



A Dream to Follow

by Lauraine Snelling

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"I'm going tomorrow, and when I get home, I leave right away again for school," Thorliff said, taking her hands in his and facing her in the brilliant moonlight. He wanted to touch her face, her hair. Her lips, parted on a soft breath, smiled in that special way she had just for him.

"I know, but that is the way life is." Anji sighed and leaned her forehead against his chest.

His heart thudded as if he'd been running five miles. He dropped her hands and cupped his palms along her jawline, lifting so she had to look up at him. "I...I love you, Anji Baard." There, he'd said the words that had been drumming in his heart and mind for months. Her smile made him want to run and jump and shout for joy.

"And I you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you, back when our wagon was heading west."

"And my far invited all of you to homestead here. We were so little then." His thumbs caressed the curve of her cheek. Her skin felt soft as pussy willows in the spring. His eyes memorized her face—the slightly tipped nose, eyebrows that could say more with one arch than a page in a book, eyes that looked at him with such love he could feel his heart clench.

"Can you—will you wait for me?"

"Yes. Four years is nothing. Besides, I can't leave my mother."

"I know. Someday though, I pray you will go to school to become the teacher God meant for you to be."

"Someday."

Her breath teased his lips. He leaned forward. Their lips met in a trembling kiss that whispered of love and yearning and...

"Thorliff, you sleepin' up dere?" Mrs. Sam rapped on the wall behind the seat.

He jerked upright. "No, not at all." But when he looked ahead, the distance between him and the metal monsters had widened to nearly half a mile. The horses pulling the wagon had slowed to a shuffle. He flipped the lines, and they picked up their feet to a slow but jingling trot. He could feel the heat creep up his neck, and it wasn't from sunburn.

They pulled into the first farm just in time to set up to serve dinner, which Mrs. Sam and Lily Mae had been preparing as they traveled. Since they couldn't light the fire, they had laid out sandwiches and potato salad, which Ingeborg had helped prepare the long night before. The threshing crew ate quickly so they could get started to work.

As soon as they had the steam engine up to pressure, had checked all the belts one last time, and Hamre had filled all the places needing oil, Haakan released the lever, and the long belt began to turn. Thorliff waited for the signal and threw the lever for the bed of the threshing machine to pull sheaves of wheat into the maw of the dragon. Within minutes golden wheat streamed into the gunnysack held under the chute.

Each wagon pulled up to the carrying belt, the men forked sheaves, and straw blew out the arched spout into a growing stack. Wheat spears snuck inside shirt necks and under overall straps. Sweat poured from the bodies as the sun burned down. Besides taking care of the oiling, Hamre kept water in a covered barrel for the men to drink.

Always on the watch for sparks, they kept buckets of water near all sides of the machinery. Sparks could fly from the smokestack of the steam engine in spite of the metal roof on top.

By dusk when the last wagon left empty, the threshing crew collapsed in the shade of the monolith called a steam engine.

Mrs. Sam brought cold drinks around for all of them. "Supper ready soon as you wash up."

Thorliff groaned. What would it hurt to eat dirty for a change? He slapped his hat against his bent knee and watched the dust fly.

Haakan finished checking over the machinery and dumped a bucket of water over his head so that it sluiced down his whole body.

"Good thing we's near de river yet and can refill de barrels. Dat man say some wells be dryin' up," Mrs. Sam said.

"You're right. Bad enough the harvest is so light, but to go without water too..." He shook his head, water drops splattering the thirsty earth, rock hard from lack of moisture.

Thorliff watched his father joke with the others, but when it came to him, silence ached. All because he wanted to go to school. He thought back to the worst fight he'd seen in his family. Usually if Haakan and Ingeborg had a disagreement, they went to the bedroom or out for a walk. Not this time....

"Where will you be when Thorliff needs to come home?" Ingeborg poured another cup of coffee for her husband, her hand resting on his shoulder.

"Thorliff will come home with the rest of us."

"Then you think you will be done by September tenth? Is the harvest that bad?"

"I hope to heaven not." Haakan shook his head and twisted to see his wife's face. "You aren't going to back down on this, are you?"

She shook her head. "No. This is too important. Thorliff must have this chance."

"And it doesn't matter that we sweat our blood for him to have this farm?" Haakan lowered his voice with great effort.

Thorliff wanted to slide right under the table. Veins corded on his father's neck. The handle snapped on his coffee cup, and he threw it toward the woodbox, but it pinged off the side of the stove. When Thorliff started to get it, Haakan roared. "Leave it be. Why isn't this farm enough for you? Are you better than the rest of us?"

Thorliff straightened his spine and looked straight into his father's eyes. "Not better, no, never that, but different. Andrew is in love with this farm, not me."

"You hate this good life of tilling God's good earth?"

"No, Far, that's not it at all. I love the land and all of you. I just want something else, that's all. Something else."

"Haakan, never have I gone against your will...." Ingeborg paused for a moment, obviously thinking back to the time she'd been working the fields against his express wishes and lost a baby due to an accident. Then taking a deep breath, hands strangling her apron, she continued. "But this is what is right. Our children must be given every opportunity that we can give them. Not everyone in this great land will be a farmer; we need teachers and writers and doctors and..." She let her hands drop to her side. "Please, don't make him go against your wishes."

Haakan shoved back from the table and headed for the door. "You will do what you must, but I cannot give my blessing. I cannot."

Thorliff fought the tears that burned at the back of his throat and watched his mother dry her eyes on her apron.

"Mor, I cannot go then."

"Yes, you will go. He will come around. Just give him time."

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
ISBN 1-55661-576-0