

THE STRANGER

A LEGACY OF LOVE NOVEL



MELANIE DOBSON

EMBER ROTH BOOKS

THE AMANA COLONIES

WEST
AMANA

HIGH
AMANA

MIDDLE
AMANA

AMANA

EAST
AMANA

Millrace

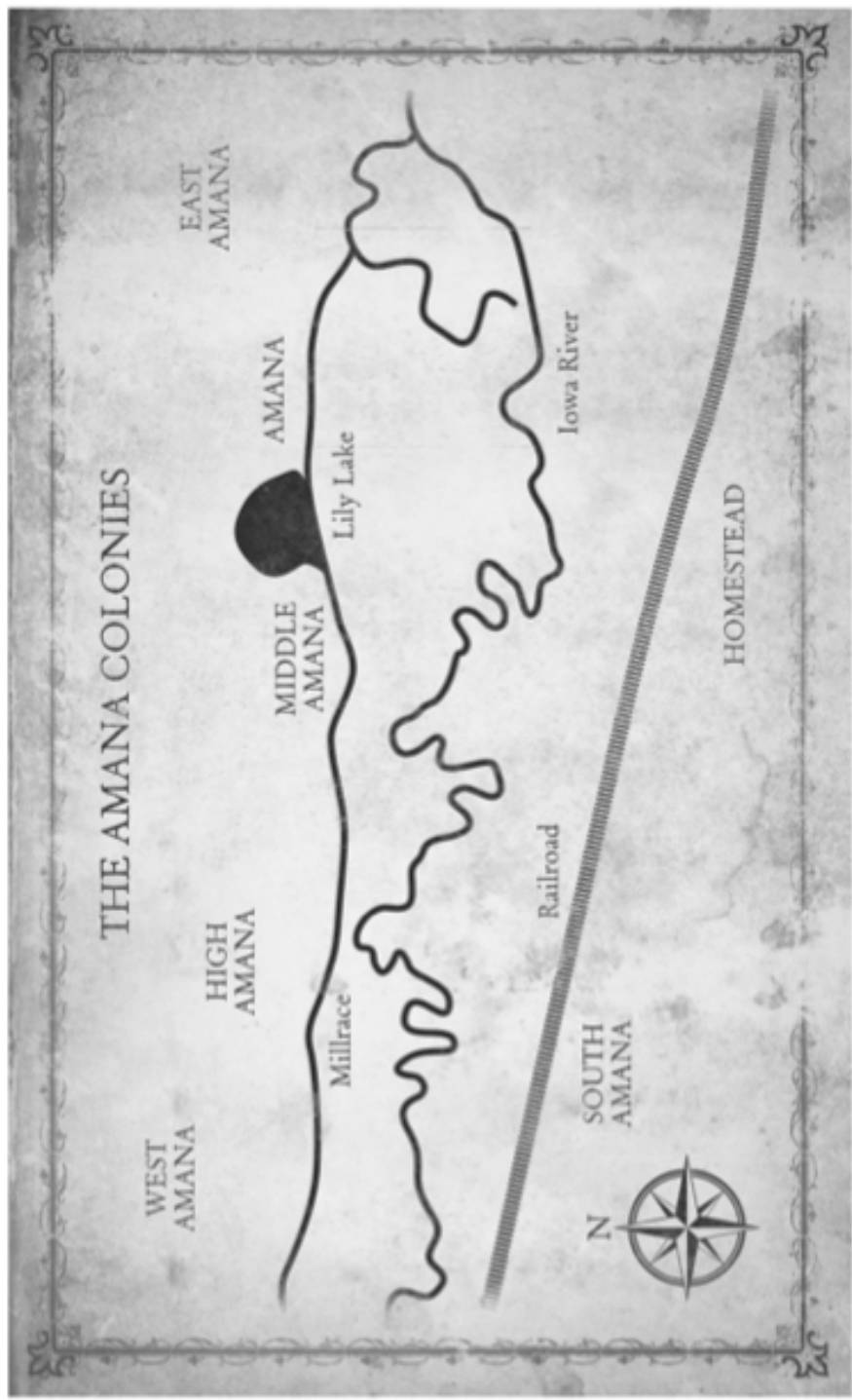
Lily Lake

Railroad

Iowa River

SOUTH
AMANA

HOMESTEAD



*Whoever does not wander through the dark
wasteland of his heart cannot enter
into the new and peaceful land.*

Christian Metz, 1833

CHAPTER 1



JULY 1894, CHICAGO

The morning fog lingered in the alleyways and draped over the iron palings that fortified the row of saloons along Harrison Street. At the corner of Harrison and LaSalle, a gas lamp flickered in the mist, its yellow flame spreading light over the alley tents. Only a few more blocks until they were safe in the depot.

In the distance, the station's clock tower glowed like a beacon, beckoning him to hurry, and Jacob Hirsch patted the back of his daughter, asleep on his shoulder, before checking his breast pocket. The two train tickets were tucked safely inside.

Adjusting the strap on his satchel, he took a deep breath and hurried toward the train that would take him and his daughter far away from Chicago.

Cassie squirmed against his chest and lifted her head. "My throat hurts, Papa."

"I know, Pumpkin."

She tried to smile. "I'm not a pumpkin."

"You're my pumpkin," he replied softly. He put her down for a moment to shift his satchel to his other arm before he picked

her up again. Laying her head back on his shoulder, her breathing deepened as she drifted back to sleep.

Shivering in the morning air, he pushed himself to walk even faster to get her into the warm station. Almost a week ago Cassie had started complaining of a sore throat, and he felt useless to help her. His money was almost gone, and they were just two among thousands who had no place to sleep tonight.

This city was the only place Cassie had ever known, but there was no future for them in Chicago. Tens of thousands were unemployed—strong men willing to work and educated men who could no longer provide for their families. These men walked the dirty streets during the day, searching for work, and a tent housed them and their families at night.

A tramp lay sprawled across the sidewalk in front of Jacob, inches from the door of a saloon. He stepped over the man, but a familiar queasiness clenched his gut. So many people were struggling to survive while others tried to drown the country's economic depression by drinking themselves to death.

He'd considered the latter himself, using the last of his money on liquor instead of train tickets, but the streets in Chicago were already crowded with children who'd lost both of their parents—he couldn't think about what would happen to Cassie if he weren't here to protect her from the scum who patrolled for orphans.

Jacob's stomach rumbled, but he ignored it. Cassie was the one who needed to eat. Cassie and the other young victims of the financial tsunami that had hit the East Coast last summer and swept across the plains and mountains, devastating families and businesses and farms in its wake.

Jacob checked his pocket again for the train tickets. They were still there. He'd pawned the last of their furniture along with Katharine's wedding ring to buy these tickets and garner two additional dollars to buy Cassie food during their journey west.

Three months had passed since he'd lost his job at the bank, and almost a year had passed since he'd lost...

He shook his head, focusing on the depot's bright clock tower instead of drowning himself in the past, for Cassie's sake.

They would take the early morning train to Minneapolis and then on to Washington State, where there were jobs waiting for men willing to work. He was more than willing.

Someone tugged on his trousers, and he looked down to see a young girl not much older than Cassie's four years. Her hair was matted against her head, and tattered rags hung over her shoulders.

"Can you spare a nickel?" she whispered.

Behind the child was a row of tents in the alley. "Where are your parents?"

Her scrawny finger pointed toward one of the tents. "Mama's in there."

"You hungry?"

She nodded, blinking back her tears. The New York Stock Exchange was eight hundred miles away, yet the impact from its crash trickled down to the least of these on the streets of Chicago. The pain wasn't in their wallets. It was in their bellies.

He couldn't spare a nickel but—

Cassie lifted her head in her sleep and snuggled into his other shoulder. What if it was his daughter begging for food?

The girl stepped back, her head hung with resignation, and he couldn't help himself. Digging into his pocket, he pulled out one of his precious nickels and handed it her. "Buy some bread when the bakery opens."

"Yes, sir," she replied, the strength returning to her voice as her fingers clenched the coin. "Thank you, sir."

During the colder nights, swarms of homeless slept in the hallways of city hall or in the basements of saloons. When those got overcrowded, the chief of police opened the doors to the

station and crammed young and old alike into cells alongside the criminals for the night.

A jail cell was no place for a child.

He shifted the leather bag on his shoulder again and Cassie stirred, coughing against his suit jacket. He rested his hand on her back until she stopped coughing and then turned the corner toward the station and the passenger train that would take them west.

A half dozen people crowded together on the corner in front of him, and Jacob shuffled across the street to avoid them. He'd read plenty about rings of thieves that stalked the night hours on the Near West Side. He couldn't afford a confrontation this morning, nor could he afford to lose the last of his money or his train tickets.

A rough laugh passed through his lips at the irony of clinging to the two dollars in his waistcoat. A year ago, he'd been bringing home sixteen dollars and forty cents every week while employed as a clerk at Chicago's prestigious Second National Building and Loan, and he'd been on his way up the ladder with his sights on becoming president one day.

"A promising future," the president of the bank had told him in the spring of '93, and Jacob believed the man. Back then, his future was full of promise. More responsibilities were ahead. A reputable title. And, if he kept working hard, a lot more money.

For most of his life, he'd respected the power of a dollar. Even more than providing for his family, it was his livelihood, and he thought he'd understood its worth. But he didn't truly understand it until most of the bank's reserves were washed away in the Panic of '93 along with his salary. Never before had he known what it was like to have the future obliterated, to only have two dollars to his name. Nor had he understood real desperation—the need for money because of the love for his daughter and the hunger in his own belly.

And now here he was, on this chilly summer morning, afraid

that thieves might steal a measly two dollars from him. And even more afraid that he might be tempted to steal like them if he didn't find work soon and provide for his daughter.

Cassie moaned against his shoulder, and he kissed the lopsided part between her braids. The train station was only three more blocks away, straight down LaSalle. When she woke again, he'd feed her the crackers and apple his kind neighbor gave them last night.

The bell in the clock tower chimed five times. The train wasn't scheduled to depart for an hour, but even so, he hurried toward the depot. They would be ready to leave whenever the conductor called for them to board.

Nothing would stop him from getting on this train.

Dim rays of sunlight began to clear the gray fog, and the LaSalle Street Station rose through the mist like an ancient castle. The place spoke of a time past. A time of money and power and prestige, when more people wanted to visit their great city than run away from it.

Ahead, forty or so men crowded around the depot, and at the front of the mob, a man in a black overcoat shouted and raised a shovel in the air. Jacob's entire body tensed when the crowd raised their voices in response.

Why are they so angry?

Skirting around the group, Jacob pushed open a side door and shuffled into the marbled lobby of the train station. Golden ceiling tiles towered above them with a crystal chandelier that cascaded light onto the granite pillars below. Dozens of people slept on the stiff benches around the station, wrapped in blankets or covered with overcoats.

Cassie squirmed in his arms, lifting her head to take in the grandeur. "Where are we, Papa?"

His heart softened at her voice. "At the train station, sweetheart. You keep sleeping."

"I don't wanna sleep," she said, nestling her head back into his shoulder.

"Of course not." He laughed softly as her breathing slowed again.

Long glass windows overlooked the train platform on the far wall, and near the windows was the train counter. He rang the bell, and then rang it again when no one came to the counter.

A stout man slipped up beside him, a cigar hanging out the side of his mouth. His nose was swollen and red. "They're all outside."

Jacob turned toward him. "What's happening?"

"The railway strike."

"I thought the workers were striking down in Pullman."

"That was last week." The man blew smoke in Jacob's face. "The big whigs down there ain't budging an inch, and now the union is wailin' mad."

"The trains—"

"A few of them are still moving." The man slid the cigar out of his mouth and twirled it in his fingers. "Where you headed?"

"Minneapolis and then Spokane."

He pointed his cigar toward the glass windows. "You best get yourself onboard. They'll be leaving early today."

Early? Jacob slid back from the counter, the man's words propelling him through the station and back out into the morning air. On the other side of the platform, five trains were lined up on a maze of tracks, and the train closest to him was a passenger train. The train taking them to Minnesota.

He scanned the platform for a brakeman or conductor to open the closed doors, but he didn't see one. Turning, he watched the darkly cloaked man march onto the platform, thrust his shovel into the air, and shout about the Pullman dogs. The leader would be frightening enough by himself, but this morning, an entire crowd mimicked his tirade.

Dozens of men marched onto the platform brandishing

shovels and pitchforks, and they were all chanting. “*Strike. Strike. Strike.*”

“Papa?”

Jacob glanced into his daughter’s frightened eyes. He had to get her out of here.

The whistle blew on the passenger train, and he hopped onto the steps and tugged at the locked door. Something whizzed by his head, and the window beside him shattered.

Floundering backward, he protected Cassie with his arms, and his chest muffled her cries.

More rocks followed the first one. More glass splintered onto the platform and the tracks. A rock clipped his ear, and he stumbled away from the firing line.

Shovels plunged into the windows of the depot, glass pouring to the ground—and then the train in front of him started to quake. Turning to the right, he sucked in his breath.

“Dear God,” he whispered. The mob was rocking one of the Pullman sleeping cars, trying to tip it over. No one from the station was even trying to stop them from overturning the car.

His ear stinging from the rock, he tried to back away from the madness, but they were trapped on the platform. A gunshot blasted through the station, and the throng of men spun into a rage. People scattered in all directions, screaming, but whoever was rocking the train car didn’t stop.

Steam puffed out of the engine on the far side of the tracks, and Jacob glanced around at the unruly mass. No one seemed to notice the steam. Covering Cassie’s head, he ducked through a pelting of rocks as he cut between the train cars. He didn’t care where the other train was headed. He’d get Cassie on it, and they’d escape this madness.

The freight train was thirty feet in front of him, the wheels already turning. He tripped over the tracks as he raced for an open boxcar, and Cassie cried out as they hit the ground.

Quickly, he pushed up from the gravel, but as he started

running again, someone shouted behind him. The mob had spotted the moving train.

The train's speed escalated as it fled the station, and Jacob ran harder than he'd ever run in his life, over the gravel and rails, toward the boxcar at the end. His hat flew off his head, but he didn't turn around. The crowd was swarming behind him now. He couldn't stop running, nor could he do anything to stop Cassie's tears. He would get her on that train, and then she'd be okay.

A crashing sound exploded through the station, shaking the ground. For an instant, the noise seemed to paralyze the crowd. They stopped running. Stopped shouting. And then they began to cheer. The mob had crippled the passenger train.

"Stop that freight!" another voice yelled over the roar.

The train in front of him increased its speed, and Jacob sprinted beside the boxcar, sweat pouring off his face. No matter what, he would protect his daughter.

Swinging the bag off his shoulder, he thrust it into the open door. Cassie clung to his neck, sobbing against his shoulders.

"C'mon, Cassie!" he shouted over the commotion.

"No..."

There was no time to hesitate. He pried Cassie's fingers and arms from his neck and swiftly pushed his daughter onto the train.