
Katie's Choice, Digital Edition

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Publishers Note:

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

To Rob. I love you.
Especially when we're lost in Amish country.

Acknowledgments

A ton of work goes into the “making” of a book. For those Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) of you who believe writing is a solitary journey . . . well, Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) it's not. This book could never have been if not for the wonderful encouragement

from my agent, Mary Sue Seymour, and my editors, Julie Gwinn and Julie Carobini. Endless gratitude to my family and friends who continue to amaze me with their love and support. (This includes answering the phone even though you know it's me on the other end and I'm in "Amish" mode.) And a special thanks to everyone who patiently answered my endless questions about the Amish. I appreciate Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) you all.

1

Are you ready to go back out on assignment?" The phone line Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) crackled slightly on the last word, but he thought Jolene Davidson, senior editor for *Around the World* magazine, had said "assignment."

Zane Carson sat up in a hurry. He'd been lounging on the couch watching reruns of *Happy Days* when he should have been at his physical therapy session. But he just wasn't Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) up to another round of incredibly boring exercises with the commando instructor. No sir, he just couldn't do it again today. He'd been a little contemplative lately.

Okay, so he had been downright depressed. But who wouldn't be? One bullet and his entire life had been put on hold. His entire life had changed. He'd been sent home, grounded, and for once he'd started to think about the future. His future. Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) His and Monica's.

"Of course I am," he lied. But what better way to prove to everyone that he was ready to hit the red zone than jumping on the horse, so to speak?

"Are you sitting down?"

"As a matter of fact, I am." Jo was always one for drama. If she weren't such a wordsmith, she could have been an actress instead. "Lay it on me."

"Oklahoma Amish country."

"Come again?" Surely he heard her wrong, because he thought she'd said—

"Oklahoma Amish country."

Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2)

He leaned forward. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you . . . going to Oklahoma . . . and living among the Amish to get the inside scoop on what it's like to be part of such a community."

"Jolene, Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) I am a war correspondent. That means I cover wars." He purposefully made his voice sound like he was talking to a four-year-

old. When would Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) they accept that he was ready to go Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) back out into the field? Maybe *ready* was a bad word, but he needed to get back out there, if only to prove that he could.

“Now, Carson, this is an important assignment—”

“Jolene, there aren't many wars in Oklahoma, and there certainly aren't any in Amish territory.”

“Country.”

“Whatever.” He flopped back on the sofa, then grimaced as he jarred his healing shoulder. “Aren't they conscientious objectors?”

“You've been calling every day asking for an assignment.”

He hadn't called today and look where that got him.

“Now they want to give you one. You can't turn it down if you ever want to get back into the red zone.”

She was right. But . . . “Did you say Oklahoma?” Did they even have an Amish community? Why not Pennsylvania? Everybody knew about Lancaster County.

“Everybody knows about Lancaster County. We're looking for something different—smaller settlement, tighter surrounding Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) community. Alternate worship right there in the buckle of Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) the Bible Belt.”

Zane didn't know if he would call their manner of religion “alternate,” but what did he know about such things? He'd never been to church. His parents had preferred to worship nature and his uncle hadn't had time for that sort of thing.

“I need you to do this for me.” Those quietly spoken words held a wealth of information. “You do this and I'll make sure you get the Juarez assignment.”

“I thought Douglas was in Mexico.”

“He's ready to come home, but he's willing to stay until we can find a suitable replacement.”

Juarez, Mexico. Where innocent people died for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was dangerous, very dangerous, this war on drugs. And exactly where Zane wanted to be. Jo knew that, and she used that information to her advantage.

He sighed. “When do you want me there?”

“Day after tomorrow.”

That didn't give him much time. Zane pushed his fingers through his hair. It needed a cut, but it seemed like even that would have Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) to wait. At least he was going back to work. Sort of. He really didn't consider an assignment like this *work*. How challenging could it be? Amish. Right. But with Mexico dangling in front of him, what choice did he have?

“You'll fly Chicago to Tulsa. There's a driver who will pick you up and take you to Clover Ridge. And . . .” she paused for dramatic effect. “I've arranged for you to stay with a host family.”

“Wait. What? Hold on.” Zane ran his hands down the legs of his faded jeans and tried to get a handle on the information she just dumped on him. “A driver? Why do I need a driver? What about a car?”

Jolene sighed in an aren't-you-just-the-silliest-thing kind of way that set his teeth on edge. “Zane, the Amish don't drive cars.”

What had he gotten himself Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) into?

“You're going Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) there to learn how to live like them, give the world an inside perspective. You certainly can't do that if you're zipping all over the place in Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) a rental.”

That might be true, but he was sure he could get the feel for the lifestyle without being stranded in podunk Oklahoma with no means of transportation. But he knew better than to argue with Jo when she thought she was being brilliant. “Define ‘host family.’”

Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2)

“Basically there's a family, let me see here . . .” Zane could hear her shuffling papers. “The Fishers. You're going to stay with them, and learn how to live like the Amish.”

“And what do they get out of the deal?”

She paused. “The satisfaction of helping their fellow man?”

He shook his head. “Helping their fellow man sell countless magazines and make lots of money. Isn't that a little . . . un-Amish?” Even writers were sometimes at a loss for words. But someone once told him that the Amish weren't interested in making money and getting ahead. They only earned what they needed to in order to care for their families. Or maybe he had read it in a magazine during one of his countless layovers.

“The mom has cancer. They're hoping that the exposure will help bring more people into the community and thereby raise enough money to cover the medical costs.”

That seemed a little out of character too. But what he knew about the Amish could fit on

the back of a postage stamp—with room to spare.

Host family usually meant Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) an in-depth study, a series of articles, and quite a bit of Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) time away from home. Zane glanced around his tiny apartment. He was so sick at looking at these walls. Maybe an assignment like this was worth getting out for. "How long are we talking about here?"

Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2)

"Three months."

"Are you insane? Three months?" He flipped the calendar to October. Three months would get him back to Chicago at the first of the year. "I'll be gone during Christmas."

Jolene snickered. "I thought you might like to spend the holidays with someone other than me."

Truth was he'd never spent any personal time with Jo at the holidays, or any other time for that matter, but he was one of the few reporters at *Around the World* that had no family to speak of. Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) No one would miss him if he were on assignment Christmas Day. Not even Monica. Well, she might miss him, but she would understand. Not that it mattered. It'd never been a big holiday for him before or after his parents died.

"And you're sure it's okay with them?" The Amish were a tight-knit group, and the last thing he wanted was to invade their inner sanctum. He'd been in war-torn countries with bullets whizzing past his head like fiery hail, he'd suffered discrimination of being the only white face in the jungles of Africa, but there was no way he'd overrun someone's private time with their family. That was not a road he wanted to travel down.

"Are you worried, Zane?" She said this, but what she really meant was, *Are you going soft on me?*

"Not at all."

"Good, then. They'll be expecting you on Thursday. I'll send over the specs on the angle we'd like to see. This is a serious assignment, Zane. We want it all—interviews, pictures, the works."

Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2)

"Got Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) it."

"In the meantime, it's probably best to start your own research. You'd better get on it though. You only have a day and a half to learn how to live like the Amish."

Soft music played in the dimly lit restaurant. Zane smoothed a hand down his tie, resisting the urge to loosen it. He was certain the maitre d' would frown upon anything less than perfection from his diners. And the noose was for a good cause. He glanced at his dinner companion.

To call Monica Cartwright pretty was the understatement of the century. With her silky, black hair, flawless complexion, and petite frame, beautiful didn't seem to cover it either. Gorgeous, stunning, breathtaking—those came close. Or maybe it was the way she carried herself, with a self-assurance that came from old money. Why she had set her sights on a footloose vagrant like him was beyond comprehension.

Katie S Choice A Clover Ridge Novel Katie's Choice (A Clover Ridge Novel Book 2) Book 2

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