venture to live in this strange new world for two months, although she really needed to find a job as soon as possible. Now she wondered who might take an Amish girl with little experience in jobs common with the *Englisch*. She was a very good cook, having taken after her talented mother in that department, although jobs like that were likely hard to find, and she was not qualified for anything else. Martha sighed. She was so busy thinking on the clothes, the chocolate business, and her job, that it was a second before she realized someone was opening a window in the living room.

Martha froze as she listened to the person climb

through the window, land on the floor, and start to move through the living room, only to collide with the sofa and fill the air with a string of curses. From her spot on the floor near the fridge, she could not see if it was her new housemate, although Martha suspected that Sheryl would use the front door. Panic set into her heart and sweat dappled her forehead.

“Anyone home?” The stranger’s voice, a *mann’s*, and very deep, echoed through the apartment. “I’m just grabbing the cups I left here last weekend, and then I’ll get out of your hair.”

Martha furrowed her brow. Did she have time to scuttle back to her bedroom, lock the door, and hide until the *mann* left? Before she had time to consider the idea properly, the *mann* stepped into the kitchen. He was young, with dark hair and large brown eyes, ripped jeans, and a shirt emblazoned with a guitar. Martha swallowed.

“You’re not Sheryl.” The *mann* stared down at the strange girl eating moldy cheese on the kitchen floor. “Unless you are Sheryl, and I’m still extremely drunk.”

“*Nee*. No, I’m Martha.”

“Hello, Martha the mouse,” he replied, holding out a hand. Although she hesitated for a moment, unsure about touching the hand of a strange *Englischer* boy, she relented and allowed him to help her off the floor. “I’m Gary. Sorry if I gave you a fright. I just live upstairs. Sheryl and I are friends. How long have you known her?”

“Not long.” Martha quickly placed the cheese back

in the fridge. The thought of anyone, let alone a young man with tousled hair and sleepy eyes, catching her sitting on the floor and eating made her shiver. “I’m renting the second room. This is actually my first day here. I only just now moved in.”

“I know,” said Gary, a lopsided grin spreading over his handsome face. “I’d have remembered you. Do you want me to grab some food from my apartment, or do mice only eat cheese?”

Half an hour later, Martha sat across from Gary. On the table between them sat bowls of colorful Fruit Loops, toast, jam, scrambled eggs, and cups of orange juice. Martha had never eaten Fruit Loops before, and she felt her heart beating out a rhythm as the sugar roared through her system, although that might have been caused by the disheveled boy sitting across from her.

“So what’s the go, Martha? What do you do?” asked Gary, buttering his toast.

“I want to start a chocolate business. What about you?”

“Right on,” he said, looking up from his toast and grinning. “Myself? I’m in a band. I play the drums. We’ve got a real different sound you know. It’s authentic. Nobody’s in it for the fame or glory, man. It’s all about the music.”

Martha was struck by how different *Englisch* and Amish boys were. Sun filtered through the windows, throwing a halo of yellow light around the pale Gary. The boys she had grown up with, like the Hostetler *bruders*, worked on the farm with their father as soon

as they were grown, their bodies browning in the sun. Martha's good friend, Moses Hostetler, the third oldest of the brothers, would make Gary look like a ghost. Martha's mind drifted to wonder what Moses was doing at this exact moment.

"What are you doing?" she asked suddenly, watching Gary cut his slices of toast into triangles.

"Cutting toast?"

"But why don't you cut it straight down the center?"

"Because I'm a rebel. You should check me out," Gary added, his mouth full of toast. "My band, I mean. You might like what you see." Then he glanced at his watch, slammed his fist on the table, and said, "Damn it. I'm late."

As he moved toward the window, Martha picked up the glass that Gary had toppled over and cried, "But what about all this food?"

"You keep it, little mouse." Gary flung one leg over the windowsill and pulled himself onto the fire escape. Then he ducked his head back into the apartment. "I wouldn't want you to disappear before we've had a chance to get to know each other," he said with a wink, vanishing into the golden sunshine.

Martha sat once more, wondering if all *Englisch* boys climbed through windows and lived on Fruit Loops, or if Gary was just as unique among them as he would be among the bronzed bodies of the Hostetler brothers. For the first time in her life, the world was not full of chores and dust, but fresh and full of curiosities. Martha picked up a new slice of bread, and cut it into triangles.