



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

Paul Gerhardt

Chapter One
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July 1863

Wagon wheels rumbled over the hard earth and stones along the Ohio trail before dipping down to splash through a creek. Rain clouds swathed the hot sky, pacifying the intense sunrays for seconds and sometimes minutes at a time. Nature's game of hide-and-seek was welcome relief from the heat that had trailed the Inspirationists since they left New York. Two long weeks ago.

Water seeped through Amalie Wiese's boots as she stepped into the creek. The coldness bathed her stockings and chilled her toes. If only she could take a bath tonight. Clean the dust and sweat off her skin and soothe the aches that rippled up her legs and back and settled into her shoulders.

Beside her Karoline Baumer picked up her skirt and stepped into the creek. She squealed with delight as the cold water soaked her bare toes and splashed on her legs. Her friend's pale yellow hair was hidden under a lilac-colored sunbonnet, the same sunbonnet all of the women in their community wore. Even with the head covering draped over her ears and shoulders, hiding her cheeks, Amalie could see the freckles that dotted the nose of the 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 the colony's communal kitchens. She didn't mind the cooking or cleaning. It was the wilderness she hated. The dirt and the bramble and the 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 in the kitchen, but out here on the trail, there was no way to keep the dirt off her clothes, her skin, or her dishes.

She wouldn't grumble about the long journey through the trees and hills, at least not with her lips, 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.

"How are your feet?" Karoline asked.

"Blistered."

Karoline actually giggled. "Mine too."

"I wish I could laugh about it."

"You should take off your shoes," Karoline said, but Amalie shook her head. Even if she could hide her bare feet under her long dress, she didn't want her toes to touch the dirt.

"It's all part of the adventure," Karoline insisted.

"I'm having enough of an adventure with my shoes on."

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



They were going to replenish their food supply in the town of Lisbon tonight with meat from the butchery and fresh fruit and vegetables. And if they made it to Lisbon before dark, she was secretly hoping for a hot meal as well, along with a bath at a hotel instead of spending another night in a tent.

The hooves of two oxen beside them plodded back onto dry ground, and she and Karoline both hopped up onto the bank as another wagon rode into the water. In front of them were two wagons with nine other wagons following behind, all of them filled with supplies and clothing and family heirlooms. On their way to paradise.

The elders had written in great detail about the twenty-six thousand acres they had purchased in the Iowa River Valley. They wrote about the timberland and pastures for their 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 named the land, from the Song of Solomon. *To remain true.* It would be the perfect place for their community, the Community of the True Inspiration.

And it would be 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 in the new *Kolonie*. Friedrich had 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 sweat and dirt and the 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 their move to their grandchildren and 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 around them, 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 to each other.

She and Karoline were the only two women on this journey west—the rest of the women and children remained at the Inspirationist colony in New York called Ebenezer. If she and Karoline had waited, they would travel by steamship across Lake Erie and then by iron train with Friedrich's family and the rest of the group coming to Iowa in the autumn months. Instead she'd convinced the elders that the men escorting the dozen wagons with supplies to Iowa needed a couple of women to cook for them.

At the time, traveling by wagon 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. They would leave Ebenezer with the final group moving west, probably in a year or two.

More than anything else, though, Amalie had chosen to go with the wagon train because she would see Friedrich two months earlier than if she had waited.

The Wiese name was one of strength, of men and women who escaped persecution in Germany and traveled the rough seas from Europe so they and their families could worship God in freedom. Her



ancestors and even her parents faced many more trials than she ever had. Surely she could finish this journey to Iowa.

Karoline looked up at the trees above them. “Isn’t God’s creation beautiful?”

Amalie glanced up. Light filtered through the web of branches and leaves and spilled over them, but her 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 started but then caught herself. There was no reason for her to be untruthful with Karoline. “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 new kitchen in Amana.

“Not until next year,” Karoline assured her.

The ox snorted beside her, and Amalie reached out her hand and patted its back. She could feel his ribs through his warm skin. He was probably hungry too.

“Don’t distract him,” Christoph Faust commanded in German. The man rode up on the other side of the oxen, towering over them from his saddle. Karoline slowed her pace to walk behind Amalie.

Mr. Faust 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 to Iowa. The wide brim on his hat circled his head like a rugged halo. He reminded Amalie of the mighty angels of the Bible, the ones who could strike down the disobedient with a wave of their hand.

“I wasn’t distracting him. I was encouraging him.” Amalie glanced away from the wagon master, down to the wet hem of her skirt. 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 Amalie knew that flattery only led to an inflated view of one’s self. A false view. Each person was created equal in God’s sight. Their skills and talents contributed to God’s kingdom, not to building up a kingdom that would crumble the day they left this world.

She could feel Mr. Faust’s gaze still on her, awaiting her response from atop his horse.

“What do you usually eat on the trail?”

“Anything we can catch,” he said with a grin. “Sometimes a squirrel or a snake.”

Her stomach rolled at the thought of eating 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, and 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 an unruly man like Mr. Faust. She couldn’t imagine it nor would she honor the absurdity of his statement with a reply.



Marriage should be discussed behind closed doors, not out in the open with Karoline beside her 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.

He 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 or any man like him, 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 a 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 flattering 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 or the pride that would ensue if she believed herself to be pretty. 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.”

The smile on his face 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. But when the road straightened again, Amalie coughed as a cloud of smoke hovered in the trees around them. She scanned the forest on both sides to search for a clearing where fellow travelers had built a campfire to cook their supper.

“What is it?” Karoline whispered behind her.

She shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Instead of a campfire, black coils of smoke rose above the trees to their left, quickly turning the sky into a dark haze. She coughed again and covered her mouth with the calico from her bonnet.

“Whoa!” Mr. Faust shouted to the oxen.

He kicked his heels against his horse’s flanks to urge him ahead, yelling 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,” Mr. Faust told her. “Tell them to wait here until I return.”

She stepped forward. “Where are you going?”

“To see what is 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.

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. But now, even though they traveled as one, 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 and 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 to him. She would have reprimanded him for the use of her given name, but his hazel eyes had turned as dark as the night sky, piercing her with their intensity. 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,” he said.

Instead of waiting to give commands to Brother John or Niklas or one of the other men, he steered his horse toward the fire and rode off.

Amalie patted the ox beside her one more time, trying to assimilate her scattered thoughts. She had no problem being in charge, but she wasn’t sure how the men would respond to her. Though 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. "Go get the men at the back of the train and bring them here."

"Brother Niklas," she shouted at the twenty-two-year-old in front of her. "Brother John."

Niklas Keller and his father rushed to her side.

Niklas rubbed his hands together. His eyes were on the black smoke funneling into the sky, his voice passionate. "Someone needs our help."

She 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."

Niklas leaned back against the rear of the wagon. The elders had put Mr. Faust in authority over them for this trip. If he said to wait, they would all wait. 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 her wagon. Peace filled each of their eyes, a peace that passed understanding, and she wondered if she was the only one whose heart raced.

"We will pray," Brother John announced, and he began petitioning their Lord for wisdom and for His hand of protection.

The roar drew closer, and her heart beat even faster.

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, but God was silent for the moment.



A gunshot blasted through the trees, the sound echoing around them. She looked into the faces surrounding her. Fear flickered in some of their eyes. Questions. Several of the men had shotguns to hunt game, but they would never use a gun on their fellow man. They had only one choice.

Amalie steadied her voice, pointing toward the trees. “We need to run. Hide.”

A second shot rang out and the people around her didn’t hesitate this time. Karoline vanished into the forest along with most of the men standing around Amalie.

She looked 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. “Run, Amalie.”

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