

✧ AN AMISH BEGINNINGS NOVEL ✧

Anna's Crossing

SUZANNE
WOODS
FISHER



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Suzanne Woods Fisher, *Anna's Crossing*
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To those “keepers of the faith” who have gone before us,
risking their lives, seeking to worship God in peace.
We don’t appreciate enough what you have done
to preserve and protect religious freedom.
May we all use our freedom for the Gospel.



Always in the big woods when you leave familiar ground and step off alone into a new place there will be, along with the feelings of curiosity and excitement, a little nagging of dread. It is the ancient fear of the Unknown, and it is your first bond with the wilderness you are going into.

—Wendell Berry

Glossary for Historical Ships

binnacle is the built-in housing for a ship's compass.

boatswain, pronounced boh'-suhn, is the ship's officer in charge of equipment and the crew.

bollard is a large ball on a short pedestal.

bowsprit is a spar extending forward from a ship's bow (the front part of the ship), to which the forestays are fastened.

cleat is a low fastener with a horn on each side.

companionway is a set of steps leading from a ship's deck down to a cabin or lower deck.

coaming is a raised border around the hatch of a ship to keep out water.

forecastle or *fo'c'sle* is the forward part of a ship below the deck, traditionally used as the crew's living quarters.

fo'c'sle deck is a raised deck at the bow of a ship.

galley is the ship's kitchen.

Great Cabin is the captain's quarters.

halyard is a rope used for raising or lowering sails, spars, or yards.

holystoning the deck means to use pieces of soft sandstone to scour the decks of ships. Sailors called the stones *bibles* or *prayer books* because they scrubbed the decks on their knees.

larboard is the historical term for the left-hand side of the ship (aka *port*), looking forward. In early times merchant ships were loaded from the left side. *Lade* meant “load” and *bord* meant “side.”

leeward is the side sheltered or away from the wind.

oakum, from the word *off-combing*, is loose fiber obtained by untwisting old ropes, used to caulk wooden ships.

Round House is the chartroom where the ship's progress was planned and plotted.

spar is a thick, strong pole used for a yard.

speak a ship is to hail and speak to her captain or commander.

starboard comes from *steor*, meaning “helm” or “rudder,” and *bord*, meaning “side.” At one time, a boat or ship had rudders tied to its side. The modern word refers to the right-hand side of a vessel, looking forward.

stern is the rearmost part of the ship.

upper deck or *waist* is the middle part of a British ship. This large area, lower than both the raised deck toward the bow and the even higher forecandle deck toward the stern, was where passengers could congregate if there was no maneuver requiring the area to be cleared for action.

yard is a spar that hangs horizontally across a ship's mast for a sail to hang from.

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April 15th, 1737

It's a hard crossing, they'd been warned. Eight weeks in a wooden tub with no guarantee they'd ever get there. Anna König crouched beside a bed of roses, breathing deeply of the freshly turned loam. She had done all she could to avoid this treacherous sea journey, and yet here she was, digging up her rose to take along with her. She jabbed her shovel in the ground, mulling all the reasons this voyage was fraught with ill.

It meant leaving behind her grandparents, her home, her church in Ixheim, Germany. Her people. It would be the end of everything she'd ever known and loved.

“Some endings are really beginnings,” her grandfather had said when she told him that Christian Müller, the minister, asked—no, insisted—she join the departing families. “If you don't remember anything I've ever tried to teach you, remember that.”

Despite misgivings and forebodings, Anna relented. How do you say no to a minister? She was the only one who could speak and understand English. And that's why she was stab-

bing the earth with her shovel, digging up her most precious rose to take on the journey, hoping that the hard winter and late-to-come spring meant its roots would still be dormant. If she was going to go to this strange New World, she was going to bring this rose. And she was going. Tomorrow.

Tomorrow! The crack of doom in that one word.

Anna had begged her grandparents to join the emigrating group, but they wouldn't budge. "It's a young man's sport, that sea journey," her grandfather said, shaking his head, ending the discussion. She couldn't argue that point. The voyage was filled with risks and dangers and uncertainties, especially for the very young and very old.

Anna sat back on her heels and looked around. In a few years, who would be left in Ixheim? Who would care for her grandparents in their final days? Who would bury them and tend their graves? Tears welled, and she tried to will them away, squeezing her eyes shut.

This little valley that hugged the Rhine River was supposed to be their home, for good, for always. Here, they had tried to live in peace, keeping to themselves in secluded hills and valleys, where they could farm the land and their sheep could graze and they could go about their daily life of work and worship without worry or hassle. This valley was dear to her, peaceful and pastoral.

Yet beneath the surface, life had started to change. A new baron held the Amish in disdain; much of the old conviviality of the village was disappearing. It was time to leave, the bishop had decided, before tensions escalated as they had in Switzerland, years ago.

Carefully, Anna wrapped the root ball of the dug-up rose in burlap. She glanced around the garden filled with her grand-

mother's roses. Their survival was a testament to her people's story: roots that adapted to whatever soil they were transplanted into, thorns that bespoke of the pain they bore, blossoms each spring that declared God's power to bring new life from death. As long as the roses survived, her grandmother said, so would our people. Her grandfather would scoff and call her a superstitious old woman, but Anna understood what she meant. The roses were a living witness to survival.

The sounds of hooting and hollering boys stormed into her thoughtful moment. She caught sight first of eight-year-old Felix, galloping toward her, followed by his older brother Johann. Felix frightened the chickens that scratched at the dirt in the garden, scattering them in a squawking cloud of flapping wings and molting feathers.

"A letter from Papa!" Felix shouted.

Behind him came Johann, holding his father's letter in the air, red faced and breathing hard from the exertion of climbing the hill. His eyes, bright from anticipation, fastened on Anna's face. "My father wrote there are twice as many immigrants leaving for Port Philadelphia this year as last. And last year was three times as many as the year before. He said we must make haste to join him in Penn's Woods and settle the land."

"Just think, Anna. Deer, turkey, rabbits, all easy to obtain. And with a little more effort—" he pretended to aim and shoot a rifle at an imaginary beast—"elk and wild boar to put up for winter provisions." Naturally, Johann, at age thirteen, knew everything.

But Anna, practical and skeptical and older than Johann by six years, held a different point of view. "I hear that the New World is a land of poisonous snakes, lions, tigers. And

black bears and mountain lions. Gray wolves sweep down from the mountains in packs.” A wolf pack frightened her most of all. When the wolves here grew desperate for food, they would attack her woollies.

Johann wasn't listening. He never listened to her objections about America. “Good water springs, lumber for building cabins.”

“I've heard stories that settlers have seen red men. Many times.”

Johann shook his head as he came up to Anna in the rose garden. “Friendly Indians. Curious ones. Fascinated with shiny brass kitchen kettles and knickknacks. Papa said he has found a place for us to settle.” His eyes took on a faraway look and she knew he was off in his head to America to join his father. Jacob Bauer, the bishop of their church, had gone ahead to the New World last spring, to claim land and purchase warrants for those who intended to join him this year.

Anna turned to Felix and couldn't hold back a grin. A riot of curly hair peeped from beneath a tattered black felt hat, blue eyes sparkled with excitement, and a big smile showed more spaces than teeth.

The Bauer boys were like brothers to her. Felix was round and sturdy, with carrot red hair that matched his temperament. Johann, blond and thin, had never been hale and was afflicted with severe asthma. His heart and body might not be strong, that Johann, but his mind made up for it. What he carried around in that head of his was what mattered.

Now Felix was another story. Two black crows cackled from a nearby tree and he stared at them with a distant look in his eyes. “There's a crow's nest on the ship that's so high, you can see the curve of the earth.”

Smiling inside, Anna said to him, “It’s really that high?”
“Even higher.” With a sweep of his hand Felix showed the curve of the earth. “Johann told me so.”

Anna didn’t know where Johann got his information. He’d had no schooling and owned no books except the Bible, but he knew all sorts of things. Solid-gold facts, he called them. She delighted in each nugget, whether true or not.

Then the twinkle in Felix’s eyes faded. “It’s a great pity I won’t be able to find out for myself.”

“The Bakers changed their mind and aren’t going, so Felix wants to stay behind too,” Johann explained. “That means that Catrina Müller is the only one aboard close to Felix’s age.”

Felix’s scowl deepened. “I’m not going if I have to be stuck on a ship with her. I’ll stay here and live with the Bakers.”

“I don’t think you have much of a choice, Felix.” *Nor do I.* Anna would never voice it aloud, but she dreaded the thought of spending the next few months in confined quarters with Catrina and her mother, Maria. Those two had a way of draining the very oxygen from the air. She set down her shovel. “Is your mother ready to go?”

Felix shrugged. “She’s packing dishes into barrels.”

“She must be eager to see your father.”

He tilted his head. “She’s humming. That’s good. She wants to see Papa.” Then he took off running along the narrow sheep’s trail that led up the hill.

“I wish I could find a reason to go. Better yet, to stay.”

“Change is coming, Anna,” Johann said with annoying professorial patience. “It’s in the air. We can’t stay here and live like sheep in a pasture.”

Anna looked up at the hillside. “I like sheep.”

He crossed his arms in a stubborn pose. "I mean there is a whole new world out there. Just think of the mountains and valleys and unknown places we'll see."

"Filled with savages and the beasts. Your father has said as much in his letters."

"He also says there is land waiting for us which has never before been claimed, surveyed, or deeded. Land, Anna. We can live in safety. We can *own* land."

"Maybe there's no place that's truly safe for us."

He shook his head hard. "That's not what William Penn said. He offered a place where we can go and live in peace."

Johann didn't understand. He was moving toward someone—his father. His mother and brother would be traveling with him. Anna was moving away from those she loved. "My grandmother says it's wicked to want more than you have. She wants to just stay put and thank God."

Johann laughed. "Your grandmother is a frightened old lady who's had a hard life. Doesn't mean you should be scared of new things."

"I'm not." *Yes, I am.*

"Everything changes. That's the way of life. This Greek fellow Heraclitus said there is nothing permanent except change, and I think he was right." He leaned forward and whispered in a conspiratorial voice, "Your grandmother has made Maria promise to find you a husband in the New World. She said that Ixheim has only old toothless men and young toothless boys." He lifted his voice an octave or two, warbling, to mimic her grandmother. "Anna must have Her Chance! She is pushing twenty without a man in sight."

Anna laid the rose in her basket and stood, sobered by the thought. With each passing birthday, her grandmother grew

increasingly distressed. The New World, she decided, was Anna's only hope to find a like-minded bachelor.

Johann was watching her carefully, and then his eyes took on that teasing look of his. "If there's no one in the New World who passes Maria's muster, and if you don't mind holding off a few years, I suppose I could marry you."

She laughed then, and her mood shifted instantly from solemn to lighthearted, as it always did when she was around Johann. "I'll keep such a heartwarming proposal in mind."

"With fair wind and God's favor," Johann said, with his usual abundance of optimism, "we'll reach Port Philadelphia by the end of July."

When Anna pointed out that he was basing that assumption on all conditions being ideal and how rarely things ever turned out that way, he rolled his eyes in exasperation. "It's God's will. Of that my father and Christian have no doubt."

And how does anyone object to that? How in the world?

He wiggled his eyebrows and winked at her, then hurried up the hillside to join Felix, who was already on the top, to reach the shortcut that took them back to their house. Midway up the hill, Johann stopped and bent over to catch his breath. When he topped the hill, he turned and doffed his hat at her, flourishing it before him as if he were going to sweep the floor. She grinned, and then her grin faded as he disappeared down the other side of the hill and she was left with only her worries for company.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow!

Like it or not, the journey would begin. They would travel down the Rhine River to Rotterdam, board the vessel a shipping agent had arranged as passage for them, and then they'd be off to the New World.

Anna stretched her back and moved out of the shade to feel the afternoon sun on her face. The muscles in her arms and shoulders ached from spearing the shovel into the cold earth, but it was a pleasant ache. She'd always loved working outside, much more than she did the washing and cooking and keeping up of the house, the woman's work. The drudgery, she thought, and quickly sent an apology to the Lord for her ungrateful heart.

A furious honking of geese in the sky disrupted her reverie. Heading north for summer, she presumed. Her gaze traveled up the green hillside dotted with ruffs of gray wool. Her wool-lies, each one known to her by name. Her heart was suddenly too full for words as she let her gaze roam lovingly over the land she knew as home: over the rounded haystacks, the neat lambing sheds, the creek that ran almost the year round. The steep hills that brought an early sunset in summer and broke the wind in winter. It grieved her that she wouldn't be here this year for spring, as the lambs came and the wool was sheared and the ewes were mated and then the lambs would come again. She gazed at the hills, trying to engrave it in her memory. Where would she be next spring? She wondered what home would look like, feel like, smell like. She glanced down at her basket and gripped the leather handle, hard. At least she had her rose. If it survived, so would she.

A few hours later, Anna heard the whinny of a horse and came out of the house to see who was driving up the path. She shielded her eyes from the sun and saw Christian Müller on a wagon seat, Felix beside him.

Why would Felix be riding with their minister?

She noticed the somber look on Christian's usually cheerful face, the way Felix's small head was bowed. She crossed her

arms, gripping her elbows. The wind, raw and cold, twisted her skirts around her legs. *Something's wrong.*

There came a stillness as if the whole world were holding its breath.

Let it be nothing, she entreated silently, let it be another meeting tonight to talk about the journey, or to let her know that Johann stopped to visit a friend. Let it be something silly. With every squeak of the wheels, she felt the lump in her throat grow bigger, the apprehension build.

A gust of wind swirled up the hill, flapping Anna's dress like a sheet on a clothesline, whipping the strings of her prayer cap against her neck, and she shivered.

Christian hauled back on the reins and set the brake on the wagon. Slowly, he climbed down and waited beside the wagon, bearded chin on his chest. Felix jumped off the seat and threw his arms around Anna's waist, shuddering with sobs.

Anna's gaze moved over Christian's pale face. Behind him, in the back of the wagon, was the shape of a body, covered by a gray wool blanket.

"Christian, who is it?" An icy feeling started in Anna's stomach and traveled up her spine. "C-Christian?" she whispered again, her eyes wide, her throat hot and tight. It was then she saw tears running down Christian's cheeks. The awful reality started to hit her full force and she pressed a fist to her lips. *Dear God*, she thought. *Dear God, how can this be?*

Christian turned away with his chin tucked down, then, almost lovingly, gently folded back the top of the blanket. His eyes lifted to meet hers. "The Lord has seen fit to take our young Johann from us."