

THE SOCIETY

A LEGACY OF LOVE NOVEL



MELANIE DOBSON

EMBER ROTH BOOKS

THE AMANA COLONIES

WEST
AMANA

HIGH
AMANA

MIDDLE
AMANA

AMANA

EAST
AMANA

Lily Lake

Millrace

Railroad

Iowa River

SOUTH
AMANA

HOMESTEAD



*The road to good is often wild
With briars and with thorns defiled.*

Paul Gerhardt

CHAPTER 1



*J*uly 1863

Rain clouds swathed the hot sky along the Ohio trail, pacifying the sun. Nature's game of hide-and-seek was welcome relief from the heat that had trailed Amalie Wiess and the other twenty-four Inspirationists since they left New York. Two long weeks ago.

Every hour of this trip brought Amalie Wiess another mile closer to the man who'd become her husband once they reached the new *Kolonie*. And every hour took them farther away from the war that waged between the northern states of her adopted country and the south.

Wagon wheels rumbled over the hard earth and stones along the Ohio trail before the oxen dipped down to splash through a creek. Water seeped through Amalie's stockings as she followed the kitchen wagon, the coldness bathing her ankles, chilling her toes. The water wasn't deep, but Amalie still moved carefully. She'd heard stories about travelers being swept away by a river.

Beside her, Karoline Baumer squealed with delight as she peeled off her stockings and stepped into the cold water. Her

friend's pale yellow hair was hidden under a lilac-colored sunbonnet, the same sunbonnet all of the women in their community wore.

She and Karoline were the only two women on this journey to their new villages in Iowa— the other women and children had either moved already or remained behind at the colony in New York, a place called Ebenezer. Even with the head covering draped over her friend's ears and shoulders, hiding her cheeks, Amalie could see the freckles that dotted the nose of this lively girl who'd been working beside her for the past two years.

Karoline was barely twenty, but she was one of the hardest workers Amalie knew. And there was nothing Amalie respected more than a man or a woman who worked hard.

For the past ten of her twenty-four years, Amalie had cooked and cleaned six and a half days a week as a helper and then as the assistant *baas* in one of their colony's communal kitchens. She didn't mind the cooking or cleaning. It was the wilderness outside their colony that she hated. The dirt and bramble and vicious mosquitoes that liked to feed on her skin.

Her kitchen was clean. Controlled. With a bit of scrubbing, she could eradicate any sign of dirt, but out here on the trail, it was impossible to keep the dirt off her clothes and skin and the dozens of dishes she'd brought with them.

But it comforted her to know that the elders would never ask any of them to travel the states between New York and Iowa again. Once they reached the new *Kolonie*, they would be home for good.

"How are your feet?" Karoline asked as they started wading carefully across the creek.

"Blistered."

Karoline giggled. "Mine too."

"I wish I could laugh about it."

"We could finish this journey without our boots," Karoline

suggested, but Amalie shook her head. Even if she could hide her bare feet under her dress, she didn't want her toes to wallow in the mud.

Copper boilers, kettles, and skillets clanged in the wagon beside the women as the oxen forged the shallow creek, and behind them was another wagon filled with barrels of flour and sugar, flatware, tablecloths, and ceramic jars to start the Kolonie kitchen.

Tonight they'd replenish their food supply in Lisbon with meat from the butchery and fresh fruit and vegetables. If they made it to town before dark, Amalie secretly hoped for a hot meal, along with a bed in a hotel instead of spending another night in a tent. And a bath—she'd clean the dust and sweat off her skin and soothe the aches that had rippled up her legs and back, settling into her shoulders.

After she climbed up the dry bank, Amalie quickly dried her stockings on a towel and replaced her boots, but Karoline didn't bother with either stockings or shoes. Nine more wagons still needed to cross the creek, all of them filled with supplies and clothing and family heirlooms. All of them on their way to paradise.

The elders had written in great detail about the twenty-six thousand acres they'd purchased in the Iowa River Valley. They wrote about the timberland and pastures for the animals and plenty of sandstone and clay to build their villages. They described the lush hills and pristine river and rich soil in the land.

Amana is what they called the land, from the Song of Solomon.

To remain true.

It would be the perfect place for their Community of the True Inspiration. And the perfect place for her and Friedrich to begin their marriage.

In her dreams, she imagined a private reunion with Friedrich away from the crowds. He'd never kissed her before, but in the darkness of her tent, on the long nights when she couldn't sleep, she imagined what it would feel like to finally be in his arms.

She wouldn't care then about the trail dirt and endless walking on this journey. The three years of waiting would melt away in his embrace, and if God blessed them with a long life, their bond would be strong sixty or even seventy years from now as they told the story about this move to their grandchildren and perhaps even to their great-grandchildren.

The Inspirationists had been migrating slowly to the new Kolonie for eight years now. Friedrich and several hundred other men had built six villages on the land, and the elders purchased a seventh village two years ago—a railroad town named Homestead.

Their Kolonie was a harbor from the rough world, a protected place far removed from the cities in this big country and the strains of materialism that tempted their people. The community would keep all of them from falling away from their devotion to the spiritual life. They would be bound together as a people who promised to remain true to God and each other.

Karoline's mother, Sister Baumer, had been called early to the Iowa Kolonie while the elders asked Karoline to stay behind to work in the Ebenezer kitchen. If she and Karoline had waited a few more months, they would have traveled to Iowa with Friedrich's family in the autumn months, traveling by steamship across Lake Erie and then by iron train. But she'd convinced the elders that she and Karoline shouldn't wait any longer. The men escorting these supply wagons needed them to prepare their meals like they did in Ebenezer, and she could see Friedrich two months earlier than if she had waited for the steamship.

At the time, traveling west by foot seemed like a good idea. She and Karoline had both been excited to see a bit of America,

and she was ready to take a respite from her parents' influence. Her mother was a midwife in Ebenezer and assisted the doctor whenever he needed her. Amalie's father was one of the elders helping secure the sale of the property in New York.

Some mornings she wasn't certain if she could walk another step, but the Wiese name was one of strength, of men and women who escaped persecution in Germany and traveled the tumultuous seas from Europe so they and their families could worship God in freedom. Her ancestors—and her parents—faced many more trials than she'd ever known. She would finish this journey strong for Friedrich and her family.

Karoline looked up at the trees. "Isn't God's creation beautiful?"

Light filtered through the web of leaves and spilled over them, but Amalie's toes were too cold to appreciate the beauty.

"I'm hot one minute and then freezing the next."

Karoline laughed. "You don't like nature much, do you?"

"It's not that—" She sighed. "I just miss my kitchen."

"That's why you will make such a good kitchen baas," Karoline replied. "You actually enjoy the work."

"You'd make a good kitchen baas if you wanted to do it."

Karoline shook her head. "I'd much rather plant the food than cook it."

"Maybe one day you will work in the gardens," Amalie said. "But you're not allowed to start gardening until next year."

She needed Karoline's capable hands to help her start the kitchen in Amana.

"Not until next year," Karoline assured her.

The ox snorted, and Amalie reached out her hand and patted its back, ribs pressing against its warm skin. The animal was probably as ready for dinner as the men.

Christoph Faust rode up on the other side of the ox, towering over them from his saddle. The man was an immigrant from Prussia, and because of his knowledge of the

German language and his experience leading pioneers west, the elders had hired him as a wagon master to lead their train. The wide brim on his hat circled his head like a rugged halo, reminding Amalie of the mighty angels of the Bible. The ones who could strike down the disobedient with a wave of their hand.

“Don’t distract him,” Mr. Faust commanded in German.

“I wasn’t distracting him.” Amalie glanced away from the wagon master, down to the wet hem of her skirt. “I was encouraging him to press on.” One of the rules of their conduct was to be polite and friendly towards everyone, but she didn’t feel comfortable being too friendly with Mr. Faust. “We all want to get to Lisbon tonight for a decent meal.”

“I don’t know why, Miss Wiese,” he said. “Your cooking is the best I’ve ever tasted on the trail.”

She kept her eyes focused on the jagged rocks and patches of clover that garnished the trail. Some women might blush at a compliment like that, but flattery only led to an inflated view of one’s self. Each person was created equal in God’s sight, their skills and talents contributing to God’s kingdom, not one of this world.

“What do you usually eat on the trail?” she asked.

“Anything I can catch.” He grinned. “Sometimes a squirrel or a snake.”

No wonder he liked her food.

“I’m glad to know my stew tastes better than squirrel meat.”

Mr. Faust leaned down over the oxen, his gaze locked onto her. “I’d ask you to marry me, Miss Wiese, if I was the kinda man to settle down.”

Heat climbed up her neck at the thought of marrying this unruly man. She couldn’t imagine it nor would she honor the absurdity of his statement with a reply.

Karoline giggled until Amalie glared at her. Marriage should be discussed behind closed doors, not out in the open with

Karoline and so many of her fellow community members listening to their conversation. Mr. Faust's foolish words were sure to travel to Iowa. To Friedrich. Then she would have to answer questions about why she was even talking to this man.

Mr. Faust continued, seemingly oblivious to her discomfort. Or perhaps he was enjoying it.

"I might even think about joining your community," he said. "If you'd marry me."

She lifted her chin a bit higher. "There are plenty of women who could cook a decent meal for you, Mr. Faust."

"But few of them are as pretty as you."

Her chest quivered. Not because she held any interest in Christoph Faust, but because of his close attention to her. His scrutiny. None of the women in their community were ever singled out for their beauty or their talents except on the occasion when a man was serious about marriage. Then he would ask her permission, along with the permission of the elders, to marry her.

She tugged at her sunbonnet until it hid her face.

Was she pretty? Or was Mr. Faust showering her with idle words in hopes that she would continue cooking for him?

It didn't matter what his reason. She scolded herself for entertaining even a moment of his flattery.

Do not love the world and do not follow the customs of the world. Do not love beauty nor daintiness of dress, much less boast in them.

She must battle against the flattery. Against the wiles of the devil that would tempt her to seek beauty.

Not that Mr. Faust was the devil, but as she'd learned in *Lehrschule*, the evil one used the unsuspecting to draw members away from the tight bonds of their society.

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Faust," she said, venturing a glance at him from the side of her bonnet. His gaze was intent on her face. "I've already promised to marry a man in Iowa."

His smile fell. "He's a lucky fella."

“I’m the blessed one.”

He tipped his brim toward her. “Blessed, indeed.”

In front of them, the wagons disappeared around a bend in the road, and the oxen hauling the kitchen wagon followed them in the endless parade. When the road straightened again, a cloud of smoke hovered in the trees on both sides.

Amalie coughed as she scanned the forest for a campfire built by fellow travelers, but black coils of smoke rose above the trees to their left, quickly turning the sky into a dark haze. She coughed again, covering her mouth with the calico from her bonnet.

Mr. Faust kicked his heels against his horse’s flanks, shouting for the oxen to stop. The animals were like children obeying their teacher—some of them stopped immediately while others delayed just a bit. But in a minute’s time, they’d all complied, and the wagons stopped on the path, waiting for direction from their captain.

Mr. Faust rode back to her, the teasing erased from his eyes and lips.

“Gather everyone together,” he said. “Tell them to wait here until I return.”

She stepped forward. “Where are you going?”

“To see what’s burning.” He wiped his forearm over his mustache. “And to find out who set the fire.”

“Are we in danger?”

A glimmer of pity washed through his eyes. “There’s danger all around us, Miss Wiese.”

Her aching shoulders stiffened at the urgency in his words. And the condescension.

But the truth was—she’d never really known danger. The villages of Ebenezer weren’t as isolated as the new Kolonie, but they’d been sheltered from most of the evils in the world. The crimes she’d heard rumored about in the cities never touched their community.

Now they were no longer separated from evil. The western world, like the Ohio trail, was full of ruts and thorns threatening to ensnare them. People and problems she didn't understand.

She sniffed the smoky air as she stepped back from Mr. Faust. The world didn't frighten her—at least, not as much as her fear of how she would survive if she were thrown into it. The untamed wilderness was not her friend.

She belonged in her neat kitchen, managing her assistants, feeding her people. In her world, she could ward off danger with her tongue.

“Amalie!” Mr. Faust demanded, and she snapped back.

She would have reprimanded him for the use of her given name, but his hazel eyes had turned as dark as night. It wasn't the time to confront him or dwell on her fears about the world. It was time to stop the danger here from infecting all of them.

“I need you to take charge, Amalie.”

She responded with a sharp nod before he steered his horse toward the fire.

She had no problem being in charge, but she wasn't sure how John Keller or his son Niklas or the men would respond to her lead. But if Mr. Faust were able to ride toward the danger instead of away from it, she supposed she could organize the group as well as any of the men on this journey.

Karoline nudged her arm. “What can I do?”

She took a deep breath. “Tell the men at the back of the train that we need to gather here.”

Karoline rushed around the wagon to fetch the men, and in moments, Brother Niklas and his father rushed to her side.

Niklas rubbed his hands together, his eyes on the black smoke funneling into the sky. “Someone needs our help.”

Amalie shook her head. “Mr. Faust said there might be danger.”

He skimmed the forest line and glanced at the wagons behind them. "I see no danger."

"He said we should group together and wait for him here."

Niklas leaned back against the rear of the wagon, wringing his hands. The elders had put Mr. Faust in authority over them for this trip. If he said to wait, they would have to listen.

But the minutes crept past and Mr. Faust didn't return. A low rumble echoed through the tangled forest on the left side of their train, like the roar of hooves in a stampede. Amalie squinted into the shadows of the foliage and shuddered.

Maybe it was a stampede.

The men and Karoline thronged around the kitchen wagon. Peace filled each of their eyes, a peace that passed understanding, and she wondered if she was the only one whose heart raced at the thundering sound.

"We will pray," John announced, and he began petitioning their Lord for wisdom and for His hand of protection as the roar drew closer.

What were they supposed to do? Christian Metz spoke regular testimonies to them in Ebenezer, inspired words from the Spirit to give them direction, but Brother Metz wasn't with them on this journey.

She glanced up at the sky, as if God would write His direction for them in the clouds.

A gunshot blasted through the trees, the sound echoing around their wagons. This time fear flickered in the eyes of her fellow travelers. Questions. Several of them carried shotguns to hunt game, but they would never use a gun on their fellow man.

They only had one choice.

Amalie steadied her voice, pointing toward the trees. "We need to hide."

When a second shot rang out, Karoline vanished into the forest along with most of the men.

Amalie glanced at her wagon one last time, at the pots and

kettles she'd spent hours cleaning and polishing and preparing for this trip. Kettles that were supposed to feed her brothers and sisters in the new kitchen.

Niklas pressed his hand on her shoulder. "Hurry, Amalie."

She looked back at the wagon one last time. And then she ran.