THE GLISTENING FURROW

SOPHIA SLOBODIAN

The Glistening Furrow is a tale of courage, a tribute to the remarkable people who settled the western prairies of Canada at the turn of the century. Armed with little more than determination, and a deep faith in God and their destiny, these settlers managed against all odds to survive and prosper in a harsh new land.

The promise of land and freedom in a young Canadian West drew a flood of pioneers form oppressed lands around the world. *The Glistening Furrow* is the saga of a close-knit Ukrainian family, tracing their struggle throughout the early years, against starvation and the elements, to the challenge faced by the younger generations, the challenge of retaining their heritage amid the pressures of modern Canadian society.

Sophia Slobodian's novel recreates in poignant detail the day-to-day rigours – from clearing bush with axe and oxen to baking bread in a willow-and-clay oven – of primitive pioneer life, the prejudices the newcomers endured, and the sacrifices they made to help build this country.

Told with warmth and humour, *The Glistening Furrow* is a novel filled with the love of life. In times of hardship there is sharing, in tragedy there is dignity, and always there is the gaiety of music, dancing, and community celebration so much a part of the Ukrainian Canadian heritage. The Glistening Furrow is history brought to life in a way that will warm the hearts of readers everywhere.

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SOPHIA SLOBODIAN

Sophia Slobodian
4311 - 103 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6A 0S4

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To my husband, Peter, and my children, Mary Rose, Terrence, James, Karen and Linda

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Look mama! Look papa!" the little boy called out excitedly. "Marusia is drawing pictures again." Petro stood in the aisle of the fast-moving train. His head barely reached the top of the leather seat, but he held on to it tightly with both hands. His sparkling blue eyes lit up with delight as he admired his sister's artistic design on the misted windowpane. He cocked his curly blond head on one side and declared proudly, "I like *this* one very much." In the eyes of a four-year-old, it was indeed a masterpiece.

Prokip Zhoda and his wife Anna smiled at their six-year-old daughter with discernible pride as she stood on the seat of the coach, quite unperturbed by Petro's enthusiasm. Her attention was wholly taken up by a young mother and a little girl, seated in the next coach, who were on their way from Calgary to Edmonton.

Her brown eyes wide, Marusia gazed through the open doorway, admiring their elegant outfits of velvet trimmed with buttons and bows, with matching bonnets and flowing ostrich feathers. With the forefinger of her right hand she tried, in her childlike way, to reproduce their portraits on the windowpane.

She was preoccupied with her drawing for some time. Then she slid down into the seat and watched, fascinated, as her

handiwork cascaded down the window in little rivulets of water and was soon obliterated. She sighed and closed her eyes. She was so tired, and the rock and hum of the speeding train made her very sleepy.

Anna drew the lithe form of the child to her side and tenderly cradled the dark head in her lap.

Suddenly the Canadian Pacific train came to a grinding halt. The conductor opened the door, placed a pair of steps in position, and the passengers descended to the wooden platform of the station in Strathcona. This was as far north as the Calgary and Edmonton Railway had come. Ahead lay the winding North Saskatchewan River, and across it, Edmonton.

It was the latter part of April 1901. The sky was overcast. The southeast wind blew cold and raw, with a threat of an April shower. The immigrants pulled up the collars of their sheepskin coats. Their homespun clothes and fleece-lined leather boots were warm, but the women bundled up their children nevertheless.

The boys tugged their caps over their ears, and the girls tied their *babushkas* more securely, for fear the wind would tear them off and carry them away.

The rail trip was the last leg of their journey to a new and strange land. Although they were all exhausted, their hearts felt lighter. They did not know what lay ahead, but they had left the oppression of Austria and the prosperous Polish barons behind them. Freedom was at hand.

In Ukraine, the peasants worked from dawn to dusk cultivating, sowing, and reaping to eke out a mere existence. The only children who had any education were those whose parents could afford to pay the government a small fee. Therefore many remained illiterate or could do little more than sign their names.

A baby began to whimper. She was Anna's youngest. Anna cradled her more closely to her breast, rocking the little one gently as she whispered, "Hush, my precious, hush." Secure in her mother's arms, the baby fell asleep. No one else spoke. They looked around them with awed apprehension.

A short, rotund figure, with bowler hat askew, bustled across the dusty street, ran up the three steps to the station platform, drew out his watch from his vest pocket, studied it, then faced

the new settlers and apologized in Ukrainian. "Forgive me for being late. I am Mr. Charles Stanley, your agent. If you will follow me, I will take you to your lodging for the night."

The faces of the tired travellers lit up with pleasure. It was good to be addressed in their native tongue. Mr. Stanley could converse fluently in both English and Ukrainian. He had been to Austria on three occasions to recruit Ukrainian farmers, urging them to sell their plots of land, pack their meagre belongings, and emigrate to Canada, the land of promised opportunity.

Being an astute businessman, he made a profit from the sums each family had to pay for transportation. He had decided to make no more trips to Austria. Since the CPR line ended at Strathcona, he would work from his land titles office there, a branch of the main office in Edmonton.

Mr. Stanley's decision not to return to Austria was a personal one. He had been prosecuted for advising would-be immigrants to leave for Canada. His brush with the Austrian authorities and the month he had spent in their jail remained very fresh in his mind.

The eight families in this contingent of new settlers, totalling forty-two people, did not need a second invitation from Mr. Stanley. They gathered their belongings, tied up in bundles of homespun linen and straw valises, and filed after him from the station platform to the street. They crossed the dusty road to the sidewalk in front of the Strathcona Hotel. It loomed large and stately, and was the main attraction in Strathcona, which boasted a population of fifteen hundred people.

Among the families was Prokip Zhoda, a young man of twenty-three, stockily built and as strong as a bull. His deep-set blue eyes twinkled with amusement when he was happy, but flashed like a steel dagger when he was aroused or provoked. He and his family had come from the village of Borschiew, County Sniatyn, Province of Halychyna, Ukraine.

His wife Anna had been scarcely more than a child when she married him, at the age of fifteen. She was tall and slender, with beautiful brown eyes set in an oval face wreathed with thick, luxurious braids. With Marusia, the fledgling artist, Petro who exuded so much energy, and their nine-month-old baby Lesia, Anna's fortitude was often near the breaking point.

Marusia lagged behind and watched a group of wealthy-

looking people carrying their handsome leather luggage and fancy hatboxes into the hotel. She caught sight of the little girl and her mother whom she had seen on the train. When they came within reach, she put out her hand and timidly touched the ribbons on the girl's bonnet. The little girl stopped and smiled shyly at Marusia, and allowed her to admire her outfit. Marusia was overcome with envy. If only she could trade her babushka for a bonnet like that.

The happy moment ended abruptly. The mother gave Marusia a stern, unfriendly glance, took her daughter firmly by the hand and said, "Come, Annabelle. Don't talk to those people. We must hurry."

Before Annabelle was rushed inside, she looked back, smiling, and waved her hand in farewell. Marusia smiled in return. She was fascinated by their appearance and wished she could follow them into the hotel. But for a poor peasant to spend the night within the walls of the Strathcona Hotel was an unthinkable luxury. Feeling a persistent tug on her arm, she turned and looked into her brother's worried eyes. "Come, Marusia," he pleaded. "Let us catch up to mama and papa or we will be lost." Reluctantly she allowed him to lead her away.

Anna, with Lesia in her arms, was walking a few feet behind the rest of the group. She looked back anxiously. Prokip, seeing that his wife was worried, put down his bundles on the sidewalk and shouted to the children to hurry.

Marusia and Petro started to run towards their father, then stopped once more, this time in front of a grocery store where they gazed in fascination at the window display of household articles, food, and toys.

A little farther down the street was a shoemaker's store. For a moment, through the open door, they watched a cobbler as he repaired a worn boot. He looked up from his work and smiled kindly at the children, dressed in their quaint attire. They smiled back and skipped merrily on their way.

There was so much to see! Next they passed a man leading his horses to be shod at a blacksmith's. The loud clang, clang on the anvil filled the air. Some men were feeding oats to their tethered horses as they waited their turns to have their animals shod. Marusia and Petro covered their ears with their hands to shut out the harsh clinking sound as the glowing metal was

hammered into horseshoes.

Unwilling to miss anything, the children stopped once more in front of another building, bearing a huge sign, LEE'S LAUNDRY. A smaller notice in the window read, "For 25¢ a load will wash and return clothes same day."

The children peered through the dusty window into the shop. What they saw made them look at one another and giggle. They covered their mouths with their hands to stifle their laughter and pressed their noses against the windowpane to watch more closely.

Sam Lee, the owner of the laundry, was bending over a tub in which a load of dirty clothing was soaking. He took a pair of men's long underwear, slapped them onto a tin washboard set inside the tub, and rubbed them up and down until all the soiledspots were removed. His pigtail bobbed up and down as he worked. The children watched, fascinated, until they each felt a firm hand on their shoulders. Their father looked down at them with disapproval.

"I thought you heard me call to follow us," he scolded.

"But papa," replied Marusia, still giggling, "did you ever see a man with a long braid before?"

Sam Lee, the Chinese laundryman, came outside for a breath of fresh air. He dried his wet hands on his apron, wiped the sweat from his brow, then flicked his pigtail into place. He gave the trio a friendly grin before returning to his work.

Prokip made the children walk ahead of him. Petro's roving eyes darted from side to side as he did not want to miss anything. He pointed towards the west, exclaiming, "Marusia, look at those funny houses!" Prokip was also curious. As he followed his son's pointing finger he agreed that the houses were indeed unusual. What they were looking at, a quarter of a mile away on the outskirts of town, were rows of Indian teepees.

The Zhodas finally caught up with the group of travellers who, along with Mr. Stanley, were lined up in front of a low wooden shed.

Mr. Stanley turned and faced his followers. The weary settlers rested their heavy bundles on the ground at their feet and waited patiently for further instructions from their agent. He sensed the feeling of uneasiness among some of the womenfolk who were

obviously afraid of the unknown.

Hoping to allay their fears, he spoke to them in a kind, reassuring voice. "You have come a long way from your homeland to a strange country," he told them. "But fear not, for with diligence and perseverance you will surmount all obstacles." His words of hope banished some of their doubts, and the menfolk put protective, loving arms around their wives who smiled with cautious relief.

Mr. Stanley pointed to the wooden shed in front of them. "You will spend the night here," he said. "There's hot food in the kitchen. For twenty-five cents each you will have a good meal. In the morning you must come to my office to pick out and file claims to your homesteads. After that you can buy your oxen and wagons at the livery stable across the street, and your household supplies and food at the grocery store that you have just passed. You should be ready to leave for your homesteads by early afternoon."

He stepped aside to let the newcomers enter the building. When they were all inside and had put down their belongings, they looked around. The wooden bunks placed along one wall would sleep a few people; the majority, however, would have to bed down on the floor.

Baby Lesia whimpered again. She was hungry. Prokip led his family to the far side of the shed and Anna sat down on a wood bunk to nurse her offspring. The baby suckled her mother's breast contentedly until she had had her fill. Marusia and Petro complained that they, too, were hungry. Prokip took the youngsters by the hands, beckoning Anna to follow, and together the family went to find the dining room.

The kitchen was run by a Frenchman, Pierre Dumas, and his wife Charlotte, who had emigrated to Canada from France in 1895. They had tried to farm a few miles northwest of Edmonton where a French colony was started. But they had had to give up as, for three years in a row, the cold winters and short summers ruined their wheat and oat crops. Instead, they opened a restaurant in the immigration shed in Strathcona to serve the continual flood of new settlers.

The Zhoda family entered the dining hall where most of the other travellers were already seated on benches on both sides of long, roughly hewn wooden tables. Prokip, Anna, and Lesia sat

at the table nearest the door. Marusia and Petro climbed on a bench beside their father.

Charlotte Dumas brought in five enamel plates and mugs, tin forks and spoons, and placed them in front of each person. Marusia's mug had a painting of a red rose. Petro's was plain white. The rose mug caught his fancy; he grabbed the handle of Marusia's mug and refused to let go. Marusia held on tightly with one hand and gave her brother a resounding slap on the wrist. Petro released his hold on the mug and cried out in pain. Displaying a red welt on his smarting hand, he whined, looking for sympathy from his parents. But none was forthcoming. Prokip scowled at them both and, bringing down his clenched fist on the table with a loud thud, threatened, "If you don't behave yourselves you'll have a taste of this medicine." He pointed to the leather belt around his waist, adding, "You will also go to bed without any supper."

Pierre Dumas emerged from the kitchen carrying a large pot of venison stew. All eyes turned to him as he approached the table. Petro, seeking revenge, put out his tongue at his sister and kicked her under the table while no one was looking. Marusia winced from the blow but did not cry out as she did not want to miss her meal. She frowned at her brother in painful defiance.

With a long-handled ladle Pierre Dumas placed a heaping portion of stew on each plate. Charlotte followed him with slabs of rye bread in a basket which she put before them. She then filled each mug with strong black tea from a large, grey enamel teapot.

Anna marvelled at the elaborate way their meal was served to them individually. She felt sorry for Charlotte when she thought of the stacks of dishes she would have to wash. In her former home the prepared food was served in one big dish which the family dipped into with their spoons or forks.

They all tucked into their meal with relish. Anna fed Lesia a piece of bread soaked soft in the venison gravy. Then she drank her hot tea, which restored her energy and brought some colour to her pale cheeks.

When the proprietor returned to collect the dirty dishes Prokip paid him a dollar and a quarter for their supper. Then he took out his pipe, filled it with his own homegrown tobacco brought from Ukraine, lit it, and inhaled deeply.

Marusia watched him exhale the smoke. It curled upwards,

forming little circles and odd shapes before disappearing into the air. Petro's curly blond head began to nod and drooped towards the table. Lesia fretted and fidgeted. But the family did not move until Prokip had finished knocking out the ashes into a nearby spittoon and carefully replaced the pipe in his vest pocket. He then picked up Lesia, guiding them all back to their bunks in the adjoining room.

In the far corner of the shed he found a heap of empty gunnysacks that had contained oats from the livery stable. He spread a few on the floor and the bare bunk, and tossed the rest to a fellow settler who stood nearby.

Anna, Marusia and Lesia made themselves as comfortable as they could on the bunk. Prokip and Petro slept on the floor. The April night was chilly. As there was no heat in the draughty shed, they pulled their homespun blankets and sheepskin coats over them to try to keep warm.

The other families settled down on the remaining bunks and the floor. They were all very tired. Soon dead silence hung over the shed, with only an occasional rasping cough or a snore to disturb the stillness of the night.

Towards dawn, Prokip was awakened by Anna, who was sobbing pitifully. Gently he shook her by the shoulder and tried to waken her, but she continued to cry. He tried again.

Suddenly Anna sat up, and in a sleepy stupor began with her fists to beat Prokip on the chest, crying, "Please, don't! That's all I've got. If you take it, my children will starve. Please, don't!"

The noise awakened some of the travellers. Their curiosity was aroused. Prokip took hold of Anna's hands and held them firmly until she regained full consciousness.

"What is the matter, my love?" he asked, deeply concerned. Anna seldom lost her poise.

Anna shook the last dregs of slumber from her mind and looked around her. Marusia, Petro and Lesia looked at their mother with concern. Lesia began to cry. Marusia comforted her.

Anna looked up at her husband and said, "Oh Prokip, it was horrible." She shuddered. Her lovely face was as white as a sheet. She took a deep breath and continued, "There came this tall skeleton of a man dressed in black and he took my last loaf of bread. I pleaded with him, but he paid no heed."

"It's only a dream, my love," reassured Prokip.

To Anna, the dream was so very real. It haunted her. She furrowed her brow, gave her husband a worried look and said, "Prokip, we do not know what lies ahead of us. I'm so afraid. What will become of us?"

Her outburst affected the women around her. Their faces also registered apprehension and fear.

"Shush, my dear. Don't fret. I am strong and healthy, and I will take care of us all." He moved closer to her and drew her head down to rest on his shoulder.

Soon the mood in the immigration shed returned to normal. Marusia dressed herself without assistance. Petro put on his linen trousers, but had to get help from his father to lace his leather boots and button his shirt. Anna dressed herself and the baby.

After such a good night's rest, the families dressed and one by one washed in a tin basin with cold water from a wooden bucket. There was laughter and light banter among them; also a frequent reprimand from a parent when a stubborn youngster began to get out of hand. When the aroma of food drifted in from the kitchen, they all went eagerly in to breakfast.

From the sale of their land in Austria, and after Prokip had paid for their transportation to Canada, the Zhodas had three hundred and fifty dollars left. The land was a bequest to Anna, an only child, from her father, who had died the previous year. Her mother died in childbirth. This money was a great help, and they were more fortunate than most of the penniless settlers, as they could afford to buy essentials for their start in their new country. They had sufficient funds to purchase a pair of oxen, a wagon, staples, and household supplies. Anna's father had been a man of some means and had been able to pay the necessary tuition fees to send her to school. She had learned to read and to write the Ukrainian language.

After breakfast Prokip went to the livery stable where he selected a pair of oxen and a wagon. He drove up to Mr. Blaine's grocery store and tethered the animals to a wooden pole. Then he crossed the dusty street to the land titles office where, for a sum of ten dollars, he procured his claim to a homestead. "Good luck," said Mr. Stanley, shaking Prokip's hand.

Meanwhile, as Anna and the children made their way to the grocery store, they passed the smithy, where two men were

engaged in a heated argument over the sale of some furs. One of them, a powerful Swede, raised his fist and lashed out at his opponent, who ducked and aimed a hard punch at the Swede's midriff. The other man, a burly Irishman, then pinioned the Swede against the wall. Their argument soon developed into a brawl. The blacksmith watched intently, hammer in hand, in case they needed a referee. He did not want any blood spilled in front of his shop.

Marusia and Petro were scared and clung to Anna's skirt for protection. She, too, was a little apprehensive but did not show it. She hurried the children past without a backward glance.

Most of these adventurers had come from the United States. Others were French, English, Irish, and Scandinavians who made their livelihood from trapping and hunting in the Northwest Territories where fur-bearing animals were plentiful.

In front of Mr. Blaine's store, a group of Indians dressed in buckskin and soft moccasins, their long black hair in braids, lounged against the wall. Their sombre, granitelike features were inscrutable. Their numbers in the region had diminished drastically in recent years, as the smallpox epidemic of 1870 had killed them off in the thousands.

There were already a few established colonies surrounding Edmonton. In the French colony northwest of Edmonton was a Catholic Mission where the children could attend school. Northeast lay a German colony; five miles farther east an English colony; and twenty miles to the southeast, a colony of Swedes. Most of these settlers had come from Manitoba in Red River carts, and the Northwest Territories were opening up slowly.

All of these settlers were amazed and delighted with the richness and fertility of the virgin soil. The Red Fife wheat was hardy and matured well if the fall frosts were late. Oats, which needed a shorter season to ripen, were grown more successfully. Red Fife was a tough wheat but, since it was difficult to grind, its use had not become widespread until the stone grinders in the mills had been replaced by steel rollers.

Due east the land remained primitive. The few nomad Cree Indians who roamed the woods in search of food moved on because the buffalo had become scarce. The Zhodas' homestead lay in this area across the muskeg, bogs, sloughs and small lakes.

This mysterious land — covered with stately poplar and birch trees; thick, prickly rose bushes; wolfberry shrub and willow — was nigh impregnable. It was the home of the loon; the magpie and crow; the grouse, wild duck, and the pheasant; the coyote and the rabbit; the industrious beaver and the muskrat; the owl and the lofty eagle. In the summertime the wild animals played in the tall, lush grass, or settled their differences in fierce battles, undisturbed by man. During the long, cold winter months they foraged for food in snow many feet deep. Only the fittest could survive. This was the land which now lay in defiance, awaiting the men and women who had sufficient courage and determination to challenge its dark, uninhabited depths. Most of the Ukrainian settlers headed east into this empty land.

Prokip waited for Anna and the children in front of Mr. Blaine's store. The tinkle of the door bell announced their arrival. The bright sun had blinded them, and it took a few seconds for their eyes to become accustomed to the dim interior.

The shelves and counters were stocked to capacity with merchandise of every description. In the centre of the store stood a potbellied wood and coal stove. A long line of black metal pipe, suspended by wire from a rafter, led to the chimney on the roof. The supplies were stored in large wooden kegs along the walls and on the counters.

The store owner, Tom Blaine, was an Englishman who had emigrated to Canada in 1899. When he heard the doorbell he emerged from a small anteroom, smiled broadly, and greeted his customers with a cheerful "Good mornin' all."

Although Prokip and Anna did not understand the English language, they realized that this was a friendly greeting, and nodded their heads politely.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mr. Blaine.

Prokip went to the far end of the store where he had spotted a saw hanging on a peg on the wall. Anna pointed to the shelves and the goods on the counter, then to herself, to indicate that she wanted to make some purchases.

The children's main interest was a row of candy jars on the counter. Squealing with delight, Marusia and Petro ran to their mother and begged, "Mama, mama, may we have some of these?"

Anna looked down at the children's eager faces. "You must be patient," she replied. "You will get your reward if you are good."

Large bales of brightly coloured prints on a top shelf caught Anna's fancy. She felt she could afford one little luxury. Seating baby Lesia on the floor, she demonstrated an arm length, then raised nine fingers.

"Ah!" replied Mr. Blaine with a twinkle in his eye. He understood her perfectly. He went to a drawer in the counter, took out an enormous pair of scissors, and proceeded to cut off nine yards from the bale of print Anna had selected. He also produced some needles and thread and laid them in front of her. She smiled at him and picked out what she needed.

Prokip was still busy in the hardware section. Anna picked up Lesia and called to Marusia and Petro to follow her. Together they joined Prokip, who was examining the saw. He also selected a chisel, a plane, nails, and a hammer, and laid them on the counter. Taking an axe from a box on the floor, he ran his fingers expertly along its edge to test the sharpness and put it beside the other items. From a peg on the wall he took down a rifle. "Don't forget a lamp and kerosene," Anna reminded him. 'We will also need two panes of glass and some lime to whitewash the walls in our house after it is built."

Mr. Blaine tallied the bill, wrapped the two panes of glass carefully between several thicknesses of old newspapers, handed them to Prokip and packed the rest of the items into a gunnysack.

Anna looked around for her two older children. Petro's head popped into view from behind a barrel filled with nails, then he ducked out of sight again. Marusia was tiptoeing from barrel to barrel, looking behind each one for her brother. What fun it was to play hide-and-seek in Mr. Blaine's store!

Petro heard her creep up and slowly backed away on all fours. He tried to hide behind another wooden crate, but tripped and, with a loud thud, tumbled into a large box containing a torn sack of wheat flour. A cloud of white dust filled the air and nearly choked him. He spat and sputtered, covering his smarting eyes with his hands. His clothes and hair were white from the flour dust. He let out a shriek as he tried to struggle out of the deep box. Marusia thought this so funny that all she could do

was stand there and laugh at her brother's predicament.

Prokip hurried to the scene, grabbed Petro's hand and pulled him out. Then he boxed his ears and led him over to his mother at the counter. His ears hurt and his stifled sobs filled the room as he tried to brush the flour from his clothes.

Prokip and Anna chose their groceries with care. They needed basic staples such as a hundred pounds of flour; twenty pounds each of salt pork, rolled oats, sugar, and onions; two boxes of compressed yeast; ten pounds of salt; and a small barrel of herrings. By the time they had completed their purchases, the children were becoming impatient.

"How about some candy?" coaxed Petro as he wiped the tears from his chubby cheek. He tugged at Anna's skirt and looked up wistfully into her face. Marusia waited at the candy counter, gazing longingly at the array of jars and licking her lips. She hoped that her parents would not punish them by forbidding them a candy treat.

"You have both been very naughty. I'll have to think about it," reprimanded Anna. But she relented as she saw Marusia's woeful face. "Which ones do you want?" she asked.

The children pointed eagerly to the jar of candy canes and multicoloured lollipops. Anna bought three canes, giving them one each. Petro and Marusia shouted "Thank you, mama!" as they took the candy, and Lesia gurgled with delight.

A display of white enamelware with a rose design caught Anna's eye. She walked to the table and examined the plates and mugs. Prokip saw how much she wanted them and, although their finances were by this time limited, he allowed her to buy six plates and six mugs, plus six each of tin forks, knives, spoons, and teaspoons.

Their purchases were now complete. They carried the merchandise over to the main counter where their other items were spread out. Mr. Blaine wrapped the goods and calculated the bill. The total amount owing was fifteen dollars.

After Prokip had paid for the claim to the homestead, the oxen, wagon, and the groceries, he had five dollars left. But he was happy. Turning to Anna he said, "You and the children wait here. After I have filled the barrel with water from the well over there, I will bring the wagon to the front of the store."

"Come children, we must not block the doorway," said Anna,

leading them to a corner where, while waiting for Prokip to return, they sat and watched other families select supplies.

Prokip did not take long, and soon he and Anna were loading their purchases into the wagon. Then they all climbed aboard and settled themselves as comfortably as possible. After a stop at the railway station to pick up the homemade wooden trunk containing the rest of their belongings, they returned to the immigration shed to gather their bundles wrapped in homespun blankets.

At last, they were ready for the journey. But Prokip decided to make one short detour to catch a glimpse of bustling Edmonton on the river's far side.

The wagon rolled past the livery stable, where the horses were stirring up clouds of dust with their hooves. The other settlers busied themselves with loading their wagons in front of Mr. Blaine's store, while the rows of teepees stood like sentinels to the west. The wind carried towards them the occasional bark of a dog and the voices of the Indian children romping happily in the tall grass.

Walter's ferry, the only means of transportation across the river, stood at what is now the portion of the river between 105 Street and the High Level Bridge. The price to carry a single wagon and team across the North Saskatchewan was twenty-five cents.

Although Strathcona boasted a population of approximately fifteen hundred, that of Edmonton was nearly twice as large. Hotels, banks, and small stores lined the dirt streets of Edmonton's burgeoning business district. There was also a newspaper printing office that issued the *Edmonton Bulletin* regularly twice a week.

To the east of the ford, high up on the bank of the river, stood McDougall Church, where every Sunday worshippers prayed to their Maker for the redemption of their souls. There were also a flour and a grist mill, and a telegraph office that could send a wire as far as Winnipeg.

Below these buildings stood the renowned Fort Edmonton. A detachment of the North West Mounted Police stationed there brought law and order to an otherwise lawless Northwest Territories. The palisades of the fort glistened in the afternoon sun.

A huge sawmill and an electric light plant were located in the

river flats. The sawmill obtained ample supplies of lumber from the tall stands of trees in the surrounding area. Wires from the electric plant were strung up to the town above, providing electricity to some of the homes and businesses. Big steamships plied the river, bringing goods from Winnipeg.

Prokip Zhoda and his family absorbed the sights, then turned their wagon to the east. As they rounded a large clump of willows and a tall stand of poplar and birch, the town of Edmonton disappeared from view. Except for the creak of wagon wheels, and annoyed snorts from the oxen as they whisked away pestering horseflies, the sounds of civilization gradually died away and were heard no more.

2

The Zhoda wagon jounced along a well-worn trail until it ended abruptly a short distance away. Ahead lay rough and perilous terrain. Mounds of dirt dug up by gophers and moles, and hidden stones in the tangled dead grass, almost tilted the wagon on its side on several occasions.

"Hold on tightly," shouted Prokip, "or you will be thrown off."

A mile ahead they came to a large slough where Prokip halted the oxen, released his hold on the reins, and let them have their fill of water. He knew that if he tried to cross the slough he would get stuck in the mud. "We'll have to go right around this," he said. So the bumpy ride was prolonged for yet another mile.

Dusk began to fall. By this time Anna and the children were very tired and their muscles ached. Lesia began to cry. "Prokip," Anna pleaded, "perhaps we should stop here and rest."

"All right," replied Prokip as he drove the wagon into a glade of trembling aspen which provided a welcome shelter. "Yes, we will spend the night here."

He climbed down from the wagon, tied the team to a tree, then helped his family to alight. The oxen grazed hungrily on tufts of new green grass that peeped out of the ground.

It felt good to touch the earth again. They all stretched their tired limbs and relaxed for a while. Then Prokip turned to the children and said, "Come. Help me pick some dry kindling and wood so we can build a fire." Obediently Marusia and Petro followed their father into the forest.

Anna spread a homespun blanket under a tall poplar. She placed Lesia on it and secured her to the trunk with a long sash. She then began to gather some large stones which she arranged in a circle. Prokip and the children soon returned with arms full of dry kindling. Anna made a bed of dry grass and twigs in the centre of the circle, covered them with some crumpled paper, and lit the heap. The fire caught and began to burn briskly. They piled more dry wood onto the fire and warmed themselves beside it, for the evening air had turned cool. They watched until the wood had burned into a pile of hot embers.

Anna brought a tin pot and a frying pan from the wagon. She filled the pot with water from a nearby slough and set it on the hot coals until it came to a boil. Very soon the family was able to enjoy a hearty meal of fried bacon with thick slices of bread, washed down by strong black tea.

A magpie was making its raucous call in a tree overhead. Marusia and Petro mimicked the sound with great delight. Prokip quietly smoked his pipe. Anna sat on the blanket, cradled Lesia in her arms, and let her suckle her breast contentedly.

The sun sank slowly in the west. Its crimson rays illuminated half the sky. It was a breathtaking, beautiful sight. Prokip looked skyward and predicted that the next day would be windy. The air was filled with the croak of frogs in the slough. A few yards from them a fat hare scurried past. Prokip would have liked to catch it to make a stew, but the evening had grown too dark. He unharnessed the oxen and fettered them so that they could not stray from camp during the night.

He checked the embers and found they were still red-hot. Fearing that the rising wind would fan them into a forest fire while the family slept, he threw a few potfuls of water to extinguish them.

Turning to his family he said firmly, "It's time for bed. Up into the wagon with you."

As he was lifting Marusia into the wagon box, she flung her arms around his neck, squeezed him hard, and kissed him on the

cheek. "Thank you, papa," she murmured. "I love you very much."

Petro clambered in after his sister without assistance. Turning to his father, he boasted, "Look papa. I did it all by myself."

"That's my little man. I knew you didn't need help," replied Prokip proudly. Anna handed Lesia to her husband and climbed into the wagon after the children. Prokip followed with the baby, and the family bedded down together. The children fell asleep almost at once.

The sun had slipped below the horizon, and darkness settled over the forest and the pioneer family. The wind calmed down, and an eerie silence enveloped them, broken only by the lonely, mournful howl of a coyote in the distance. Anna shivered and drew her sheepskin coat more closely around her. Prokip sensed her fear and put a reassuring hand on her shoulder, whispering tenderly, "You, too, better get some sleep. We have another hard day ahead of us."

"I will try," she replied.

For a long time Anna watched the moon through the branches of the trees as it sailed across the heavens. She wondered if the same moon was shining on her beloved Ukraine, where spring arrived in early March. She could almost smell the sweet perfume of the apple and cherry blossoms, feel the lush green grass on her bare feet, and the warm balmy breeze on her cheek. But now they were in the middle of nowhere, with no other human near. How different from the thickly populated villages on the plains and steppes of beautiful Ukraine.

The floor of the wagon was hard and cold. She missed the warmth of their old thatched hut, and, praying silently, she asked the Good Lord to protect her family. The last thing she heard was the hoot of an owl. After a while she drifted off into a sound, untroubled sleep.

Prokip was up before the first rosy haze of the morning sun appeared on the horizon. He had a brisk fire going by the time Anna and the children were awake. "Get up," he called. "It's too fine a morning to sleep in."

The children rubbed the sleep from their eyes as they climbed down from the wagon. Anna smiled, gave baby Lesia to Prokip, and went to fetch water from the slough for their morning tea.

After breakfast Prokip extinguished the fire, harnessed the oxen, and the family was once more on its way.

The first three miles were uneventful. Prokip's prediction that the day would be windy had proven correct. The wagon creaked as it rumbled on, climbing a steep hill. As they began the descent, Prokip reined in the oxen to prevent them from breaking into a run. A fast-flowing creek lay across their path, and Prokip brought the wagon to a stop. The oxen strained their necks for a drink, so he let them have their fill.

"Please hold the reins, Anna," said Prokip as he climbed down from the wagon. "Keep the children by your side. I'll go downstream a little way and see if I can find a better place to cross."

Anna took the reins and, holding them firmly with both hands, begged, "Hurry, Prokip. Don't leave us alone too long."

A quarter of a mile downstream, Prokip came upon a beaver dam spanning the creek. He was greatly relieved. They should be able to cross without too much difficulty. He returned to the wagon and drove to the foot of the dam.

"Whoa-whoa!" he commanded. The oxen obeyed and the wagon halted at the edge of the dam. It would be a fairly dangerous crossing but Prokip was stubborn and determined. He must overcome all obstacles.

"Anna, you and the children come down and stretch your legs. We *may* have to spend the night on this side, but we'll try to get across before dark. I will build a bridge of tree trunks over the dam, but it will take me some time. Please hand me the axe."

Anna obeyed, and Prokip felled some huge poplars. He unhitched the oxen, tethered one to a tree and, with the other ox, pulled the poplars lengthwise across the dam to the opposite side.

Battling the strong wind, Anna carried the cut-off branches, laid them over the logs, and helped to form a rough road. There was only one hour of daylight left.

"We'll try to cross right away," said Prokip. "We can have our supper and sleep on the other side. You and the children go on foot ahead of me. I'll follow you."

Anna clutched Lesia in her arms, and Marusia and Petro followed stepping gingerly over the rickety bridge. They waited on the other side for Prokip. He held the halter of the stronger

ox in one hand and spoke in a low, firm voice. "Come Syvyj, come on boy," he urged, as he pulled gently on the halter and walked slowly ahead of the team.

The animals were uneasy. They stepped onto the log bridge then halted. Prokip pulled a little harder on the halter. "Come on, boy, come on," he called in a louder tone. This time the beasts obeyed and managed to haul the wagon over the creek without mishap.

In 1901, spring came early, with a promise of budding leaves and green grass before the middle of May. The third day of their journey was hot. The oxen plodded along more slowly, their tails whisking furiously at the blackflies that swarmed over them. Anna and the children hit out right and left at the pests. They were all thirstier than usual and frequently gulped drinking water from the wooden keg strapped to the underside of the wagon. The water was warm and stale. They used slough and creek water only for cooking.

Another muskeg lay in their path, lengthening their journey by several more miles. A startled wild duck flew off its nest as the team approached. The animals balked and started to run. Prokip managed to bring them to a stop a few hundred yards ahead. He then retraced his steps to where the duck had startled them, and found its nest with twelve blue-white eggs in it. That evening the Zhodas supplemented their meal of bacon with scrambled eggs.

As they were preparing for bed, they were startled by the sound of human voices a short distance away. As the voices grew louder, Anna drew her children closer to her. With a harsh crackling of underbrush, a dozen or so Indians on horseback appeared. They had smelled the smoke of the fire and had come to investigate. Prokip held his rifle ready.

But they were a friendly group, on their way to an Indian village on the Athabasca River. The children and Anna hung back in fear, but the visitors merely grunted a greeting and rode off into the gathering dusk. Prokip did not relax his vigil until daybreak. It was the fifth day since they had left Edmonton; they had struggled many miles through the rough, unexplored country.

"We should reach our homestead before nightfall if all goes well," said Prokip.

"I do hope so," Anna replied. "It will be so good for the children to get out of the wagon." Marusia and Petro were delighted at the thought of reaching the end of their uncomfortable journey.

At noon they were surprised to see a young couple on foot, leading a brindled cow, heavy with calf, on a rope. They were carrying their worldly possessions in sacks on their backs.

"Whoa-whoa!" shouted Prokip as he reined in the oxen. Leaning down towards the couple, he introduced himself. "I am Prokip Zhoda. My family and I are on our way to our homestead."

"I am Mykhajlo Plotkov," replied the tall, thin man, clad in homespun trousers held up by a stout string around his waist. "This is my wife, Lena," he added as he extended his hand to Prokip. Lena nodded her blonde head in acknowledgement. "We, too, are on our way to our homestead," Mykhajlo continued. "We could not afford a team, only the cow."

"How far are you going?" asked Prokip. "May I see your claim? My Anna can read," he added proudly.

Mykhajlo pulled out the title and claim from his jacket pocket and handed it to Anna. Prokip passed his own claim to his young fellow countryman. "I learned to read a little in the old country," Mykhajlo said. He studied the claim with interest. "What do you know!" he exclaimed excitedly. "We're going to be neighbours. We are both in the same range and township." Anna confirmed this fact.

"In that case, you'd better put your bags into our wagon and climb in yourselves. Your feet must be very sore," said Prokip. "You can tie the cow to the back of the wagon."

"Thank you," Lena replied. She did not need a second invitation. Pulling up her long skirt above her knees, she stepped onto the wagon wheel spokes and clambered in. After the cow had been securely tied to the wagon, Mykhajlo swung his strong, agile body into the seat beside Prokip.

The two families found that they had much in common. The Zhodas' hardships in western Ukraine had been no less severe than those suffered by the Plotkovs under the Romanov regime in Russian-occupied Ukraine. As they chatted, the time went by swiftly, and on the afternoon of the same day, at approximately five o'clock, the weary travellers reached the Zhoda homestead.

3

"We're home, my love," cried Prokip jubilantly. He reined the oxen to a halt, and they all stood up in the wagon. Prokip was the first to alight. He stood still for a moment and looked around him. He stood in the rich softness of dead, brown grass of the past summer. "What a waste of good hay," thought Prokip. He saw new green blades of grass peep above the ground. Envisioning stacks of sweet-smelling hay, he was heartened with the knowledge that his animals would not go hungry come winter.

He was pleased with the flat terrain around him. It was dotted with tall, dense stands of trembling aspen. How different from the plains and steppes of Ukraine, which were now stripped of their wealth of forest. Here was more than an ample supply of wood to keep the fires going.

A deer stepped out from the dense undergrowth of wild rose brambles and wolfberry at the edge of the forest and lifted high its head. Its nostrils quivered as the smell of the strangers and beasts came strong to it on the breeze. It snorted in disdain, turned around, flicked its tail and disappeared again into the deep forest. "Fresh venison," thought Prokip.

He stood a minute longer and listened. A gentle murmur of running water was like music to his ears. He was listening to the spring runoff of melting snow in a nearby creek. "Abundant

supply of water," he thought.

Then he took Lesia in his arms and helped Anna to the ground. The children jumped down quickly after her.

A few feet away, a gopher came out of its hole to investigate the commotion created by these intruders, then popped back out of sight. It soon nosed its way out again, and sat up on its haunches by a mound of earth freshly excavated by its strong paws.

Prokip rushed towards the pile of black loam and fell on his knees. He picked up a handful of dirt and let it run through his fingers. The gopher dived back into its hole with a frightened squeak.

"Look, Anna, this good earth is as rich and as black as the soil back home in Austria," he cried. Then he slowly rose to his feet. He stood for a moment, looked around him and raised his hands heavenwards, crying jubilantly, "This vast piece of land is ours, one hundred and sixty acres of it!"

He grabbed his wife around the waist and danced in a circle with her, his blue eyes shining with joy. The children followed suit and pranced around in the grass. Mykhajlo and Lena looked on, greatly amused. They clapped their hands.

"Calm down, Prokip, calm down," said Anna breathlessly as she disengaged herself from his arms. "We have a lot of hard work ahead of us." A look of sadness spread over her face.

"But we are free, Anna, *free*. Do you know what that means?" cried Prokip as he gently shook her by the shoulder. "The Austrian *pomishchyky* won't breathe down our necks anymore."

"I cannot help how I feel. I have suffered too much pain," replied Anna. Their former hard life again became very vivid in her mind. She began to cry.

Lena put a comforting arm around her frail shoulders. "There, there, my dear. Don't cry. Our lot was just as bad. The Russian tsar had no mercy for the Ukrainian peasants. We are lucky to be in a free country."

Anna wiped the tears from her eyes with the corner of her apron and managed a weak smile. Before dusk could descend upon them, the two families prepared themselves for the night.

Prokip unhitched the oxen from the wagon, unharnessed and watered them, and bedded the animals down nearby. It had

grown chilly and an east wind began to blow. Mykhajlo quickly had a brisk fire going, and the children moved closer to the flames to keep warm. Anna laid Lesia on a blanket on the grass near the fire and instructed the older children to keep an eye on her.

Lena helped her carry their food supplies from the wagon, and together they prepared the evening meal. When night fell, the two women and the children climbed into makeshift beds in the wagon, while the men made themselves comfortable on the ground beside the fire, taking turns to feed it throughout the night.

The next morning, after a hasty breakfast, the men left camp to explore their domain. Prokip Zhoda's 160 acres, with the surveyor's stakes firmly embedded in the ground, adjoined Mykhajlo Plotkov's homestead. It was some time before the families realized that they were seven miles from their nearest neighbours to the south.

A flowing creek cut the northeast corner of Prokip's homestead. The tall poplars along its bank would provide good shelter from the icy blasts of the winter winds, while the high bank of the creek would make a good shelter for a hut. It was here that Prokip decided to build the family *burdey*. Mykhajlo chose a site for his new home a quarter of a mile away.

It was noon when the two men returned to the wagon. "I have found an ideal spot for our burdey," said Prokip. "You'll like it, Anna."

Mykhajlo pondered for a moment, then turned to Prokip and suggested, "Why don't we pool our resources and build one hut at a time? I'll help you and then you can help me. What do you say, Prokip?"

Prokip slapped his thigh and cried, "It's a splendid idea!" The two women were equally delighted.

"We'll break camp and head for the creek," said Prokip. He hitched the oxen to the wagon and the women tied the cow behind. Then they climbed aboard for the trip to the well-sheltered spot by the creek.

"It's beautiful here," Anna exclaimed. "You have chosen well, Prokip." Prokip beamed with pride.

When they reached their destination, Marusia and Petro began to explore their new homeland. They chased each other around

until they grew tired, then sat down under a tall poplar to rest.

Marusia spotted a large, fluffy white feather, shed by an owl or an eagle — perhaps in flight — in the tall grass. She picked it up carefully and held it in her hand. Her face grew sad as a picture of the beautiful woman and the little girl on the train flashed before her eyes. She longed to see them once again. But she brushed away the thought and jumped quickly to her feet as she said, "Come, Petro. I'll race you back to the wagon."

A southeasterly wind sprang up and the sun hid behind a dark cloud. With a worried look, Prokip scanned the menacing sky and predicted rain. "We must build a shelter," warned Mykhajlo. He took the axe from the wagon and walked quickly towards a stand of poplars.

Prokip turned the wagon so that its broad side faced the wind. Mykhajlo laid the cut tree trunks side by side, on a slant, and placed more cut branches on top, leaving a small opening above and beneath the wagon for an entrance.

Prokip then cut blocks of turf and laid them on the branches to keep out the rain. Anna worked with the men while Lena watched the children and prepared a meal.

The southeast wind grew stronger and the weather turned colder. The ominous dark clouds hung low across the sky. It began to drizzle.

"Mykhajlo, will you get some dry kindling to store under the wagon for the morning's fire?" Prokip asked. "I'll tend to the animals."

He led the oxen and the cow to a dip in the bank of the creek that was sheltered by tall birches and poplars and thick underbrush.

The drizzle turned into a steady downpour that drummed down late into the night. The women and children made themselves as comfortable and as warm as they could in the wagon. The men slept under the wagon with the food supplies.

Soon after midnight the rain turned into sleet, and by morning four inches of snow lay on the ground. But the skies cleared at noon and the sun came out. So did the hungry and cramped travellers. How glad they were to leave such uncomfortable quarters.

Mykhajlo built a fire, the women prepared a meal, and Prokip fed the animals. The two older children romped happily in the

melting slush. Marusia traced pictures with a long stick in patches of snow. She was most annoyed when the menfolk tramped over her artwork and ruined it.

There was no time to be idle. The men soon began to build their first burdey. It was only a dugout in the bank of the creek, which provided three walls. The fourth wall and roof were fashioned from young saplings. They covered the roof with sod and slough hay and filled the chinks in the wall with mud and grass mixed with water to form a soft, pliable substance. It was musty, wet, and cold inside this hut, but it was home, and Anna tried to make it as comfortable as possible.

Lena remained behind with Anna when the men went to Mykhajlo's homestead to start building his burdey. There was a patch of sparse turf along the bank of the creek. Anna dug up large pieces, shook out the dirt, and threw them in a pile to dry. Prokip had made a crude rake from a young sapling, drilling holes in the crossbar and fitting them with wooden teeth. While Anna was digging, Lena raked the soil to level out the ruts and to prepare a bed for the planting of seeds and potatoes.

After she had finished digging, Anna went to the old wooden trunk she had brought from Ukraine and pulled out a small bundle containing some precious cabbage, beet, carrot, pea, and onion seeds. She had purchased a small pail of potatoes at Blaine's store in Strathcona.

Petro and Marusia danced on each side of their mother, tugging at her skirt and begging, "Mama, mama, may *we* plant something, please?"

"We'll start with the potatoes," Anna replied. "I'll dig some holes in the ground with my hoe. Now you two place half a potato in each hole. But make sure that the cut side of the potato is placed downward, and the eye on top, or it will not grow."

Anna made her rows of holes as straight as she could. The children followed her, filling each hole carefully with half a potato. Lena brought up the rear, raking the soil over each potato and pressing it down firmly with her feet.

Next, rows of peas were planted near to the potatoes; then the carrot, beet, bean, and cabbage seeds. Long rows of corn completed the garden layout. Anna reserved a few rows for the transplanting of tobacco plants that Prokip had already started from seed. With civilization so far away, he would have to grow

his own tobacco or give up his beloved pipe.

The women and children stood back and viewed their work with pride. Anna knew that in order to survive in this new land one would have to work hard or starve.

The burdey was quite comfortable during the summer months, but since Prokip realized that it would not be warm enough in the winter, he started work on a log cabin.

Mykhajlo helped Prokip cut down poplars, trim the branches, and saw them into logs. The oxen dragged the tree trunks out of the bush to the open plain. Prokip expertly debarked and cut the logs so that they would fit into each other at the end of each wall. Soon a twelve-by-twelve-foot cabin began to take shape.

"Where do you want the window, Anna?" asked Prokip when the walls of the house were four feet high.

"In the south wall, please," she replied. Anna was very proud of her rising home. The walls were now seven feet high and it was time to put on the roof, which was formed by laying logs close together and supporting them with beams. Slabs of cut sod covered with slough hay were placed over the cracks to keep out the rain and cold.

"Tomorrow I will dig for clay," said Prokip. "Mykhajlo, will you scythe the grass? We'll mix the two together and plaster the walls and floor."

Next morning, when the sun had dried the dew on the tall, dry grass, Mykhajlo was busy with the scythe. With long, strong strokes he felled the grass ahead of him in neat rows. When he had finished, he hung up the scythe high in a tree out of the children's reach. No risk could be taken to cause an accident, as medical help was far away.

While Mykhajlo was cutting the grass, Prokip dug for clay some twenty feet from the bank of the creek. Mykhajlo finished his task first and joined him.

"Put the top black dirt carefully in one heap," said Prokip. "I'll use it later to pile around the cabin to keep out the draughts."

After taking off three feet of topsoil, they came to the yellow clay beneath. Both men took turns digging.

"We'll collect enough to plaster one wall at a time," said Prokip. "If we dig too much before we can use it, the clay will get too dry."

"I've asked Anna and Lena to rake the grass into small mounds," replied Mykhajlo. "We'll pile it onto blankets and haul it over here."

"Splendid," said Prokip as he lowered himself into the pit. When the bucket was full, Mykhajlo grabbed the rope, which was secured to a large rock, and hand over hand he heaved up the bucket and dumped its contents a few feet away. Then he spread out the clay in a circle for easier mixing.

The two men worked well together and neither thought of stopping until dusk. Then Prokip decided to call it a day. "Let down the rope and haul me up," he said.

Prokip tied the rope to his spade, which he propped against the wall of the pit, stepped on its handle, and held out his hand to Mykhajlo, who pulled him up onto solid ground. Then Prokip hauled the spade and rope up after him.

The next morning the adults were up before the sun peeped over the eastern horizon. The children were still sleeping.

Mykhajlo, Anna, and Lena raked the mounds of dry grass onto the blanket and dragged it to the clay pit, while Prokip went down to the creek where the oxen were bedded. He harnessed Grey and led him up the embankment towards the pit.

Prokip tied Grey to a tree and, with his hoe, spread the clay in an even round heap. The women filled buckets with water from the creek and placed them beside the pile of clay. Then they spread the grass evenly over the clay and watered it down.

Prokip led the ox in a circle over the grass and clay, the animal's hooves kneading it into the consistency of soft dough. They were lucky to have a beast; otherwise they would have had to do the mixing with their bare feet.

The clay mixture was soon ready for filling in the holes of the cabin walls. They used the tailgate of the wagon to haul it to the door of the hut.

Anna and Lena plastered the inside of the walls first. They dampened their hands in a bucket of water, slapped a handful of clay into the holes and chinks, and smoothed it down to make the coating on the wall as even as possible.

It took a whole day to complete the inside walls, and by nighttime they were ready to rest their aching bodies.

When they had dug down to a depth of five feet, they struck sand. The hole would have to be widened from its present four

feet if they wanted more clay.

Prokip walked to the pit and looked down into it. Suddenly he gave an excited yell. "Come quickly! Just look here!"

Mykhajlo ran to the edge of the pit, peered in and exclaimed, "Water! Clean and clear water!"

"Thank God, we have a well," said Prokip. "We must make a wooden cribbing before it caves in."

The next two days were spent in cutting and fitting poplar trunks to form a cribbing, three feet square and eight feet deep, with an overhead support to hold a rope and pail.

Within a week, the plastering of the exterior of the cabin was completed and the glass window was in place. A rough door of logs, hanging on leather thongs, completed the dwelling.

A second layer of clay, sand, and dung was spread over the interior walls which, after drying, were ready to be whitewashed. Prokip dug a three-foot-square hole in the centre of the room, with a trapdoor made of saplings. This cellar would keep their vegetables from freezing during the winter.

By this time, their communal larder was nearly empty. The potatoes and other vegetables were not yet ready, and only a few pounds of flour remained. There were seven mouths to feed, and everyone was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger.

"Before we start on your cabin, Mykhajlo, I'll have to do some hunting," said Prokip. He took down his rifle from the wall and examined it carefully. "You take one of the oxen, the axe, and the saw, and start cutting down the trees on your homestead."

The next morning Prokip slung his gun over his shoulder and took off into the deep forest. Fortunately, wild game and rabbits were plentiful; without them the settlers would have starved.

By late afternoon Prokip had bagged a string of grouse and two rabbits. He had also filled his shirt with red top mushrooms. He was home before dusk, and laying his booty on the bench outside the cabin he called, "Look what I've got here. I'll skin these rabbits, Anna, while you pluck the birds."

"What's that in your shirt, papa?" asked the children as they jumped up and down with impatient curiosity.

"*Hryby*," he replied. "There are lots of them growing along the banks of the creek. I didn't think we'd find them here. They are different from the ones that grow in Ukraine."

"Good," said Anna. "We'll pick some more tomorrow. I can

dry them and store them for the winter. Marusia, fetch me an empty gunnysack, please. We'll save all these feathers and down from the birds. When we have enough they will make soft pillows."

The settlers enjoyed a feast that night, served on a rough table that Prokip had made from logs and tree stumps. Anna cooked the grouse in a pot of water over an open fire and seasoned them with salt, pepper, and diced onions. She also made griddle cakes from flour and yeast.

When the families were gathered around the table, Prokip announced, "I will have Petro say grace tonight." He folded his hands across his chest and bowed his head in reverence. The rest followed suit.

In a low, solemn voice the young lad recited, "O Father in Heaven, thank You for the food which we have received today.We place our care in Your hands, dear Lord. Bless this house andthe people that are in it."

After supper the men skinned the rabbits and stretched out the pelts on a debarked poplar log to dry. After Prokip had smoked his pipe, he washed the rabbit meat and placed it in brine to keep it fresh.

There was great consternation next morning when it was discovered that Sunflower, the cow, had broken her tether and was nowhere in sight.

"I'm sure she can't have gone far," said Prokip. "I'll follow the east bank of the creek and you, Mykhajlo, go the other way. Whoever finds her first, yell loud and clear."

Marusia and Petro offered to help but Prokip refused. He was afraid they would get lost in the thick underbrush.

The two men parted at the creek, each going in opposite directions. A quarter of a mile downstream, Mykhajlo found Sunflower standing patiently while her newborn heifer, unsteady on wobbly legs, nuzzled at her udder in search of nourishment. Mykhajlo was elated. In his excitement his voice roared out like a cannon boom. Prokip heard him half a mile away. He rushed back to the scene.

In the meantime, Mykhajlo had half carried and pushed the newborn calf up the steep embankment and onto level ground. The protective Sunflower followed close behind, switching her tail vigorously to chase away the hordes of pesty mosquitoes

that tormented her. At the same time she kept a watchful eye on her offspring.

The birth of the calf was indeed a great event. The children thought of how many delicious mugs of milk they could drink, but Anna reminded them that Sunflower belonged to the Plotkovs, and that the small calf came first. Seeing the wistful faces of Marusia and Petro, Lena reassured them. "You have shared your bread with us," she said. "I promise to share our milk with you."

The next month passed by quickly. Prokip and Mykhajlo were busy building the Plotkovs' cabin, and by the time they had moved into their quarters Lena was heavy with child. Although she was unhappy to leave the Zhoda family, she was relieved at the thought that at last she would be alone with her husband.

One day in the latter part of July, Prokip took down the scythe from its perch in the tree and proceeded to sharpen the blade with a whetstone. "The winter months will soon be upon us," he told Anna, "and the animals will need hay. I'll start on the tall grass in the southwest corner."

At that moment Mykhajlo arrived, and after a brief exchange of greetings, asked, "Prokip, may I borrow your gun to hunt with? Our food supply has run low."

"Just help yourself," he replied. "It's hanging on the wall of the burdey. You may also have the scythe after I have finished cutting my hay."

"Thank you, my friend," replied Mykhajlo.

The swish, swish of the scythe as it cut through the succulent grass, and the clang, clang of the whetstone could be heard for a whole week. Prokip's arms ached, and new blisters formed on his calloused hands from his fast hold on the handle of the scythe. Sweat and dust blinded his eyes, but he worked on feverishly, as if possessed. There was so much to do before winter arrived, and he was beginning to tire.

The summer days had been long and hot. The hay had dried well and was now a rich dark green. There had been no rain to wash away the nutrients or to discolour it.

Anna was just as busy. She raked the hay into rows, which she then rolled into heaps. She and Prokip loaded the wagon together, using forks made from stout willow saplings. They then hauled the hay to the homesite and stacked it into rounded

ricks to be used to feed the oxen during the winter.

In mid-August they were able to enjoy fresh vegetables from the garden. But for a short time only. There was not enough produce to feed two families. Anna picked and dried the pods of peas and beans. She then shelled them, storing the kernels for next year's planting.

Prokip was never still a minute. Although tired out, he knew that he had to keep on working like a mule to ensure his family's survival.

One day he said to Anna, "It's time for me to build you a *pich*. Winter will be on us in no time. We'll have to keep warm or freeze to death."

He started to work on the oven immediately, chopping down some supple young willows and stripping them of branches and twigs. He piled them neatly before tying them together with rope. Then he swung the load on his sturdy shoulders to carry them home.

The pich was built in the corner of the cabin on a platform of debarked logs. Prokip's skilled fingers wove the willows into a half circle, which he fastened to the platform. This was level with the bottom of the oven. Between the wall of the hut and the pich he left an opening three feet wide, with sufficient room for the children to sleep on cold nights.

Next he chiselled a hole through the inside wall, leaving an opening for the smoke to pass through to the outside. The willow structure was plastered with a thick layer of clay and dry grass mixed together.

The heat from inside the pich made the clay walls as hard as cement, and fireproof. Prokip left an opening in the front of the oven large enough for the clay cooking pots to be put through. A flat slab of stone was used as a door. Split dry logs and kindling were stacked underneath.

However primitive it was, Anna felt very proud of her new oven. It was an added luxury, and she was thankful that she would no longer have to stoop over a tripod in the open air.

Her first task was to bake bread. She placed a large wooden bowl on the table, put a handful of rye flour, added a mugful of potato liquid, and beat the contents vigorously.

Marusia and Petro knelt on the bench, chins propped in their hands and elbows resting on the tabletop, and watched her with

interest. Lesia managed to pull herself up from the floor and cling to the bench.

"What are you doing, mama?" asked Petro, poking his finger into the dish and licking it.

"I'm preparing a starter dough for the bread I will bake tomorrow," she replied. She added a little sugar and two cups of lukewarm water to the flour and potato mixture, into which she crumbled a round cake of compressed dry yeast. Then she covered the bowl with a cloth. During the night the dough would rise and ferment, and in the morning she would add more flour, knead it, and leave it to rise again until it doubled in bulk before forming it into loaves.

The morning after the oven was completed, Prokip lit a fire inside it and tested the draught that carried the smoke through the chimney to the outside. He was satisfied with his handiwork.

"Now I'll have to start breaking land in the southwest corner," he said. "We must keep to our contract with the government. It's not enough to pay only the ten dollars for the homestead. Our quota of a broken acreage has to be met."

Anna took her husband's arm as they stood in the doorway and gazed at the vast plain with its patches that were free of brush, and at the large stands of willows and poplars. "With God's help we can do it," she said.

Prokip smiled at the confident expression on his wife's face. As he looked at the land ahead of him, he could almost see a field of golden heads of Fife swaying in the breeze. He picked up his axe, slung it over his shoulder, and with renewed vigour walked briskly towards the bush. Marusia and Petro played happily in the long grass outside the cabin, and Lesia laughed gleefully as she crawled after them, trying to catch them.

That evening the Plotkovs paid the Zhodas a neighbourly visit. They brought the children some milk, and Anna gave them vegetables in exchange.

"My time is drawing near," she confided to Anna. "I don't sleep well and I find it hard to pick up stumps in the clearing. But Mykhajlo is very kind and considerate. He has finished building my pich. I will be able to use it tomorrow."

"You'll find it such a relief not to have to cook out-of-doors anymore," said Anna.

The two men sat outside the cabin on a bench and discussed the work that had yet to be done to clear the primitive land around them.

"You may use one of my oxen to pull out the trees and stumps, and I will use the other one," offered Prokip.

"Thank you, Prokip. You are a true friend and I am grateful," Mykhajlo replied. "It is becoming too hard for Lena to help me in the field."

The next morning Prokip was up with the dawn. The sound of the whetstone on his axe blade again rang loud in the still air, intermingling with the lonely cry of a loon in a nearby slough. It was going to be a sweltering day. The mist was thick and heavy as it rose from the slough and dissipated into the air.

After a full two hours of work Prokip returned to the hut, leaning his axe against the door. Anna was busy kneading her batch of bread. When she saw him enter she covered the dough with a clean white cloth, washed her hands, and asked, "Prokip, would you like your breakfast now?"

"Thanks, Anna," he replied with eager anticipation as he sat down at the table.

Anna placed before him the breast and thigh of a grouse, a hot griddle cake, and a steaming cup of tea. "Tonight we'll have fresh bread," she said. "I'll wash the clothes and whitewash the inside of the hut today, and tomorrow I'll be able to help you with the clearing."

Hearing their parents' voices, the children awakened. Marusia and Petro jumped out of their beds, made from poplar saplings, with mattresses of dry grass encased in gunnysacks. Anna picked up Lesia.

Prokip hugged them, patted the baby's head, and said, "Mind you listen to your mother. I'll be gone all day." The children promised to be good.

Prokip put on his wide-brimmed hat, picked up his axe, and drew a flask of cold water from the well. He harnessed one ox, led it from the corral and went off to tackle the stand of trembling aspen in the far distance.

After the children had breakfasted, Anna took two pounds of dry lime and placed it in a metal container outside the house. "When I mix this lime it will bubble and may burn you," she warned. "Stand well out of the way." The children watched as

she added water to the lime, stirring it vigorously with a stick until the bubbling and sputtering had ceased. The slaked lime now looked like thick cream.

The family wash was her next task. Anna took a bundle of soiled clothes from the cabin, a bar of homemade soap, and a *pranyk*, a thick, flat board with a handle. She had brought this primitive washboard with her from the old country.

Anna and the children made their way to the creek. "Marusia, take Lesia and play on the bank while I wash the clothes," she said lifting her skirt to her knees and tucking it into her waistband.

Kneeling by the flowing stream, she started on Petro's homespun shirt, first wetting it and then rubbing it with the bar of soap. She then laid it on a flat stone and beat it gently with the pranyk, turning it expertly from side to side. After the stains were removed, she rinsed it in the clear, clean water of the creek.

It took her an hour and a half to pound, twist, and turn all the soiled clothes. Then she carried the heavy, wet garments to the cabin and hung them to dry on some low willow bushes growing nearby.

A big fire of split logs was blazing inside the clay oven, and its intense heat warmed the walls and floor. When the bread in the pans had risen, she raked out the coals with a long hoelike handle, a *kotsiuba*, which Prokip had made for her. Inside the pich she placed the bread and a clay pot containing *hrechana kasha* (buckwheat) mixed with water and seasoned with salt, pepper, and grease drippings from the grouse. She then sealed the oven with a stone slab surrounded by a layer of clay and grass. The heat trapped inside cooked the kasha and baked the bread at the same time.

After a frugal meal of porridge and milk, Marusia took the baby outside while Anna prepared to whitewash the cabin. She added a little more water to the lime and slapped it onto the walls with a brush Prokip had made for her from bunches of long, dry grass bent double and tied together with twine.

It was hot and sultry in the one-room cabin. The heat from the oven added to her discomfort, but she worked nonstop until she had finished. She did not believe in leaving a job half done.

After applying the last stroke of lime, she went outside to get

some much-needed fresh air. By this time the clothes spread out on the bushes were dry, and she took them inside to iron them.

For this she used a round, smooth roller which she rolled over each garment, and a smaller one, with grooves one side, to iron out the creases. Then she folded and stored the clothes in her trunk.

Suddenly she heard a commotion outside the cabin as Marusia called excitedly, "Petro, papa is coming home! Mama, please take Lesia."

The two children ran hand in hand to meet their father as he came slowly towards them with his axe on one shoulder and leading the brindled ox.

It was late afternoon and the air was still hot and humid. Prokip tilted back his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand as he knelt down and hugged the children. "Have you been good today?" he asked.

"Oh yes, papa," they replied in chorus.

"Let's go home. I'm hungry," said their father.

After he had unharnessed the ox, the trio washed their faces and hands in a basin of warm water that Anna had placed on thebench outside the house.

Anna opened the pich and took out two loaves of golden, crusty bread and the pot of kasha. She placed these on the table with an earthenware container of sour milk.

The aroma of the freshly baked bread filled the small room. Prokip bit hungrily into a thick slice and praised his wife. "You bake the best bread in the world," he said. Her cheeks glowed with pride.

"Look mama, papa — look!" shouted Petro. Baby Lesia had grabbed the leg of the bench, pulled herself up and was standing firmly on her feet. "She will be able to walk soon," said Prokip.

The following morning Anna was awakened by the raucous cawing of a crow. Prokip was not beside her. She had not heard him go out. She dressed quickly and started a fire in the oven. When the water came to a boil, she cooked a pot of oatmeal and made tea.

Just as the meal was ready, Prokip threw open the door and shouted triumphantly, "Where do you want these?" He was holding a string of partridges and two wild ducks.

"That's wonderful, Prokip," Anna replied. "Leave them on

the bench outside and have your breakfast."

He did not linger over the meal. "I'll go ahead of you and start stripping the poplars," he said as he left for the clearing.

"The children and I will join you as soon as I dress the game," Anna replied.

Petro helped to fill a sack with feathers as Anna plucked the birds. "You'll be able to sleep on soft pillows come winter," she promised.

After she had dressed the birds, she washed them and placed them in the oven with seasonings and vegetables. The unused portion of the wild game would be stored in the well to keep cool.

When Anna and the children arrived at the clearing in the early afternoon, Prokip already had a big pile of logs. Anna put Lesia on a blanket in the shade of a big tree. "Take good care of your sister, Marusia," she said. "Petro and I will carry the branches and add them to the pile. When they are dry we will burn them."

"Mama, these big mosquitoes are biting me," Marusia complained as she slapped herself with her hand, trying to kill the pests.

"I have a good idea," Petro said. He broke off a large willow branch and swished it back and forth. But the mosquitoes continued to swarm over the youngsters until their bites drew blood. Lesia began to cry.

"Hold it, children," said Prokip. "I'll fix them." He dug a small hole, filled it with dry grass and twigs, and lit it. When the fire was red-hot, he heaped raw willow branches onto the flames. The thick black smoke soon drove the mosquitoes away. "Don't get too close to the fire," he warned as he returned to his work.

The hot sun beat down mercilessly. The branches tore Anna's hands and arms until they bled. The sweat and swirling dust blinded her eyes and blackened her face, but the pile of logs grew higher and higher. Anna and Prokip clawed relentlessly at the good mother earth. They had a quota to meet for the government, and they were determined that no one would take their land away from them, however hard they had to work.

As twilight fell, the children started to complain. They were tired of chasing the gophers and were beginning to grow

hungry.

Prokip picked up Lesia, slung her on his shoulder and said, "Come, let's go home. Tomorrow I'll dig around the stumps and the oxen will pull them out of the ground."

It was the end of one of many hard days in the lives of these pioneer settlers.

4

By mid-October the Zhodas had approximately ten acres of prime land ready for the plough. "We'll have to wait till spring to clear more land," said Prokip. "I'll build a lean-to for the oxen, as it looks like it's going to be a hard winter."

Anna dug up the rest of the potatoes, and Marusia and Petro helped her to store them in the root cellar. They pulled out the pea and bean plants and hung them on pegs to dry. Then Anna shelled the heavy kernels, letting them drop onto a blanket spread on the ground. They were then stored in gunnysacks for winter use.

Some of the dried peas and beans were washed and soaked in water overnight, and boiled the following day. The dried corncobs were husked, and the dry kernels ground on a *zhorna*, a hand-operated mill from Ukraine. The coarse cornmeal flour was boiled to form a mush. Anna also dried and stored a large quantity of mushrooms. She knew that every bit of food had to be saved to feed the family through the winter.

Prokip picked the tobacco leaves himself and strung them up on the cabin wall to dry. When they were ready he packed them in bundles of ten before storing them. He would process the tobacco when he needed it.

By the end of October he had finished the sod-roofed lean-to

against the east wall of the cabin. By this time, the trees had shed all their leaves, and each morning the ground was covered with hoarfrost. The cold north winds began to moan around the hut — like a woman in labour. The month was not over before the Zhodas were greeted with the first snowfall.

Prokip was busy feeding his oxen when Mykhajlo Plotkov arrived in an agitated state. "Would you mind if I took Anna away for a while?" he asked. "Lena has been in labour since late last night and I'm worried about her."

"Of course," Prokip replied promptly. "I'll ask her to get ready at once."

After Anna had told Prokip and the children what was to be done while she was away, she dressed hurriedly, took a small package from her wooden trunk, and left with Mykhajlo for his homestead.

When they arrived, Lena was lying on their grass mattress, beads of perspiration glistening on her furrowed brow. With each contraction a moan escaped from her colourless lips and she clutched at the sides of the roughly hewn bed to brace herself against the pain.

"It's all right, I'm here," said Anna comfortingly as she examined Lena. Then turning to Mykhajlo she said, "Keep the room warm and have plenty of hot water ready. The baby should come soon."

Mykhajlo hastily did as he was told. He filled a large container with water and put it on the hot coals in the pich. He was distraught. Soon he stopped his agitated pacing and sat down on a stool, burying his head in his hands.

It was Lena's firstborn and she was scared, but Anna's soft, gentle voice reassured her. "With each contraction bear down, Lena," she said. "It will help to lessen the pain."

After what seemed an eternity to Mykhajlo, Lena let out a piercing scream, then fell back on the pillow exhausted. The lusty cry of a newborn baby filled the room.

"Mykhajlo, it's a boy," cried Anna, greatly relieved. She proceeded to cut the umbilical cord with a pair of scissors she had brought with her. She tied it with a piece of homespun thread, then bathed the infant and swathed him in a clean blanket.

From the packet she took a small bottle of holy water brought from the old country. As there was no priest to baptize the baby,

she poured a little of the water into a cup and turned to the new parents. "What will you name him?"

Lena looked up at Mykhajlo. "We should call him Tymofij," she whispered.

Anna dipped her finger into the holy water and made the sign of the cross on the baby's forehead and on the sole of each foot. In a solemn voice she declared, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, from this moment on you will be called Tymofij."

After attending to Lena's needs, she placed the infant in the crook of his mother's arm. Mykhajlo approached the wooden bed and looked down lovingly at his wife and son. He was overcome with happiness. His first child, a Ukrainian Canadian, had been born in a free country.

The homesteaders' first Canadian winter was very harsh. The heavy snow came early, and the howling north winds kept an icy and relentless hold on the poor settlers. The water in Prokip's shallow well froze solid. They kept the wooden barrel well filled with clean snow which when set beside the warm oven to melt provided them with drinking and cooking water.

It was now mid-February. They had endured three months of sub-zero temperatures and there seemed to be no break in sight. Anna scraped away the frost on the windowpane and looked outside. The overcast sky was threatening more snow.

The Zhodas had an ample supply of logs to keep them warm and dry, but their food staples began to dwindle. The ruffed grouse, partridge and rabbit had been scared off by the frequent shots from Prokip's gun and had moved on to safer ground.

Anna's heart was heavy as she looked at her children. They were too young to understand why there wasn't enough food. With a worried look on her face she turned to her husband and whispered, "Prokip, there's no meat left and only a few handfuls of dried peas, beans, mushrooms and porridge, and very little flour. We are going to starve."

Prokip came over to his wife, put an arm around her shoulders, kissed her on the cheek and replied, "Don't worry, my love. Yesterday I saw deer tracks in the snow. Since I did not snare a rabbit, today I'll kill us a deer."

"Do you think it's wise to go now? It's going to snow again."

"I'll be back with deer meat before nightfall. But I must go

now, before the fresh snow covers the tracks, or the howling marauders of the night may get to the deer before I do. Didn't you hear their lamenting for the last two nights? They too must be very hungry." He then took down from the peg on the wall his rifle and a stout length of rope. He put on his coat and the fur cap Anna had made for him from the hide of a muskrat he had snared in a nearby slough. He put in his pocket a piece of bread wrapped in paper. The bread would sustain him until he returned. He then put on his mitts, picked up his rifle and rope, and left the cabin.

Anna and the children watched from the window until he disappeared into a copse of birch and willow. She turned away from the window, walked over to the pich and stoked it with logs. She then sat down to mend clothes. Marusia and Petro amused themselves by telling stories, while Lesia listened. The day dragged on.

When Prokip left the house he plodded through the snow with grim determination until he again saw deer tracks. Marching against the wind, he followed them deeper and deeper into the forest, entering territory unfamiliar to him, far from home. But there was no deer in sight.

By mid-afternoon the wind began to moan around the treetops. It began to snow. Big flakes of white fluff cascaded to the ground. Prokip was beginning to grow very tired. His lungs hurt and he gasped for air. He needed a rest, but he knew that he must go on, for the falling snow was covering the deer tracks and soon they would be obliterated.

He walked a few steps further and fell, sinking to his knees in the deep snow. He began to rise, and when he looked up he saw a white-tailed deer a short distance away. His heart beat with excitement.

He got down on all fours and, clutching his rifle, crept slowly towards the animal. The deer did not catch scent of the man because its head was turned away from him against the wind. When Prokip crept within shooting range, he got to his knees, put the gun against his shoulder, took careful aim and fired. The deer fell where it stood. He was ecstatic with joy. Quickly running forward, he pulled out a sharp knife from the leather sheath slung on his belt and bled the carcass. The snow turned crimson from the draining blood.

It was a doe, weighing approximately 160 pounds. His family would not starve now, thought Prokip. He would also share the venison with his starving neighbours, the Plotkovs, he told himself.

He then tied the forelegs of the deer with the length of rope, slung it over his shoulders and began the long trek home. He hurried, for it was growing dark.

The wind gained strength and the snow swirled down more heavily, covering his tracks and nearly blinding him.

The howling wind and the snow rapidly turned into a blizzard. Prokip staggered under the heavy load on his back. He looked around him, but did not know which way to turn. As darkness fell over the forest, Prokip realized that he was lost.

Back at the cabin, Anna was growing more and more alarmed. Throughout the night she waited in vain. She did not dare to go out into the storm to look for her husband for she feared that she too would be lost, and then her children would surely die.She recalled again the dream of the skeletonlike man dressed in black. It haunted her anew.

She trembled with foreboding as she looked down at the angelic faces of her sleeping children. She could not hold back the tears. Her frail body shook with sobs. She fell on her knees beside the bed and, resting her elbows on the hay pallet, she clasped her hands, raised her face heavenward and began to pray. "Dear God, have mercy on us. Deliver us from this want and hunger. Let it be Thy will . . . and please, Lord, bring my husband home." Scalding tears blinded her.

During the night the storm abated, and dawn broke crisp and clear over the blanket of new-fallen snow. Anna decided to go to the Plotkovs' and ask Mykhajlo to help her look for her husband.

By this time the children had awakened. Marusia turned to her mother and asked, "Mama, where is papa?"

Petro and Lesia looked around the cabin, bewildered. Lesia was accustomed to having her father greet her each morning with a kiss. She now looked up at her mother with questioning eyes and cried, "I want my papa. Where is he, mama?"

Anna masked the worry on her face and in a cheerful voice replied, "He'll be home soon, my dears. Come eat your breakfast." The children obeyed. She then turned to Marusia and

instructed her to look after her brother and sister, not to try to stoke the fire, and not to leave the cabin until she returned.

Anna dressed warmly, and when she walked outside the dazzle from the fresh snow blinded her for the first few minutes. As she plodded on, she sank into snow waist-deep and often stopped to get her bearings. Her lungs hurt from the cold air and her breathing was laboured, but she trudged on. She climbed a small hill and when she descended she saw a dark spot to her right. The spot moved. The brightness of the snow had a way of playing tricks on the eyes. Was this an illusion? She closed her eyes, and when she dared to open them again the black spot in the distance moved. Was it a man or a beast, she wondered. She sucked in her breath. The black spot came closer and closer. When she recognized her husband, she sank into the snow giddy with excitement. "Prokip," she cried, "You've come home!"

When Prokip reached her side he slid the carcass of the deer off his back onto the snow, gathered Anna in his arms and held her close to him.

"Prokip, you are safe. How did you manage to stay alive in that awful storm?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get home," he answered. Together they pulled the carcass of the deer towards the cabin.

The children were overjoyed to see their father safe and well; and after they had kissed and hugged him they stared in awe at the dead animal on the floor.

Anna helped Prokip with his coat and cap. She made him sit by the fire to thaw out. He was not used to so much attention. When he was warm again and had had his tea, he turned to his wife and said, "After I was lost in the storm I thought I would die; but the Lord is my Shepherd. When I stumbled on a sheltered coulee, I dug the snow away and found some wood." The children had lost interest in the deer; they crowded around their father and listened attentively. "I then broke some twigs off a dead rose bush and tried to build a fire; but the damp twigs would not burn. I had two matches left. My fingers were getting numb and stiff, but still the fire would not burn."

"What did you do then, papa?" asked Marusia.

"I remembered the bread wrapped in paper that was still in my pocket. That piece of paper saved my life. It started the fire."

"Oh, Prokip!" sighed Anna.

Prokip continued, "The fire also kept the howling animals away. They were hungry enough to try to steal the venison. I wonder if they were wolves."

"If they were, they are dangerous. Back home wolves attack people," added Anna.

Prokip's tale of the howling beasts intrigued the children. They were frightened, but Anna reassured them, saying that it had likely been only coyotes, which were smaller than the wolves of the old country and harmless to people.

Prokip looked around at his family and thanked God that he was home safe. Mother Nature had given them sustenance for survival.

The Zhodas shared the venison with the Plotkovs. The two men went out together on hunting forays from then on, and as their fear of starvation eased, the settlers turned to their daily chores with renewed vigour.

Lena had her hands full with the care of Tymofij. Anna madesoft pillows from the feathers of wild birds, mended clothes, cooked, and attended to the household chores with Marusia's help.

Prokip built Anna a cupboard and four chairs. To the children's delight, he also made them a sled on which they spent many happy hours sliding down a steep hill behind the cabin.

Prokip's hobby was the curing of his homegrown tobacco, in which he took great pride. Taking out a bundle at a time, he placed the dried leaves on a wooden board and chopped them finely. The leaves in their natural state were very strong; he had to rinse them well in tepid water before spreading them on the hot floor of the pich to dry. When the tobacco was to his liking he diluted some honey in a mug of water, took a mouthful and spat it expertly over the cut tobacco, and let it dry again. The honey was added for flavour. He then stored the dried tobacco in tin cans ready for use.

In the evening, after they had said their prayers and asked the Lord to bless their home, Marusia and Petro never tired of listening to fables. The one that intrigued them most was the story the sly fox who outwitted the stupid crow and stole her cheese. He praised her beautiful voice, but flattery gets one nowhere for, with the first "caw, caw," the cheese fell out of the crow's beak to the ground. The wily old fox quickly picked it up and

vanished into the forest. The children giggled and agreed that the silly crow got what she deserved.

Lesia spent many hours playing with a rag doll Anna made for her from scraps of cloth. Petro amused himself with chunks of wood from Prokip's building materials.

But Marusia was a dreamer. She was not interested in dolls. On a cold day she loved to trace pictures on the frosted windowpane. She would make finger paintings for her family on pieces of white cloth, using yellow juices from boiled onion skins and red juice from beets. One of her treasures was a piece of hard lime for tracing on dark cloth. She guarded her work with care and kept it well out of reach of the others. In the summertime she had gathered leaves, rose hips, wild roses, lilies, shooting stars and crocuses, which she dried and pressed carefully between sheets of old newspapers. She would delight the family with her artistic designs, which she glued onto cardboard with a flour paste.

She was not afraid of the dark, and often at night she would bundle up and walk out of the cabin alone, her boots crunching in the hard crust of snow. For a long time she would stand there, silently staring up at the northern lights as they splashed colours across the sky, and dreaming.

One evening in late March the mournful howls of the coyotes were louder than usual. "A change in the weather," Prokip predicted.

The north winds had spent all their fury and were followed by warm chinooks blowing in from the southwest. With these chinooks came the spring thaw, and the woods returned to life once more.

The melting snow swelled the creek, and the babble of water could be heard far and wide in the evening stillness as it rushed on for many miles toward the Vermilion River.

With spring came renewed hope. Prokip was anxious to get his hands once more into the rich soil. It was now the first anniversary of their arrival in Canada.

Prokip and Anna decided to enlarge their garden. Prokip sharpened his spade and started clearing a plot for the seeding of Red Fife wheat for the year's crop.

Anna brought from the cellar a pailful of seed potatoes and

peelings, with eyes, which she had saved to plant in the garden. The tobacco, cabbage, and onion seedlings had already sprouted in a hotbed set against the south wall of the shed. These would be planted after the ground had been prepared and the danger of frost was over.

Prokip worked unceasingly through the month of May, raking and pulling out unwanted stumps and roots until the blisters on his hands broke and started to bleed. Anna tenderly applied clarified fat from a wild duck and wrapped his palms with clean strips of cloth. But both he and Anna were exuberant, for they now had approximately fifteen acres of cleared land ready for the plough.

The last Sunday in May, the Plotkovs with baby Tymofij came for a visit. "*Slava Isusu Khrystu* [Glory be to Jesus Christ]," Mykhajlo called as Prokip opened the door.

"*Slava naviky* [Glory forever]," replied Prokip.

The two families sat around the table as Mykhajlo read passages from the Bible. The settlers were deeply religious and always kept holy the sabbath day.

After a simple meal the children went outside to play while the adults sat and talked. They were anxious about their prospects for the next winter. They had barely made it through their first year, and they needed additional food supplies and farm implements. But where to get the money for them?

"Our stock of food is very low," Prokip told Mykhajlo. "Anna has agreed to stay on the homestead while I go to Edmonton to find work. We were very short of supplies last winter" — he walked to the door and surveyed his small amount of cleared land — "and we need a plough. I must go away for a while, but I'll be back by the end of September. What are your plans, Mykhajlo?"

"You have been very, very generous, Prokip," he replied. "But I need a wagon and oxen of my own. I too must earn some money." Turning to Lena he asked, "Do you think you can manage on your own?"

For a moment Lena was horrified. She could not imagine the whole summer alone with baby Tymofij, but Anna and her children would be only a quarter of a mile away. She agreed that they needed oxen and a plough, and she could not deny her husband a chance to better their lot. They could not depend on the

Zhodas for help any longer.

She hid her fears as well as she could and, looking into h husband's eyes, she replied, "I think I'll be able to manage."

"That settles it, Prokip," said Mykhajlo. "I will go with you Edmonton."

5

In one year Edmonton had undergone great changes. The population had grown steadily, and many new buildings rose on both sides of the river. The Low Level Bridge, which would form a link for pedestrians and the railway line between Strathcona and and Edmonton, was nearing completion.

Prokip and Mykhajlo had taken two days to reach the city. On their arrival they discovered the citizens thronging the streets to celebrate an important occasion, the end of the South African War. A twenty-one gun salute was sounded and its echoes resounded up and down the river valley.

Both men were in high spirits as they settled down to sleep for the night in a clump of bushes on the outskirts of town. Before he fell asleep, Prokip remarked, "Edmonton has grown so much in just one year that it shouldn't be difficult to find work."

"We'll try the coal mines tomorrow," Mykhajlo suggested.

Several mines had been developed on the south banks of the North Saskatchewan River. The coal was used to heat Edmonton homes and businesses, and a large amount was shipped out as far as Calgary.

Early next morning the two men reported to the office of a mining company. As they entered the hut, a gigantic man, over six feet tall and weighing at least three hundred pounds, pulled

himself laboriously from an armchair and towered over the tw shabbily dressed Ukrainians. "What can I do for you?" h roared.

Prokip could not understand him, but he demonstrated wh he had come for. With an imaginary shovel he pretended to di pointing first to Mykhajlo, then to himself.

"Ah-h. So that's it," said the big man. "You want work b you don't speak English. Are you Galicians?"

Prokip and Mykhajlo understood the word "Galician" an nodded their heads in the affirmative.

A loud peal of laughter filled the room. When the big man ha recovered, be bellowed, "Hey Jake, come 'ere. Look what we' got!" He rocked with laughter again.

A small, wizened man emerged from a back room. "What up, Mac?"

The big man pointed a threatening finger at Prokip an Mykhajlo and yelled, "Get out, you scum! We don't hire Ga cians!"

The two men beat a hasty retreat, discouraged and scare They were turned down everywhere they went to seek wor Scandinavians, Britons, Irish, and French were given priorit and they discovered that Ukrainians were regarded with de sion.

Frank Oliver, an Englishman and editor of the *Edmonto Bulletin*, had made it known that he, too, had no time f foreign ethnic groups, especially the latest Ukrainia newcomers. In his opinion they were an untrustworthy, dece ful race, and the country would be better off without them. Th open hostility aggravated the whole situation. It was unfo tunate that at that time Mr. Oliver failed to realize that the Ukr nian settlers had much to offer their great new country, askir for so little in return.

Prokip and Mykhajlo were desperate. They debated whether would be best to return to their homesteads; but to go ba without earning some money to buy the barest necessities mig mean starvation for their families.

Their last hope was Mr. Stanley at the land titles office. H recognized them at once and came forward with an extend hand. "What brings you back to me?" he inquired.

"We're looking for work but we can't find any," repli

Prokip. "We have very little food and we need money to buy a plough for our land."

Mr. Stanley told them that labourers were needed on the railway line being built near Medicine Hat.

Their spirits rose, but Medicine Hat was a long way from Edmonton. As they could not afford to take the train, they decided to set out on foot.

The journey seemed endless. They plodded on day after day with the hot sun beating down on them mercilessly. There was no breeze to cool their perspiring bodies, and gravel and small stones worked their way through the holes in the soles of their boots. They had to stop many times to take off their footwear and shake out the debris. They occasionally made short detours off the track to rest or sleep for a while in the shade of a tree, and to wet their parched throats with water from a slough.

By the time they were halfway to their destination they had only half a loaf of bread, a piece of onion, and a thin slab of salted bacon left. After the fourth day their steps began to falter.

"I can't go another mile," said Prokip as he sat down on the railroad track and shook out his boots once more. "I'll flag down the next train that comes along."

"Don't be foolish," replied Mykhajlo. "You'll be arrested and put in jail."

"I don't care anymore," said Prokip stubbornly.

Prokip kept good his promise. When he heard the whistle of a CPR train in the distance, he stood in the middle of the track and waved his arms frantically as the train approached. He had no intention of moving.

From the locomotive, the driver saw a black object in the middle of the track a mile away. He began to break slowly until he brought the train to a halt only ten yards in front of Prokip.

"What the hell's going on?" fumed the angry engine driver as he jumped down from the train. He stood glaring at Prokip, his extended fists clenched ready to strike.

Prokip answered faintly in Ukrainian, "*Duzhe stomlenyi* [very tired]."

Mykhajlo was standing on the side of the track, fearful of what would happen next.

The driver looked at the weary men and felt sorry for them.

He lowered his fists and muttered tersely, pointing to the train, "Both of you, get into the boxcar before I change my mind."

Prokip and Mykhajlo did not need a second invitation. They climbed hurriedly into an empty car and flung themselves onto a pile of straw. They slept continuously for the remainder of the journey to Medicine Hat.

They were accepted on the railway work gang. There was work — hard work — for the able and willing. Both men slaved from early morning until late at night, twelve hours at a stretch, for a dollar a day.

They slept in tents that were moved along with the railroad as the iron snake forged ahead. They endured the intense, unrelenting heat of the sun as they laid the wooden ties on the track, and the sarcasm of their boss who showed his workmen no mercy.

The two men lived frugally and spent little on food. Their only purchases were a pair of trousers each, a shirt, and shoes, as their original clothes were in tatters. Their muscles ached from the hard work. Their sleep was troubled and broken, filled with worried dreams about their families alone in the bush.

Meanwhile the womenfolk on the homestead were far from idle. They tended their gardens, and Anna became an expert with the scythe as she mowed down the tall grass, dried and raked it, before hauling it home with the team. The children helped her to stack the hay in a fenced enclosure to feed the oxen during the winter months.

When the last of the hay had been stacked, she fell into bed exhausted, relieved to know that at least the animals would not starve. She had just dozed off when she felt a gentle tug on her arm. It was Lesia. "Mama, I'm so hungry," she whimpered.

Anna quickly lighted the candle by her bedside, and when she saw her daughter's wan face in the flickering light she put her arms around the child, whispering, "Hush my precious. I'll find you something to eat."

She searched the nearly empty cupboard and returned with a slice of ***kulesha***, a mush made from cream of wheat, flour, and water, which had been left over from supper. "Thank you, mama," mumbled Lesia as she stuffed it into her mouth hungrily. When she had finished and had had a drink of water, she

pleaded, "Mama, may I sleep with you?"

"Yes my darling," Anna replied, cradling the child in her arms until she fell asleep. She herself was wide awake, and lay watching the sky through the window until the hazy dusk turned light grey and the sun began to appear. Her heart was heavy, and she was afraid she might not be able to survive until Prokip came home. Her garden produce was not yet ready, and she had only a few cups of flour left. The situation was desperate. She got out of bed quietly, leaving the sleeping Lesia, and went to the bank of the creek to search for something edible.

She was lucky enough to stumble upon a wild duck's nest. When the startled duck flew off, Anna counted the eggs eagerly. There were six large ones. It hurt her to deprive the poor bird of her potential offspring, but she had no choice. Her children were starving.

She put the eggs carefully into her apron and hurried back to the cabin. She noticed some rabbit droppings in the bush and decided that next day she would try to snare a rabbit.

The children gathered around her as she prepared a feast. She broke the eggs into a bowl and added water, salt, flour, and soda. She beat the contents into a batter and poured it into a greased skillet. The children ate the pancakes with relish, washing them down with a little milk which Lena had brought them the previous day.

That evening Anna set a snare of taut wire in the forest, and was overjoyed when the trap caught its victim — a fat hare. The pigweed growing in abundance behind the cabin, and the mushrooms in the creek provided their daily diet until the potatoes and other garden vegetables were ready for eating.

Anna was delighted that the one-acre stand of Red Fife wheat had matured so well. It was now frost free and ready for the sickle. It was a back-breaking job to cut the tall stalks of wheat, and to tie them in bundles with a length of rope improvised from handfuls of stalks. She stooked the bundles, six sheaves to a stand, teepee-style, with a sheaf in the centre of each stand to keep it from collapsing. The grain was left to dry.

It was now September 1902. Anna scanned the western horizon every day in the hope of seeing Prokip returning home. In their first year and a half they had only fifteen acres cleared. She feared that they would be unable to meet their quota of

thirty acres by the end of three years. If they hadn't, they would lose their rights to their homestead.

Whenever she had time she would shoulder the axe and walk to a clump of willows, chopping them down and piling them in heaps to dry for kindling. She hacked around the stumps with a *motyka*, a grubhoe, then harnessed Grey, the ox, and drove him to the clearing to pull them out.

One day she tied a stout piece of rope around a stump and fastened it to a wooden bar attached to the traces of the ox's harness. She took the reins and commanded Grey to go ahead. The animal lurched forward and stepped into a hornet's nest. Frightened, he broke into a trot, taking her completely by surprise. As he quickened his pace, Anna became entangled in the harness, falling to the ground and being dragged for twenty feet. The frightened beast made his way to a clump of trees and came to a halt in the dense undergrowth. This saved Anna. She freed herself from the reins, but her right side, from her shoulder to her foot, was badly scraped and bruised.

She sat up and took stock of the situation. She was filled with despair, and scalding tears blinded her eyes as they washed the dust from her cheeks. She fell prone on the ground and kissed the soil, crying, "Good Mother Earth, have pity on me. Open thy womb and swallow me up. I cannot go on."

The frightened ox sensed her anguish and stood still. Anna lay on the ground for several minutes, then she dried her tears and got up slowly. She had to go on; the children needed her.

She untangled the ox from the thick brush and backed him out onto the open prairie. Slowly and painfully she limped home, halter in hand, the docile animal following her without further incident.

At the end of September, Prokip and Mykhajlo decided that it was time to head for home. They gave their boss notice; each collected his one hundred dollars for the summer's work and took the CPR train back to Edmonton. They were still very thrifty; every cent was precious. They purchased two loaves of bread, an onion, and a slab of salt pork to eat on the way home.

The first pink haze of dawn appeared on the horizon as the train pulled into the Strathcona station. Prokip and Mykhajlo climbed down from the boxcar, stretched their legs, and walked

to Mr. Blaine's store. As it was not yet open, they sat down on a bench to await his arrival. By eight o'clock Strathcona began to come to life and the stores opened for business.

While Prokip purchased his supplies — flour, sugar, pork, tea, and oatmeal — Mykhajlo went in search of a pair of oxen and a wagon. Prokip greatly admired a shiny black stove, with the trade name of Homestead. He pictured it in his own cabin, but cast the idea aside. Anna would have loved it, but he knew that he could not afford such a luxury. Instead, he bought a walking plough, a cow and calf, three hens, and a strutting rooster.

Mykhajlo, now the proud owner of a wagon and pair of oxen, drove up in front of Mr. Blaine's store. He climbed down and went inside to purchase some food supplies.

Prokip helped to heave the plough onto the wagon and piled his groceries beside it. "We'll both share the plough until you can afford your own," he said. Mykhajlo was very grateful.

Their last stop was the market square behind the livery stable, where Prokip collected his cow and calf. He tied the cow securely to the back of the wagon; the calf would follow its mother. He pushed the hens and the rooster into a gunnysack, cutting holes in it for the birds to stick their heads out, so that they would not suffocate on the journey.

Their hard-earned wages having been well spent, they climbed aboard Mykhajlo's rumbling wagon, turned eastward and drove out of Edmonton towards their homesteads.

The stream of settlers throughout the spring and summer had etched a well-worn trail, making the drive home easier and quicker. The empty eastern block of the Northwest Territories had begun to fill with eager settlers who had come thousands of miles from their homelands to seek a better life for themselves and their families. Prokip and Mykhajlo were happy to see the patches of cleared land and the completed burdeys along the route.

On the afternoon of the third day out of Edmonton, Prokip caught sight of his cabin in the distance. He rejoiced at the cut stand of his wheat as it dried in the warm sun. The two men drove towards the homestead with eager anticipation.

Anna was busy digging her rich crop of yellow potatoes, unaware that Prokip was so near home. Marusia picked the large

ones and placed them in a pile to dry before putting them in sacks and containers to store in the dugout beneath the cabin. She frequently stopped her work to look longingly towards the forest, wishing that she had time to explore its beauty. The only sound was the patter of gently falling leaves as they cascaded to earth. The fiery splendour of the poplar, birch, and willow leaves would soon blanket the ground, and the trees would once more stand stark and ugly.

A faint honk, honk of wild geese migrating south grew louder as they passed overhead. Marusia looked up at their graceful formation and wondered what it would be like to be able to fly away with them — away from the drudgery of picking potatoes.

She was brought out of her reverie when she felt a sharp sting on her back. Petro had sneaked up behind her and thrown a small potato, teasing, "Come on, Marusia. Get to work. Don't be so lazy."

"Go away please, and leave me be," she cried angrily. She picked up her pail and continued her chores.

Mykhajlo drove the wagon to the front of Prokip's cabin, and the two men began to unload the plough, the hens, and the food supplies. Prokip tied the cow to a nearby tree and started to walk towards the house.

Petro was the first to notice their arrival. He dropped his pail of potatoes and let out a loud yell. "Papa has come home!"

Anna threw down her pitchfork as soon as she heard Petro's shout. Her eyes misted with tears of relief. She murmured softly, "Prokip." Then, turning to Marusia and Lesia, she said, "Come, your father is home."

Prokip looked lovingly at his family. The children hung on to his legs, both talking at once. "What have you brought for us, papa?"

"Have you been good children while I was away?" he teased.

"Oh yes, papa," they answered in unison.

Prokip delved into an inner pocket of his jacket, bringing out three large, striped candy canes. He gave them one each.

Anna came forward slowly and looked at her husband with a sigh of relief. Then she rushed into his open arms. "It's so good to have you home, Prokip," she said simply.

Looking over Prokip's shoulder at Mykhajlo, she chided him. "Hurry home. Lena is waiting."

Mykhajlo smiled broadly, climbed into his wagon, and waved a goodbye as he drove towards his own home.

Lena was waiting at the door with Tymofij in her arms. She ran quickly to meet him. Her man had returned safe and sound.

That evening when the children were in bed, Prokip followed Anna outside. The autumn air was crisp, the wind softly rustling the leaves on the ground.

Together they walked over to the stand of wheat. The heads of the sheaves were heavy with grain and bent over their stalks.

"We'll have a few bushels of excellent wheat for next year's seeding," he said. Then, looking closely into Anna's pale face, he asked with concern, "Is something wrong? You don't look too well."

Anna replied simply, "We'll have an addition to the family come January."

Prokip embraced his wife and scolded, "You should have told me before I went to Edmonton."

"Then you would not have gone, and we do need the plough," she replied.

The next few weeks before winter set in, both Prokip and Anna worked doubly hard. Prokip flailed the wheat, separated it from the chaff, and stored a portion of it in sacks for the spring seeding. The rest he ground into flour on his zhorna, plus the dry corn Anna had husked. This would provide them with many a meal of their favourite corn bread.

Winter again came early; it was their second on the homestead. This year they were snowbound and had to spend much time indoors.

But Prokip was not idle. He built a cradle for the expected baby and made many improvements to the cabin. Petro and Lesia occupied themselves with homemade toys and a tattered picture book brought from Ukraine while Marusia continued to create her works of art. Anna was kept busy sewing baby clothes.

In January 1903, on a cold, stormy day, Lena hurried over to help Anna deliver her second son. They performed the same simple baptismal ceremony as for Tymofij. The newborn infant was christened Mykolai.

6

By the spring of 1905, more immigrants had settled in the area. Although the population remained sparse, with as much as two to four miles between homesteads, the prairies began to grow less lonely. The settlers formed a solid block bounded by Lamont to the west, Beaver Lake to the south, Lavoy to the east, and to the north, the North Saskatchewan River.

The hardworking men and women began to make their mark and, by the sweat of their brows and grim perseverance, the virgin soil was turned into productive fields. Their first concern was to protect themselves against the elements, then to provide sufficient food for their families. But, being God-fearing people, they felt other unfulfilled needs: a strong desire to practise their religion and to educate their children.

The Zhodas and the Plotkovs met every Sunday at each other's homes, when weather permitted. Mykhajlo, who had attended school in the old country, would read passages from the Bible. He was also a strong believer in education. It saddened him to see the children of the settlers growing up without a school. He believed that in a free country every child should be given the chance to be educated.

One Sunday afternoon, when the two families were having tea at Prokip's home, Mykhajlo brought up the subject of building a

school. Anna was even more excited than Prokip at the idea. She was unhappy to think that Marusia was ten years old already and unable to read or write. They all agreed to call a meeting of the surrounding settlers at the Zhoda house the following Sunday. Twelve neighbours attended.

After calling the meeting to order, Mykhajlo announced, "We are gathered here today on a matter of great importance. Our children are growing up without a chance to learn the three R's. The Basilian Fathers at Beaver Hill have built a mission and already have a number of pupils. But it is too far for our children to attend. We need our own school."

His suggestion was greeted with loud applause. "Since we are discussing a school for our children," he added, "it would be wise to plan for the building of a church as well."

A tall, weather-beaten Ukrainian, Evan Maxim, stood up. "I will back you up, Mykhajlo, and give you all the help I can to carry out your plan. I have eight children and I do not want them to grow up without being able to sign their names. We are now in a free country."

"Then it is settled," said Mykhajlo. "We will send a letter to Mr. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, asking for an allotment of land for both the school and the church. As soon as we receive permission we'll start to build."

Frank Oliver did everything in his power to grant the settlers what they had asked for, partly to compensate for the harsh manner in which he had spoken against them in the past. He also recognized the great need for such measures. The West needed settlers, and he accepted the fact that the thousands of Ukrainian pioneers could not be turned back to Austria. A permit to build a school and a church was swiftly granted.

After the spring planting and seeding, the homesteaders started their building project. The sharp chop of axes and the rasp of saws could be heard from daybreak till sundown. A small structure, twelve feet by twelve feet, was quickly erected for the school, with an attached shack to house the teacher. Then a Catholic church was built, and a young Ukrainian priest travelled by ox team from Beaver Hill once a month to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

Life became more tolerable for the womenfolk, who were able to experience a sense of freedom and comradeship as they

exchanged views with their neighbours after the church services.

One day in the latter part of August, Mykhajlo hurried over to the Zhoda home in great excitement. He had just received an answer to the advertisement in the *Svoboda*, a Ukrainian paper printed in the United States. "A Catholic teacher has agreed to come and teach our children," he said. "But we'll have to meet him in Edmonton and bring him back. I'll take my team as I want to buy a plough."

"Good," replied Prokip. "I'll go with you and take two sacks of my Red Fife. I'll have one sack ground into flour at the mill in Edmonton and sell the other so that I can buy food supplies for the family."

Marusia listened as Prokip and Mykhajlo discussed the coming trip to Edmonton. A picture of the train ride into Strathcona station and the fashionably dressed mother and her little girl came again into sharp focus in her mind. A desire to see more of the same overwhelmed her. She ran to her father, threw her arms around his waist, looked up into his face and pleaded, "Papa, please take me with you."

Prokip was taken aback by Marusia's sudden outburst and was lost for words, but Anna understood. Marusia was so different from her younger sister Lesia. Lesia was amused with the little things in life, but Marusia reached for the stars. Her moods changed as did the four seasons: unpredictable as a spring shower; happy as a flitting butterfly of summer; loving and warm like an autumn fire; or cold and cutting as a winter wind.

Marusia was persistent. Gently she shook her father's arm and asked again. "Please, papa?"

"It's going to be a long and tedious ride, and the roads are very rough," explained her father.

"I don't mind that at all."

Prokip looked down into her beautiful elfin face and pleading brown eyes shining with excitement. Someday soon, he thought, she'll grow up to be a charming young woman and leave the nest. His heart ached at the thought and he wavered. He looked back at his wife with questioning eyes. Anna nodded her head.

"Yes, you may go," Prokip said. "Go and get ready."

Prokip and Mykhajlo hitched the oxen to the wagon and

together with Marusia rumbled off to the west towards Edmonton.

The two men were amazed at how, in a span of three years, Edmonton had undergone yet another change. Marusia was fascinated. Her whole being was flooded with excitement. She stood up in the wagon box and with a pointing finger at the sight before her, exclaimed, "Papa! Look at those beautiful houses!" But her enthusiasm subsided momentarily as she remembered her own mud-plastered, thatched-roof cabin on the homestead.

The previous year, 1904, Edmonton had been granted a charter, becoming a city on November 7 of that year. The false-fronted stores had been nearly all replaced by two- and three-storey brick buildings, and a few hundred of the more than eight thousand residents now had running water in their homes.

Prokip, Mykhajlo, and Marusia made their way towards the railway station. There was an unusual amount of activity in the city. The two men had been aware that this day, September 1, 1905, would be a day of celebration for Edmonton, but they had not been prepared for such great throngs of people.

They waited on the platform as the crowds alighting from the train swirled around them and dispersed towards their various destinations. "How will we find the teacher among all these people?" said Mykhajlo with a furrowed brow. Prokip shrugged. As the platform cleared, with yet no sign of the teacher, Mykhajlo took out of his pocket the letter, written in Ukrainian, he had received from James White in answer to the advertisement. He reread it, confirming that the teacher was to arrive on this day.

Marusia was not interested in where the teacher was. She was fascinated by the sight of the people milling along the streets and sidewalks, and passing in buggies, all dressed in their best clothes. Marusia's homespun clothing was no match for the fine apparel the women and children wore. How she longed to be dressed like them! She turned to her father and wistfully asked, "Papa, will I ever have such beautiful clothes?"

Prokip's heart ached for his little girl. If only he could, he would give her the world, he thought. He patted her affectionately on the head and answered, "In time, my precious, you may have everything that your heart desires."

"We might as well take our wheat to the mill to be ground, and buy our supplies," said Mykhajlo. "Even though the teacher didn't come, at least all of our travelling won't have been for nothing."

To their dismay, they found the mill and most other places of business closed for the day, though it was still mid-morning.

After some discussion, the two men decided they would stay in the city until the next day. Marusia was thrilled at the news. "We'll have to find lodging for the night," said Prokip. "If it weren't for Marusia, we could sleep in the wagon in the bush."

They turned the wagon back towards the main part of town, tied the oxen to a rail, and after watering them and giving them some hay, set out to find a place for the night.

As they approached Jasper Avenue, Marusia witnessed a sight she would never forget. Her eyes grew wide as she watched the North West Mounted Police, clad in scarlet tunics, trousers with a yellow stripe down the side, shining boots and broad-brimmed hats, ride by on their well-groomed horses.

Marusia squealed with delight. "What is it, papa? Isn't it beautiful?"

Prokip smiled down at his daughter. "It's a parade, child, a parade."

Next came the Crees, dressed in beaded moccasins, soft skin tunics and eagle-feathered headdresses, beating their drums and chanting as they danced by. A contingent of Boer War veterans marched by, followed by a squadron of the 19th Dragoons. Bands played and flags fluttered in the breeze.

Marusia was enraptured. She grabbed her father by the hand, kissed it, and with tears of happiness in her eyes cried, "Papa, I love you so much. Thank you for taking me with you."

Prokip was deeply moved by his daughter's enthusiasm and was glad that he had brought her along.

The parade moved along Jasper Avenue to 102 Street, down an incline, and entered the vale below McDougall Hill. Prokip, Mykhajlo, and Marusia followed the crowd to the fairgrounds, where a platform had been set up for dignitaries.

The three of them stood and listened as a tall, white-haired man rose to give a speech.

Prokip turned to Mykhajlo and said, "I wish I could understand what that important man has to say."

"So do I," said Mykhajlo.

A young man standing nearby moved closer to them and said in Ukrainian, "I could not help but overhear your conversation." He was tall, about nineteen, with blond hair and penetrating blue eyes. He carried a black valise. "That is the prime minister, Sir Wilfred Laurier. He is saying that on this historic day, though we are people from many nations and should preserve our many cultures, we must also build for the future, stand united in this country, and live in peace, love, and unity."

Prokip was impressed. "*Dobri cholovik* [good man]," he remarked sincerely.

The prime minister finished his speech and at noon, to the sound of a twenty-one gun salute, Alberta became a province, and Edmonton its capital.

They conversed a few minutes longer with the young stranger before he confided that he had come all the way from Philadelphia to accept a teaching position, but that the people who were to meet him at the station had not shown up.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Prokip. "You must be James White!" Both Prokip and Mykhajlo had been impressed by this polite and clean-cut youth. His mother, he explained to them later, had been Ukrainian, and that was where he had learned the language. They were delighted that he was to be the teacher for their school. Marusia liked his blue eyes.

The next morning was spent in the purchase of a plough and food supplies. Prokip picked up his flour at the mill where it had been ground for him. They also visited a machinery shop to examine a binder and a threshing machine. "Perhaps in a couple of years, after we have broken more land, we can pool our resources and buy these," said Prokip.

"We certainly will," replied Mykhajlo.

Their final purchase was a small wood heater to warm the teacher's hut at the school. Each family in the neighbourhood had donated a small sum for this purpose. Then they stopped at the railway station to pick up the box James had brought with him. It contained school books, he explained, and a blackboard and chalk.

The trail home had been well trodden by the hundreds of settlers on their way east. As they approached their destination,

James White remarked on the fine stand of wheat. Prokip explained that the good crop was due to an early spring and fine summer. Both he and Mykhajlo hoped their yield would exceed their needs, and that they might be able to sell the surplus.

The teacher spent the night at Prokip's home, and the following day took up residence in the lean-to hut at the school. The building was named the Dniester School after the creek that flowed behind it. All the settlers felt a strong attachment to their beloved Ukraine, and the babbling stream brought to mind fond memories of the mighty Dniester River in Ukraine.

The first class at the Dniester School opened on September 7, 1905, and was attended by twenty pupils from the surrounding district. Some had to walk as far as five miles, each carrying a slate and chalk provided by their teacher, and a tin pail containing a lunch. Marusia treasured her slate as she could now draw pictures and erase them to her heart's content.

It was a one-room school with mud-plastered whitewashed walls, a thatched roof and two small windows. The wood-burning heater stood on the packed clay floor at the back of the room. The students sat on hand-hewn poplar benches facing a large blackboard hanging on the wall. It was a lowly schoolhouse, but it was a haven of knowledge to most of its twenty students. James White took much trouble to instill this knowledge in their minds, and they absorbed it eagerly.

That first day of class, James White greeted his pupils in Ukrainian with a "*dobroho ranku* [good morning]," introduced himself, and continued in their native tongue, "I'm here, dear students, to teach you the English language. After you have understood my purpose, you will speak only in English when you are in the classroom."

Marusia was puzzled and asked, "And what if we don't understand what you are saying? What then?"

"You may ask me any questions you wish, but *only* after school." The class sighed with relief.

James continued, "I will start teaching by drawings on the blackboard and illustrations from a book, and soon you'll be able to learn of other places that you have never seen."

James picked up a book, turned the pages and showed the class a picture of a sheik riding a camel.

"What a funny-looking horse," exclaimed Petro.

Amused, James answered, "Petro, this is not a horse but a camel, and it serves the same purpose as our beasts of burden. The camel lives in another part of the world, far from your farm, where there are no big trees and green grass and hardly any water. These animals can go far distances without a drink."

Marusia's interest was aroused. How can such a huge animal live without water for days at a time, she thought. Curiosity won out. She looked at her teacher and asked primly, "And how, sir, can this animal go far without water?"

"That is a good question, Marusia. A camel has many pouches in its stomach where the water is stored and used as needed."

As the days went by, James proceeded to use such illustrations to teach his students the rudiments of the English language, and soon, most of them knew their alphabet.

He now began to expand his lessons to other areas of the world and closer to home. He showed photographs of the place of his birth and they stared in wonder at the tall, clustered buildings and factories. A car intrigued Petro most of all.

One morning, after he had exchanged greetings with his pupils, he said, "Today we will have a lesson in geography on a place closer to home, Edmonton."

Marusia's interest was instantly aroused.

"Ha," she thought, "what can he tell me about Edmonton that I don't know. I've been there." She began to draw on her slate.

James continued, "Some of you have passed through Edmonton on your way to the homestead with your parents, but most of you have not seen it as yet." He brought out a picture of the city and showed it to his pupils, saying, "Edmonton is a mere fifty miles from where you live."

"Those houses are so different from our own," said Pavlo Maxim. "Why?"

"It's because they are built of lumber and have shingled roofs." Pavlo sighed and said that he wished he could live in such a house. James looked at the young lad and replied, "I am sure that some day you will." Pavlo beamed with anticipation.

James then pointed out a picture of a huge sawmill in the river flats of the city. "This is the sawmill where all the lumber comes from to build these new homes."

Marusia kept on drawing on her slate. She was drawing scenes

from her visit to Edmonton.

"Young lady," said James suddenly, "you have not been paying much attention to the lesson, have you?"

Marusia replied defiantly, "I've seen it all."

"All right then." James clapped his hands. "Attention, class. Marusia will now tell us why Edmonton was made the capital of Alberta."

The class giggled as she squirmed in embarrassed silence. Then and there, Marusia decided that she hated her teacher, and as the days passed, full of exciting new things to learn, her opinion only softened a little.

In only two years, James had made great progress with his pupils. The settlers worked even harder to break more land and to seed more wheat and other grains. Prokip now had thirty acres sown in wheat.

But there were pitfalls — the year 1907 for example. The New York stock market was swept by a panic in April and the whole continent slipped into a recession. The prices of wheat and other farm produce dropped drastically, and the new settlers were unable to meet their commitments. It became almost impossible to clothe and feed their large families, and many fell into dire need.

Still the influx of settlers from Ukraine continued at a rapid pace. Other ethnic groups also began to pour in from Montana and Manitoba, settling side by side with the Ukrainian farmers. The prairies became so populated that the homesteads were now only two or three miles apart. This meant more centres of education for the children, and within the next five years, schools were set up less than six miles from each other.

7

The Canadian Northern Railway began to branch out in the West. Small prairie towns sprang up approximately seven miles apart along the railroad tracks. The townsfolk of Lamont, Chipman, Mundare, and Shandro, to name only a few centres, started to establish banks and to build their own schools, churches, machine shops, grain elevators, flour and feed mills, so that the farmers no longer had to make the long trip to Edmonton for their supplies.

By this time the Zhodas' home had become too cramped for the growing family. Prokip tore down the lean-to hut that housed the animals and kindling, and added another room off the kitchen. He laid poplar crossbars for the ceiling and covered them with rye sheaves bound with rope fashioned from the stalks of rye.

He was a skilful workman; his roof was a masterpiece which would withstand the forces of nature for many years. When it was completed, he climbed down the ladder to admire his handiwork. He lit his pipe, drew on it, and exhaled deeply, looking with pride at his new thatched roof.

Anna and the children were full of praise for his excellent job. Suddenly Anna began to laugh. Prokip looked at her quickly and

asked, "Is my roof so funny, Anna?"

She tried to control her mirth as she replied, "Prokip, I do hope you will not have to chase the devil from the rafters tonight." At that, Prokip also burst into laughter.

The children were intrigued. "Mama, what devil are you talking about?" asked Lesia. "Tell us," she begged.

Prokip nodded his head in consent and Anna began: "When your father built our first house in Ukraine it also had a thatched roof. The first day at dusk, when we had retired for the night, we heard loud thuds and rustling sounds on the roof. All was quiet during the night, but just before daybreak we were awakened by a rustling of straw, and footsteps overhead. On the third night your father was prepared. He grabbed a long stick, climbed up the ladder, and beat the rafters crying, 'Go away, you old devil. It is not enough that the Polish barons are tormenting me. You have found me also!' "

"Mama, papa, was it a small devil or a big devil?" asked Lesia.

Anna smiled as she replied, "No, my children. It was the nesting season. A pair of storks had decided to make a home on our roof."

There was still work to be done in the home. For the outer room Prokip used poplar saplings to build a heater with a chimney and a hinged door made from a piece of cast iron. The boxlike cavity in the heater was large enough to hold fire logs. Alongside the clay heater he placed a small bench on which he could relax on a cold winter's night and warm his aching back.

As the years slipped quickly away, the friendship between the Zhodas and the Plotkovs grew even deeper. They were the original settlers in the area and were bound by the same determination to make good in their adopted country. In this great land the farmers saw the opportunity for advancement and made rapid progress. To them no obstacle was insurmountable.

As towns began to spring up on the prairies, people of other ethnic groups opened up places of business. The railroad brought Anglo-Saxons, French, Germans, and Swedes from outlying districts who intermingled with the settlers from the Ukrainian provinces of Galicia and Bukovina.

The wheat crop of 1907 was a bumper one. A new strain of wheat, the Marquis, was developed, which proved much hardier than the Red Fife and ripened a few days earlier.

Prokip and Mykhajlo were delighted. As they were assured of a good return from the fields, they decided, after much discussion, to pool their resources and buy a secondhand binder and a Sawyer Massey threshing machine in Vegreville. They made a down payment of fifty dollars and wrote a promissory note for the remainder of the payments to be made at the end of November for the next three years. Despite the recession, the two men took a chance that their crops would yield enough for them to keep up their commitments.

In September it rained hard for two whole days, and the sodden fields were inaccessible. Prokip decided that it would be a good time to make a trip into Mundare where two brothers had set up a grocery store. Since both were of Ukrainian descent and spoke the language, Prokip enjoyed doing business with them.

Anna took this time to churn a large supply of butter. Prokip had made her a wooden creamer from a hollowed tree trunk. This had a long wooden handle with two crossbars that was fitted into a hole in the lid. Anna moved the bar up and down to separate the butter from the buttermilk. She would then wash the butter with cool water and salt it to taste. The buttermilk, mixed with ground oats, was fed to the hogs.

Before Prokip left for Mundare, Anna made a list of her requirements. In 1907 the cost of living was cheap. Tea was fifty cents a pound; coffee forty cents sugar twenty-nine cents; prunes twelve cents; raisins ten cents; and rice cost twenty-five cents for four pounds. As she was expecting another child shortly, she added a list of her needs for the event.

Prokip threw into the wagon three sacks of wheat that he planned to have milled at the new mill in Mundare. The flour would last them throughout the winter months. He knew that he would not be able to make many more trips into town before spring, and Christmas baking would have to be done.

As usual, there were many things he would have liked to buy. A large black stove in the corner of the store caught his eye and he visualized this shining beauty in his own kitchen. Anna would be so proud of it. But he resisted the temptation to purchase it on credit. That item would have to wait.

He picked up a few extras, such as the *Vegreville Observer,* which had been started two years previously. The children liked to take this newpaper to James White at the school. For

Mykhajlo he bought a copy of the Ukrainian paper *Canadian Farmer*, which was printed in Edmonton. The children were not forgotten; there was a bag of peppermint candy. For Anna he picked up an Eaton's catalogue, in which she could browse to her heart's content.

After spending more time than he had anticipated in the store, he walked out into the afternoon sun, loaded up his supplies, and headed north towards his homestead.

Barely two weeks later Anna, with the help of Lena and Marusia, delivered a baby girl whom they baptized Elena.

One morning when Marusia was in the corral milking their two cows, Anna cleaned house and kept a watchful eye on her newborn baby. Lesia was feeding a dozen or more cackling hens, teasing the cocky rooster as he strutted proudly around his brood. She collected eight large white eggs from the nest inside the coop and put them into her apron. Four-year-old Mykolai was playing outside the house.

At this moment, Prokip returned from the field. As his wagon rumbled into the yard the children abandoned their chores and ran to greet him. Lesia, who was her father's favourite, rushed towards him at full speed, still carrying the eggs in her apron. Alas, in her haste, she caught her foot in a tree root and fell flat on her face, the eggs making a loud crunch beneath her. She picked herself up and watched with dismay as the raw eggs slithered down the front of her dress and into her shoes. She was an amusing but pathetic sight. The older children laughed uproariously, and she began to cry.

Anna ran out of the house to see what had happened. Turning to Petro and Marusia, she said firmly, "Stop it, children. It is not funny. Go into the house, Lesia, and clean yourself up." Eight broken eggs meant an enormous loss, but the damage was done. Anna never dwelt on the bad things in life, and this attitude helped her greatly throughout the difficult years.

Meanwhile the local children were making good progress at the Dniester School. Marusia, Petro, and Lesia were good students and James White was proud of them.

One morning he wrote the alphabet on the blackboard, together with some simple words for the children to repeat after him and copy on their slates. He walked to each desk to check

his pupils' work.

He stopped in front of Marusia and, to his surprise, instead of the alphabet on her slate he found a drawing of a squirrel standing on its hind legs, holding a nut in its paws. Despite the excellence of the sketch, James was annoyed. "Marusia Zhoda, I want to see you after school," he said sternly.

Marusia feared the worst. James was a good teacher, but he did not spare the rod when the occasion required. He certainly had not travelled all the way from his home in Philadelphia to have his students waste their time and his.

When the class had been dismissed, the boys and girls filed out of the room, each giving Marusia a knowing look.

"You are a big girl now and should know better than to waste your time in school by just drawing pictures," he said gravely once they were alone. "How and when will you learn to read and write? What have you to say for yourself?"

Marusia saw that he was angry, but she did not care whether he used the strap or not. "I *like* to draw, and I *do* know my alphabet," she replied defiantly.

"You do?" he asked, looking into her luminous brown eyes. His heart softened, and he felt a sudden surge of affection for her. "I want to hear it," he added.

Without a single mistake, Marusia recited the entire alphabet in a loud, clear voice, together with all the words he had written on the blackboard.

James was taken aback. He knew Marusia was a dreamer. He had often caught her watching the sparrows outside in the treetops or on the window sill. Yet she had managed to absorb all that he taught her. He dismissed her without further reprimand.

Her friends were waiting for her in the school yard, expecting to find her in tears. In a taunting voice Petro called out, "Did the strap hurt? Wait till you get home. Papa's belt will hurt worse."

"Go away you little monster and leave me be," replied Marusia as she took her sister's hand and started to walk home.

Anna, as usual, was busy preparing the evening meal, while Prokip was splitting logs. Anna went outside to check on Mykolai when she heard a loud cry. She saw an agitated Petro, books and lunch pail in hand, running at full speed towards the cabin, followed by his sisters.

He forgot to inform on Marusia as he cried excitedly, "Papa, papà, come quickly!"

"What is it, Petro?" inquired Prokip in alarm.

"It's Grey, papa. He's rolling on the ground and moaning. He seems to be in great pain."

Prokip followed Petro into the wooden enclosure in the pasture. The ox was lying on his side, groaning, his stomach bloated. He was foaming at the mouth.

Prokip ordered Petro to run back to the house for some baking soda and a pail of water. He opened the ox's mouth, inserted a strong piece of rope between his teeth, and tied the rope securely around his neck. In this way, Grey could exhale the air from his lungs and stomach.

Petro returned quickly, and Prokip filled an empty vinegar bottle with water. He added a tablespoonful of soda, shook the contents vigorously, then opened wide the animal's mouth and poured the contents into the big cavity. He forced Grey to swallow four bottles of the mixture, which he hoped would relieve the animal's indigestion. But the homemade remedy did not work in this case. By morning Grey was dead, and the sorrowing family was left with only one ox.

Prokip had to dispose of the carcass as quickly as possible. He tied a length of rope to the animal's leg, attached the other end to the crossbar on the harness of the second ox, and hauled it half a mile away into the forest.

The children followed behind in a solemn file. "Why did Grey die, papa?" Lesia asked tearfully.

Prokip looked down into his daughter's misty eyes and answered tenderly, "Grey has worked hard all his life. He grew very tired and needed a rest."

That evening, as Anna went out to close the chicken coop for the night to keep out the marauding wild animals and the skunks, the howling of the coyotes was louder than usual. The lean, hungry scavengers were preying upon the dead ox, gorging themselves on its flesh. Their loud yelps and snarls, as they fought among themselves, were carried towards the house by the wind, and seemed to be only a few yards away. Anna shivered, securely latched the coop door, and glanced fearfully over her shoulder as she hurried back into the house.

The next morning, when Anna was busy plucking the heads of

marigolds to store for next spring's crop, she heard Prokip's footsteps behind her. He told her about a horse sale to be held at Shandro, a small hamlet to the northeast of them. A horse trader was bringing in about twenty horses. "We'll have to buy a pair, Anna," he said.

"There is some money in the tin can on the shelf," she replied as she continued her work.

"I cannot take that money," he declared. "You have been saving that for six years for a Homestead stove."

"The stove can wait. We need the horses more," she declared firmly.

The horse trader brought in twelve work horses and corralled them on a farm near Shandro. The bidding on the animals was brisk as many homesteaders had begun to replace their oxen with horses. All the money that was to have been spent on the stove for Anna went to purchase two horses.

Mykhajlo accompanied Prokip on the trip to Shandro, and exchanged his oxen for a pair of work horses. He hitched his new team to his wagon, with Prokip's two horses tied to the back. It was late afternoon before they started for home, but the return trip took half the time as the horses travelled much faster than their oxen had done.

It was nearly midnight before Prokip reached the homestead. He led his horses into the barn and tied them up for the night. As the animals were in a new home, it was not safe to let them loose in the pasture.

Anna was still awake when Prokip walked in, tired and hungry. She set a thick slab of buttered bread and a tall mug of cool buttermilk on the table, and he consumed them with relish.

"By the way, Anna," he said, "the horse trader has offered me five dollars for our other ox. You can put that money towards the stove."

Anna thought for a moment, then shook her head. "Syvyj is a part of us. He has worked hard and must stay with us. You will be using the horses every day, and I'm used to the ox. He's docile, and if you will build me a stone boat [a low platform on a pair of sleigh runners], I'll be able to haul in the vegetables from the garden by myself."

"Then we'll keep him," he promised.

At harvest time Prokip cut his twenty-five acres of Red Fife.

The ten acres of oats and ten acres of rye were not yet quite ripe enough for the binder.

While Anna and Prokip stooked their wheat, Mykhajlo borrowed the binder. The dry stooks which could not be threshed before the first snowfall were loaded onto the wagon and put up in stacks. The precipitation would not affect the sheaves as they were stacked in such a way that rain or melting snow could not seep through. The two men could thresh well into December.

Although the wheat yield was good, the prices fetched were poor, and the recession inflicted many hardships on the farmers. However, after their wheat had been threshed and sold, Prokip and Mykhajlo were just able to meet the first payment on the binder and the threshing machine.

At Christmas, the Zhoda and Plotkov families were able to celebrate the festive season in style for the first time in six years, and to keep up the traditions of the old country. They looked forward to the *Sviata Vecheria*, Christmas Eve, supper, which consisted of twelve meatless dishes, symbolizing the twelve apostles.

Anna boiled traditional dishes, including *varenky*, circles of dough filled with mashed potatoes and sauerkraut. She simmered wheat kernels in a clay pot, while Marusia ground poppy seeds into a smooth paste with a pestle. They would also prepare whitefish from a nearby lake, fried in hemp oil extracted from homegrown seed, and boiled mushrooms seasoned with salt, pepper, fried onions, and hemp oil.

Petro and Lesia were given the task of decorating a *jalynka*, a small spruce tree, with decorations made from scraps of coloured paper and lengths of homespun thread dyed with the juice of saskatoon berries, the bark of trees, and boiled onion skins for a deep yellow hue. Lesia was allowed to place a tiny silver star on top of the tree. She had made this herself from tinsel saved from the rare chocolate bars Prokip brought home from the country store.

Petro helped his father feed the fowl and cattle. As Prokip forked hay into the manger in the barn, Petro put out dishes of food and milk for the cat and dog, for no animal or bird was allowed to go hungry before the family sat down to their Christmas fare.

The cow lowed softly and her calf answered her. While the animals were feeding, Prokip closed the door. "Papa, is it true that the animals speak to each other?" Petro asked.

"It is said that they do on Christmas Eve, my son, in memory of baby Jesus who was born in a manger," his father replied as he carried a *didukh*, a sheaf of wheat, into the house and placed it in a corner near the table.

Anna spread hay on the table beneath her richly embroidered cloth brought from the old country. The centrepiece was made from three *kolachi*, braided bread, with a candle inserted in the centre. A dish of *kutia*, wheat sweetened with honey and poppy seeds, was placed near the bread.

Other delicacies included: boiled jellied fish; *borshch*, a beet soup; whipped beans; fried fish with onion; mushrooms; dumplings and *holubtsi,* cabbage rolls; *pampushky*, sweet dough puffs filled with cooked prunes; homemade macaroni with prune juice; and a cornmeal *nachynka* baked in the pich.

The youngest children in each household always watched for the first star to appear in the heavens. Mykolai saw it first and called *"Zoria!"* — here it is! Then Anna placed a lighted candle in the window as an invitation to a stranger or a lonely person to join the family.

Except for Elena and Mykolai, the family had fasted all day, and the smell of good food made them very hungry.

Prokip took his place at the head of the table. Anna lighted the candle, and they all stood while Prokip recited the Lord's Prayer. He also asked God to bless his family and thanked Him for His goodness for the food they were about to receive. A place had been set for the souls of the departed, and a portion of food would be left on the table in case they should visit during the night.

After supper the family sat around the table to sing traditional Ukrainian carols. Prokip's rich baritone voice filled the small room. Then he took a flute out of the trunk and played many tunes, much to the delight of the children, who had not known that their father was so musical. There was rarely time for such lighthearted entertainment with a homestead to run. At last it was time to dress for midnight mass at the little church.

During the early days, the Ukrainian settlers treated the priest with great respect and reverence. They filed into the church and

stood on each side of the aisle as the priest made his way to the altar. Each member of the congregation bowed low before him and kissed his extended hand. The older priests, who had come from Ukraine, expected that respect, but the younger ones were sometimes embarrassed to have an eighty-year-old man kiss the hand of a twenty-year-old priest.

It took more than two decades for the settlers to realize that this was Canada — a free country — and that everyone was his own *pan*, or landlord.

Christmas was indeed a joyous occasion. The church filled to capacity with families from the surrounding areas. It was a calm, crisp night, and the full moon cast its light upon the church and its occupants, a witness to the joy inside as they all sang "*Bob Predvichnyj*" ["Eternal God"] and "*Sviata Nich*" ["Silent Night"].

"*Khrystos Rozhdajetsia* [Christ is born]," they greeted one another.

"*Slavte Jobo* [Glorify Him]," came the response.

After mass the families dispersed to their homes. The jingle of the bells on the horses' harnesses, and the crunch of their hooves on the hard snow resounded far into the still night.

8

The recession had a drastic effect on the prairie farmers. In spite of this, when Sir Wilfred Laurier called a federal election for the fall of 1908, Prokip remembered the glowing speech he had made in Edmonton in 1905 and supported him wholeheartedly. He urged his immigrant friends to do likewise as he felt that Sir Wilfred was the man to help cut the prices of dry goods, twine, and farm machinery, and to boost the price of farm produce.

By 1910 many changes had been brought about in Alberta, and the farmers were able to breathe a little more easily. They were now firmly established on the land, with roofs over their heads and food in the larders of those who wanted to work.

While the Liberal government was still in power, the prime minister paid another visit to the West. One of his official duties was to lay a cornerstone for a Ukrainian Greek Catholic church in Mundare. He was met at the station with a pair of decorated oxen and a wagon, and Sir Wilfred was pleased to see the progress the farmers had made in this area.

The Ukrainians became more and more determined to preserve their culture and customs. They built centres, called National Homes, where plays and concerts were performed in their own language. Life by now had become less of a drudge

and more bearable.

The Zhodas continued to prosper. Their hard work had paid off, and by the end of 1910 they had cleared a hundred acres of virgin soil. Prokip bought an additional quarter of land — another 160 acres. Petro was growing up fast and Prokip counted on his help. Someday the additional quarter section would belong to his son, and he looked forward to the day when younger shoulders would bear the burden of cultivating this primitive land. The hardships of the past years had made young men and women old beyond their years.

But Petro Zhoda's destiny was not to till the land. He proved to be a brilliant student, and James White realized the potential of this young boy. After five years of hard work he had reached the tenth grade.

Before classes resumed in the fall, James paid the Zhoda family a visit. When he arrived, everyone was busy as usual. Anna was milking the cows, Petro was tending the livestock, while Marusia and Lesia were feeding the chickens, ducks, and geese, and gathering the eggs. Prokip was splitting logs at the huge wood pile.

When the teacher approached, Prokip put down his axe, smiled broadly at the visitor, and extended his gnarled hand in a cordial handshake. James was greatly impressed at the neat state of the farmyard. Everything was in its proper place. A hand-woven willow fence enclosed the chicken coop, the pigsty, and the barn, in which mounds of hay were stored to feed the animals during the winter. An added attraction was the five beehives lined up on a roughly hewn wooden platform. James examined these unique domed hives with interest. Anna's deft fingers had fashioned them from braided straw interlaced with long strips of willow bark, leaving small openings for the bees to enter and leave at will. During the summer she had gathered enough honey to sustain the family throughout the year.

Prokip invited James into the house. By this time, the children's chores were done. Mykolai was playing in a corner, away from the rest of the family, Petro was reading *Huckleberry Finn*. Marusia, as usual, was drawing pictures of the countryside, and the animals and birds of the forest.

After a brief exchange of greetings, James and Prokip seated themselves on a bench against the wall. When Anna came in,

carrying a full pail of milk, she was pleasantly surprised to see James, who rose quickly and shook her hand.

Before putting a pot of water on the pich to boil for tea, Anna strained the milk into two large earthenware pots. The milk would cool during the night, and in the morning she would skim off the top cream to make into butter. The aroma of freshly baked loaves, which lay on the table under a cloth, filled the room. James did not hesitate in accepting an invitation to stay to lunch.

After they had eaten and the table was cleared, the teacher came to the point of his visit. "Prokip, you have a brilliant son," he said. "Petro has surpassed my expectations in his studies and I am very proud of him. He should do even better in the future."

"Thank you," replied Prokip. "I have given the matter of his schooling much thought, but I have decided to keep him on the farm as he will be of tremendous help to us. His mother has carried more than her share of the work and I want to make it a little easier for her. No, James, the land will sustain him; books and learning will not. I cannot let him continue his studies."

"But Prokip," James protested. "That would not be fair to the boy. Next year a bilingual school is going to be build in Vegreville. I do wish you would give your consent for Petro to attend."

Anna looked at her husband's undecided expression and said, "Prokip, I would like Petro to be given the opportunity for a higher education if he wishes. We have four more children who will be able to help us. We will manage." Prokip remained silent.

"*Pany* Zhoda," James continued, "you yourself supported the school cause at the meeting over whether the bilingual school should be built. You urged your neighbours to vote for the resolution. You said it was a good thing that young people who can speak Ukrainian should be trained as teachers for your children."

Prokip seemed lost in thought.

"As more settlers arrive, there will be a greater and greater need for qualified teachers." James hesitated a moment. "Would you deny your own son the chance of a lifetime — the chance to help himself and others?"

Anna could no longer bear her husband's prolonged silence. "Prokip," she burst out, "perhaps James is right!"

Prokip felt torn over this important decision. On the
hand, he did not wish to begrudge his son an education ar
brighter future, but on the other, he needed help with the h
work on the homestead. Then, for a fleeting moment, his m
went back to his homeland and the conditions under which
had grown up — denied the chance to learn even to sign his c
name.

That thought, more than any arguments from Anna or Jar
or the hopeful expression on Petro's face as he waited for
father's answer, his book lying forgotten in his lap, helped I
kip to make up his mind. He nodded gravely and announc
"So be it."

9

The year of 1912 was one of great expectations for the Alberta farmers. Prokip revelled in the knowledge that the adequate moisture during the seeding season, followed by summer rains and warm sunshine, promised a bountiful crop. Mother Nature was not frugal with her blessing; as the weeks went by, the heavy-kernelled heads of wheat began to ripen, turning from green to gold. Harvest would soon be in full swing, thought Prokip. He busied himself by mending the horse harness and repairing and greasing the binder.

It was a hot, sultry Sunday afternoon in August. The day lazed on, and before the evening shadows lengthened and dusk set in, Marusia, Prokip, and Anna went outside to attend to the barnyard chores. Petro was at a neighbouring farm playing softball with his friends. Lesia and Mykolai fed the hens and the squealing hogs. When Lesia had finished feeding the hogs she returned to the barn to help with the milking. Mykolai teased the rooster. As the family walked towards the barn, pails in hand, Prokip looked to the west. On the horizon hovered a dark, menacing cloud. He frowned. "Looks like it is going to rain again. We certainly don't need that now. The grain is ripe. What we need is more dry weather."

"The cloud is moving fast," replied Marusia. "Perhaps it will

just scuttle over us."

Anna scanned the sky with a worried look on her face.

They entered the barn, sat on stools and began to milk the cows. A loud peal of thunder, followed by zigzagging bolts of lightning across the sky drowned out the steady thudding of the milk as it squirted into the tin pails. The black cloud rolled overhead obscuring the sun from view. Soon the bright day turned to a dull grey. The clouds churned in the heavens with a hissing sound, and the wind gained velocity. It began to rain. The strong wind dislodged the straw sheaves roofing the house and threw them to the ground, baring the rafters.

Prokip put down his pail of milk, went quickly to the door and stood watching, deeply concerned. The women followed him. In a few minutes the heavy downpour of rain, now mixed with hail, deluged the yard and the fields. Hailstones pelted the kitchen window, smashing it with a loud, splintering crash. Another lightning bolt struck a nearby poplar and split it in half with a deafening roar of flame and smoke.

Anna looked around the barn and, when she did not see Mykolai, cried, "What's happened to my son? Where is he?"

"He's old enough to know to hide from the storm. He'll be all right," soothed Prokip. But Anna was frantic with fear for his safety. She began to cry and wring her hands in anguish.

Marusia turned to her father and cried, "Papa, our crop...?"

Prokip shrugged his shoulders.

The four of them stayed within the shelter of the barn until the storm abated a short while later. As they ventured out, the sun reemerged from behind the clouds and shone on the thick carpet of hailstones crunching under their feet.

"Mykolai!" called Anna. "Where are you?" There was no answer.

"Try the chicken coop, mama," suggested Lesia. "When I left him, he was feeding the chickens."

And there Anna found Mykolai, huddled in a corner of the floor, crying. She gathered him into her arms and kissed away the tears.

Marusia followed her father past the vegetable garden as he ran to the nearest stand of wheat. The root vegetables would survive, she thought, but the rest of the garden was ruined, cut to shreds by the hail.

She reached the wheat field and stopped beside her father, staring in disbelief. Of the fine stand of wheat, only shucked and broken stalks remained. The battered kernels littered the ground, mixed with the now-melting hailstones.

"The crop is ruined," cried Prokip in despair.

He was able to salvage enough feed for the horses and cattle, but throughout that winter the family would have to survive on their garden produce and a butchered hog.

Anna patched and mended their threadbare clothes, and sewed mittens from scraps of cloth. She washed the sheared wool from their two sheep and spun it into thread which she and Marusia knitted into sweaters and stockings. Prokip spent every spare moment cutting timber to keep the fires burning in their stoves. But even under these severe conditions, the Zhodas and the other farmers in the neighbourhood managed to get through the winter.

The following spring looked more promising. Petro was soon to attend the Vegreville school, but before he left he worked many hours helping his father. They had to clear the adjoining 160 acres of stumps, stones, branches, and debris from felled poplar and trembling aspen before the virgin soil would be ready for the plough. It was tedious, back-breaking work.

Petro picked stumps and piled them on huge mounds ready to be burnt, while Prokip and Marusia picked the stones and loaded them onto a stone boat which was pulled by an ox. The stones were then dumped into a dry gully.

Petro came from behind a huge pile of stumps, shaded his eyes and looked at the noonday sun. He beckoned to Marusia and called, "Time for a break, sis. Tell papa."

Prokip overheard him and answered, "Go ahead, you two. I'll join you as soon as I get rid of this load."

Marusia joined her brother in the shade of a clump of trees. She watched him take his hat off his sweating head and throw it on the ground in disgust. His hair clung in wet strands to his dusty forehead. He wiped the sweat and grime from his face with his shirt sleeve and took a long drink of cool water from the earthenware jug.

"Petro," said Marusia, "pass me that jug."

"You're as pleasant as a stinging wasp, sis. Say please, or you

don't get a drink."

Marusia gave him a scathing look and snapped, "Don't tease me, brother dear. My nerves are already near the breaking point." She looked away from her brother's questioning eyes and scanned the clearing. "Rocks!" she cried. "I see them in my dreams. This hateful, hard work . . ." Her voice trailed off and she sighed.

"And what's wrong with hard work?"

"I'd rather be living in Edmonton. Farm life is a drudge."

"Edmonton, always Edmonton," said Petro. "That's all you've ever thought of since papa took you there with him."

Suddenly he noticed there were tears in his sister's eyes. He put his arm around her waist and said, "You really do want to live there, don't you?"

"Oh Petro, more than you'll ever know."

They sat down on the grass, opened their lunch, but before they began to eat, Petro said, "Tell me again about Edmonton."

Marusia gave her brother a weak smile. "Petro, you have no idea what life is like in the city. People have good clothes, beautiful homes, cars." She paused, then added with another sigh, "To me, living in the city would be heaven."

Petro looked at his sister and then confided his secret. "Marusia, I've never told anybody before, but I hate this drudgery as much as you do."

"You're going away to school, Petro. Be glad."

"I am. But when I see how hard papa and mama work, I feel guilty at leaving. Perhaps I should forget about school and stay home and help them."

"Don't be a goose. Someday when you've become a teacher and have a steady income, you'll be able to help papa and mama by giving them the things they've never had."

"Never thought of it that way before, Marusia. Thanks for opening my eyes."

At that moment, their father came and sat down on the grass beside them and they quickly changed the subject.

The weeks passed, bringing an adequate rainfall throughout the spring and summer, and by the latter part of August the scene was peaceful, and the winter struggle forgotten. The sun kissed the long green stalks and heavy heads of gold wheat that rippled in the gentle breeze like waves upon the ocean.

Multicoloured butterflies flitted from stalk to stalk, pollinating the crops, and in the fenced pasture the contented cattle lazed in the shade of the poplars, swishing their tails to drive off the sand flies and mosquitoes.

The summer had yielded an abundance of lush green grass and within a fortnight, God willing, harvesting would be in full swing. Although Petro would soon be leaving home, Prokip knew he could rely on Mykolai, who loved the land. He was a sturdy lad with broad shoulders, and it looked as though he would be as strong as his father. Prokip also had a great deal of help from Mykhajlo's oldest son, Tymofij, who was like a brother to Mykolai.

The time came for Petro to leave for the Taras Shevchenko Bursa, the school for new Canadians. Anna packed his clothes in the straw valise she had woven during the winter. An unseen tear or two fell on the shirts she was folding. She hated to lose her son but was happy to think that someday, as a teacher, he would not be tied to work on the land, which she knew he did not enjoy.

On the morning of his departure, long before the sun peeped over the horizon, Petro was ready for the journey. He fastened the strap tightly around his valise, while Anna stood by holding a basket laden with homemade bread, butter, saskatoon preserves, sausage, and smoked bacon.

Petro hugged his mother and said, with a catch in his voice, "Mama, what would I do without you?"

Anna was unable to hide her feelings any longer and let the tears run down her face. She kissed Petro tenderly. "Take care of yourself, my son. With God's blessing, go. Your father is waiting."

Marusia, Lesia, Mykolai, and Elena embraced him, wishing him good luck. He picked up the valise and the basket of food and dashed out of the door. Prokip was waiting, his wagon loaded with logs for the stove in the school house and kitchen. These were part payment of Petro's tuition fees.

The journey to Vegreville took two hours. It was a rough and uncomfortable ride, and they did not arrive at the school until midday. Petro was shown to the dormitory where he left his valise and basket of food. Then he helped his father unload the

logs. When the last one lay on the pile, Prokip wiped the sweat from his brow and said, "My son, it is your mother's fervent desire and mine that you be a credit to your school. Do not fail us."

Petro took his father's calloused hands in his and held them tightly as he replied, "You have given me the opportunity of a lifetime. I will never forget that."

Prokip climbed into the wagon and drove off without a backward glance. He did not want his son to see the deep emotion on his lined face. Petro stood motionless, watching the cloud of dust that hung in the air long after the rumbling wagon had disappeared from view. In spirit, a part of him rode back to the homestead. He turned and slowly went indoors to begin his new life.

Prokip's prediction of good weather proved correct. In two weeks the harvest was in full swing. Sheaves from the fine stand of Fife, their heads laden with golden kernels, fell to the ground with heavy thuds as the binder ejected them. Prokip no longer had to use his scythe.

Anna, Marusia, Mykolai, and Tymofij followed behind and stooked the sheaves, teepee fashion. The sun and wind would dry them, and soon they would be ready for threshing.

The sun beat down mercilessly. The stookers stopped frequently to refresh their parched throats with water from an earthenware jug hidden in the cooler shadows of a stook. Marusia hated this tedious work. She looked longingly towards the babbling creek and the forest in which she longed to wander.

During one of Mykolai and Tymofij's trips to the jug of water, they watched a frightened mouse as it scurried along, running for its life. A chicken hawk was circling overhead uttering its loud protesting cries. Then, in a graceful dive, it swept down and claimed its prey.

An hour before sunset the dew began to settle on the stand of wheat and Prokip declared it a day. He turned his team and binder homeward, the tired workers following on foot.

There were still evening chores to be done. Prokip unhitched the horses, watered them from a trough by the well, and drove them into their stalls where he fed them oats and hay.

Anna milked the cows, while Lesia fed the poultry and

gathered the eggs. Mykolai fed chop and slops to the squealing pigs in the pen, tended the sheep, and filled the woodbox. Marusia prepared a tasty meal of fried chicken, vegetables, and salad, with slabs of homemade bread and fresh butter.

After they had all taken turns to wash themselves in soft water from a rainbarrel outside the cabin, they entered the house, feeling invigorated and refreshed. Before the evening meal Mykolai said grace. They were all bone weary and went to bed early as they would have to be up at dawn the next day.

Petro kept good his promise to work hard at school. He was a studious boy and the envy of many of his fellow students. He studied English in the daytime and Ukrainian in the evenings. Sometimes, as he sat at his desk, he found it hard to concentrate as his mind kept wandering back to the homestead. As he pictured his family around the table, his eyes misted and a hard lump arose in his throat. His mother did a man's job in the fields and barnyard, and he vowed that someday he would ease her life of drudgery. She gave so much of herself and asked for so little in return.

Petro earned his keep at the school. He milked the two cows daily to keep the students amply supplied with milk. Occasionally he helped to split the poplar logs for the fires. He had learned the art of log splitting from his father. The first semester went by very quickly.

The Christmas reunion was a happy occasion; it was good to be home with his family. The Christmas concert, held at the Dniester School, was a big event, and on the evening of the concert the school filled to capacity with families from the surrounding districts. Although the temperature was well below zero, the small wood-burning heater inside gave off ample warmth, and in a short time the packed room grew too hot for comfort. The men and women took off their sheepskin coats, beaver hats, and babushkas, and waited eagerly for the entertainment to begin. The hall was lit by two coal-oil lamps and a lantern suspended from the rafters.

A makeshift stage had been erected, and there was feverish activity behind the curtains, fashioned from homespun blankets. James White was even more excited than his pupils. With the deep controversy regarding education raging at this time, he

wanted to make a good impression and to show the new settlers that it was not necessary to build a new Ukraine in Canada in order to preserve their customs and traditions: but it was essential for them to learn the English language and adopt the ways of their new land in order to survive as a nation.

Two husky boys manned the curtains and, as they drew them back, thirty smiling young faces greeted the audience. A deep silence fell upon the room when James White gave the sign to begin. Their lusty voices blended harmoniously as they sang "The Maple Leaf Forever," followed by the Ukrainian anthem and some English carols. The curtain closed to the sound of loud applause.

As the audience waited for the second portion of the show, discussion turned to need for a large hall, the building of which was planned for the following summer. The present school was too small for important occasions such as this.

The curtains parted again to reveal a beautiful Nativity scene. Anna's expert fingers had made a doll to represent Baby Jesus. Lesia played the part of the Virgin Mary. The dialogue was in English, and the actors recited their lines without a fault. James stood in the wings, glowing with pride in his pupils.

Next came a spirited song rendered in Ukrainian by Lesia and her best friend Parania Maxim. It was "*U Horakh Karpatakh Tam Hutzul Zhyve*" ("In the Carpathian mountains lives a man who leads his young lady by the hand").

This was followed by six boys and six girls dancing the *hopak*, a lively Ukrainian dance, accompanied by a fiddle and *tsymbaly*. The youngsters wore their native dress, the girls in red wraparound skirts, aprons, long-sleeved embroidered blouses, black jackets, and leather boots. Their heads were crowned with wreaths of paper flowers with flowing multicoloured ribbons. The boys wore wide red pants held up by a *poyas*, an embroidered sash, with embroidered shirts and leather boots. The audience was enthralled. For a fleeting moment they imagined they were back in their beloved Ukraine.

Recitations in English and Ukrainian followed, including a special poem composed by Tymofij Plotkov as a tribute to his teacher, James White. He stood straight and tall before the audience as he recited:

The little log school upon this hill,
My teacher's smiling face,
Will bring back memories of the past
Father Time will not erase.
For as the years slip away
No matter where I roam
These hills and valleys so dear to me
I will always call my own.

Tymofij and Mykolai recited some pieces in Ukrainian written by the famous poet Taras Shevchenko. The concert concluded with the Christmas carol "*Sviata Nich*" and "God Save The King."

The delighted parents shook hands with James White as he wished them all a merry Christmas, and he received many invitations to visit their homes during the festive season.

Prokip Zhoda had the honour of being appointed *diak*, cantor, for the Christmas Mass celebrated January 7 in the log church. His powerful voice filled the small building and was lost in the rafters overhead.

The next exciting event for the young people was New Year's Eve, January 13, which was the night of *Malanka*. According to the legend, Malanka, daughter of Mother Earth, was held captive by *zley dukh,* the evil spirit, and not released until spring when nature came to life again. There was much laughter in the Zhoda household, as this was the night when the children masqueraded in fancy costumes and visited each other's homes.

"Marusia, please pin this tail to my trousers," begged Petro. "A donkey without a tail would look ridiculous."

Her looped earrings of thin silver wire jangled as she tossed back her thick hair and tied it with a bright kerchief. Her red skirt swirled around her ankles as she pivoted on her toes to face her brother. "Stand still, Petro," she commanded, tail in hand, "or this pin may find a more tender spot than your trousers!"

After she had fixed Petro's costume, she noticed her teacher in the background watching her. "Aren't you dressed?" she scolded. "Do come and put on this ghost costume. I have been working on it all afternoon."

James laughed as he slipped the flowing white garment over his head. Only his eyes, mouth, and nose were visible. "I'm sure

the neighbours won't recognize me," he joked.

Lesia and Elena were dressed as angels, and Mykolai as a devil. Anna looked out the window as she pinned the wings to Lesia's white dress. "It's a very cold night," she said. "Are you wearing warm underwear?"

"Oh yes, mama," Lesia replied, wriggling impatiently, anxious to get on her way.

Prokip and Anna smiled, listening to the young people's lighthearted banter as they climbed into the horse-drawn sleigh waiting outside.

They spent several hours visiting the outlying homesteads, carolling outside the windows of the houses, and receiving good wishes from their neighbours.

Shortly after midnight, they arrived at the Plotkov's homestead. Mykhajlo and Lena heard their happy voices and, when the carols were finished, they opened the door and invited the group inside. Lesia took a handful of wheat from her pocket and scattered it over the floor, blessing the household and wishing the family good health, wealth, and prosperity in the New Year.

Three days later there was yet another celebration — *Shchedryj Vechir*, Generous Eve. Again the supper consisted of meatless dishes, but before the family sat down to partake, Prokip mixed holy water, flour, and salt in a container, and painted crosses on the barn and house doors to ward off the zley dukh for a whole year.

The following day, January 18, was the Day of Jordan. The settlers attended church where the priest blessed a large tub of water, and each family took home enough holy water to last for a year.

Petro had to return to school and therefore could not celebrate with his family the traditional holidays following New Year's and Jordan. He missed *Stritennia* in February, when winter and summer meet, and *Blahovishchennia*, the Feast of the Annunciation, on March 25. He was, however, home for Easter.

In preparation for this event, Anna, Marusia, and Lesia spent many hours by the light of a small coal-oil lamp designing *pysanky*, decorated Ukrainian Easter eggs. Prokip had made a simple stylus, a *kistka*, from a thin piece of metal set into a stick.

The white eggs were divided into sections with hot beeswax. They were then immersed in a yellow dye made from boiled onion skins and left to dry. Later, other colours obtained from berries and the bark of trees were added. For Easter breakfast, blessed eggs were divided between the family members to represent the sharing of life.

A week before Easter, Marusia and Lesia went to the creek to pick pussy willows which they would take to church on Palm Sunday to be blessed.

Anna, as usual, spent most of her time in the kitchen — braiding and shaping *paska*, Easter bread, and making *babka*, from a sweet dough to which she added plump raisins.

Prokip dug up horseradish in the garden. Lesia had to scrape and wash it, a task she hated as the strong fumes made her eyes water. She also grated boiled beets, to which she added the horseradish, with salt, pepper, sugar, and vinegar.

Marusia was equally busy cleaning the house, washing and ironing the family clothes for church on Easter Sunday, while Petro and Mykolai cleaned out the barns, pigsty, and chicken coop, covering the floors with clean dry straw.

Good Friday was cool, with an overcast sky. After they had done their chores, the Zhodas drove to church in their wagon. They had all fasted except for little Elena.

Father Dmytro led the procession three times around the church. Prokip carried the icon of Christ, and Lesia and Tymofij's sister Christina carried the icon of the Virgin Mary. They laid the icon of Christ on the altar, which was draped with black banners. Then the devout parishoners crawled on their knees to the altar to kiss the Holy Shroud.

After the service, they all drove back to their homes to await the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday.

That day was warm and sunny. The gentle wind carried the cry of the loons into the marshes and the green knolls and valleys of the countryside. A robin and its mate, harbingers of spring, were busy building a nest of twigs, feathers, and hair in a tree by the cabin. The dairy cows grazed contentedly in the pasture. It was a peaceful scene.

The previous night, Anna had prepared the traditional Easter basket. She had lined a handwoven willow basket with a white cloth, and in the centre she placed a paska, dishes of butter and

cottage cheese, a ring of homemade *kobasa*, white and coloured eggs, and a chunk of ham. Eight artistically decorated pysanky, and horseradish with its green, unfurled leaves added a touch of colour. In the centre of the paska Anna inserted a homemade beeswax candle, to be lit in church when the priest blessed the bread.

The Zhoda family dressed for church before dawn, and their wagon pulled into the churchyard just as the sun rose above the horizon. Prokip hitched his horses to a post, and they all joined their friends in front of the church.

Many of the women were wearing their traditional dress, which had been carefully preserved for special occasions. Their bright babushkas and richly embroidered blouses, together with the embroidered cloths covering the Easter baskets, made a striking picture.

The black draped banners were replaced by coloured ones, and when the priest arrived, the icon of Christ was carried outside to circle the church three times, stopping before the closed doors that represented the closed tomb of Jesus Christ. When the doors were opened to symbolize the Resurrection, the Divine Liturgy began.

The congregation filed into the church, carrying the baskets of food. The strong aroma of kobasa and ham mingled with the incense. After a period of fasting, it was hard for some of the younger members to concentrate on the service.

The only custom missing was the ringing of the belfry bell to herald the good news of Christ's Resurrection. The Ukrainian pioneer settlers vowed to buy one as soon as they could raise enough money.

Father Dmytro greeted the faithful, saying, "*Khrystos Voskres* [Christ is Risen]."

"*Voistynu Voskres* [Truly He is Risen]," they replied.

After the service, the womenfolk lined each side of the aisle and placed their offerings in front of them, at the same time lighting the candles in the baskets. The priest walked down the aisle, blessing the bread and the pioneer settlers. They then filed out of the church and drove home to partake of the blessed bread. The fast was over.

10

The spring of 1914 looked promising. With Mykolai's help after school, and assistance from Tymofij when his father could spare him, Prokip was able to seed his fields in wheat, oats, and barley, sowing a new strain of wheat, the Marquis. Although the previous year's yield had been substantial, the price of wheat was only eighty-seven cents a bushel, hardly enough to make the payments on additional farm implements.

In June Petro wrote his grade eleven examinations and passed with honours. He had met the requirements of the Department of Education and could now go on to normal school in Camrose, where he was to enrol in September.

Spring turned into summer, and each day the worried farmers scanned the blue sky for a dark cloud — but to no avail. The long summer was hot and dry. Prokip worried over the stunted growth of his wheat and coarse grain; his crop would be very poor.

Their garden produce was also affected, but the industrious Anna had other resources. She raised her own brood of chickens, ducks, and geese. A lean-to against the barn provided a hatchery. After a period of egg-laying, the hens began to cluck, and were ready to sit on a dozen or more eggs. The hatching period was three weeks for chicks, four weeks for goslings and

ducklings.

The hens sat on their nests in divided cubicles along the wall of the hatchery. Feed and water were placed in the centre of the shed. Once a day the hens left their nests to eat and drink, but a good sitter would hurry back to her nest quickly before the eggs got cold. If the nest was exposed too long, the unborn chick would die. The clucking hens did not like to be disturbed during the sitting period, and Anna paid special attention to them. Since the crops and garden produce were a failure, the family would at least be certain of meat during the winter.

Elena was always exploring, and one afternoon her curiosity got the better of her. She entered the hatchery and put her hand under one of the sitting hens to see if any eggs had hatched. The angry hen pecked viciously at her wrist, then flew off the nest and settled on top of Elena's head, flapping her wings wildly and pecking her hair. The disturbance alarmed the rest of the hens who began to cackle loudly.

Hearing the commotion, Anna ran to investigate. She thought a coyote or dog must have broken in and would wreck the interior of the shed. She picked up a long stick and peered inside, ready to strike the marauder. To her surprise, she saw Elena fighting off the attacking hen. She quickly led her daughter outside, but did not scold the child as the frightening experience had been a lesson in itself.

While the farmers were worrying about the drought and their poor crops, a greater and more fearful menace loomed ahead, an event that would affect them much more acutely. On June 28, 1914, in the remote Balkans, Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was killed. This assassination led to the outbreak of World War I, and on August 2 the German army marched into France.

When the news first reached Alberta, the farmers were indifferent. A war in Europe was remote and would not affect them — so they thought. They went about their daily tasks unperturbed.

One evening as the Zhoda family sat around the supper table, Petro noticed the worried look on his father's face. "What is on your mind, papa?" he asked. "Are you worried about the poor crop?"

Prokip could not hide the stark facts from his family. "Yes," he replied. "The crop failure is a grave problem, and there will not be enough money to pay the bank for the machinery we need, or to buy the barest necessities to sustain us through the winter. I will have to go to Edmonton again to find work. With the railroad expanding in all directions, I am sure I can lay ties or dig ditches. There may also be some construction work as many new buildings are springing up in the city."

Petro was aghast at his father's suggestion. "No papa, I must be the one to leave here and earn some money."

Anna's face fell. Petro's education was at stake. She was heartbroken. But Prokip relieved her mind as he announced firmly, "No, my son, you have set your heart on being a teacher. You have gone too far to turn back, and I will not allow it."

"My mind is made up, papa, and nothing can change it." He rose from the table and went outside; he did not notice Marusia follow him.

Behind the chicken coop all Petro's pent-up emotions broke loose. In utter frustration he banged his fists against the wall until they were bruised. Then he sat on a large boulder and, putting his head between his hands, burst into tears. Marusia watched him unseen. It was so long since she had seen her brother cry.

Silently she returned to the house. Her mind was made up. Here was a golden opportunity to leave the homestead and the farm work which she hated with all her heart.

After a while, Petro wiped the tears from his eyes with his shirt sleeve and went indoors.

As soon as he took his place at the table Marusia revealed her plan. "Papa, your place is at home with the rest of the family," she said. "Petro cannot sacrifice his education. I'll go to Edmonton and work as a housemaid for some rich family."

Prokip shook his head emphatically. "My dear daughter, I cannot let you do this."

But Marusia insisted. "It will be easier for me to scrub, cook, and clean house, than for papa to dig ditches," she declared.

After a long argument, Marusia won, and it was decided that she would leave for the city in a week.

Her last night at home was one of mixed excitement and sadness. When she eventually went to bed she could not get to

sleep, She felt ashamed of being so exhilarated at the thought of leaving the homestead and seeking a new life in the city. She was determined to work hard and earn enough to send sufficient money home to the family, but she vowed to herself that she would never again live on a farm.

When sleep eventually overtook her, she had a vivid dream, one which she would never forget. In it she was picking flowers in a lush green field, with the sun shining and birds singing. Suddenly an ominous cloud appeared in the sky, obscuring the sun. Then the rain lashed down in torrents and the field turned into an ocean. Marusia found herself in a tiny cabin on a ship. Looking out of the porthole she could see nothing but turbulent, murky water. There was no way to escape. She was trapped. After what seemed an eternity, she entered a long, dark tunnel with a ray of light at the far end. As she emerged, she was once more on dry land in the warm sunshine.

James White was of tremendous help at this time. He wrote a letter of recommendation to any prospective employer, and one to the St. Mary's Convent for Girls in Edmonton, where he arranged for Marusia to stay until she found work. He also promised to accompany her on the trip.

Marusia assembled her scanty wardrobe, which consisted of two dotted cotton blouses, a long navy blue skirt and a black one. She packed one outfit into a cardboard box with her underwear made from bleached sugar and flour sacks. Her traditional Ukrainian costume and soft leather boots, which Anna had brought from Ukraine and treasured throughout the years, were also included. This outfit was her Sunday best to be worn to church. Marusia tied a strong piece of string around the box; their one valise she left for Petro as he would be returning to Camrose in two weeks.

Anna placed a basket of food beside the box. She took care not to reveal her anxiety and sorrow.

Marusia bent to tie the laces on her plain black oxfords. She felt uncomfortable in them as she was used to walking barefoot during the summer. She looked up at her mother, sprang to her feet and rushed into her arms, hugging her in a tight embrace. "Mama, mama, I will miss you so much," she cried. The tears streamed down her face.

Anna held her daughter at arm's length. "Don't cry, my

dearest. Promise me you won't forget all I have taught you. The world outside can be very cruel. Take care of yourself."

"Mama, you'll never have any cause to be ashamed of me."

When the grind of the wagon wheels and Prokip's loud "Whoa-oa Prince," was heard, Marusia knew it was time to leave. She kissed her mother once more, tenderly, picked up her cardboard box and the basket of food, and walked slowly to the door.

Petro, Lesia, Mykolai, and Elena each kissed their sister goodbye. There was nothing more to say. The parting was painful to all of them.

James put her belongings into the wagon, laying the box on a pile of hay to cushion the jolts along the way. The hay would be used to feed the hungry horses when they reached Mundare.

Marusia climbed into the wagon box beside her father and James followed. Prokip's loud "Giddy-up" set the wheels in motion. Marusia turned and waved to her family. When she looked back once more from the top of the hill, they were mere specks, and as the wagon rumbled down an incline, only the thatched roof of the house was visible. Then the wagon rounded a bend, following the road due west, and the homestead disappeared from sight.

Their wait at Mundare station was brief. There was just time to purchase their tickets at the wicket before the shrill whistle heralded the approach of the CN train from the east.

Marusia embraced her father and whispered, "Goodbye, papa. There will be some money for you at the post office at the end of every month."

Marusia and James climbed aboard, gave their tickets to the conductor, and took their seats. With her face pressed against the window, Marusia waved a last farewell as the train began to move. Prokip stood and watched with misty eyes as the train gained momentum. Then, with a final loud blast of the whistle, it sped westward towards Edmonton.

Left alone, Prokip lit his pipe. He took a long drag on the stem as he retraced his steps to the market square where his horses were tethered. He picked up a newspaper and some supplies from the store, then turned the team north to the homestead.

As the train chugged towards Edmonton, Marusia and James

watched the countryside slide by. The grass was dry and withered, and the land was parched for lack of rain. The shrivelled heads of wheat were evidence that the farmers had endured a year of hard labour for naught.

Along the outskirts of the city, rows of wooden houses with shingle roofs lined the sides of the track. Marusia could not see one thatched roof. She was awed at the sight; she began to wonder how she would manage to adapt herself to her new life.

The train pulled up at the station and the passengers alighted. Marusia carried the basket of food, and James the cardboard box. They made their way towards a streetcar that would take them close to the convent.

The city of Edmonton was a hive of activity. Horse-drawn carts were delivering milk, bread, and produce to the scattered houses. Big Percheron and Clydesdale horses strained at the bit as they hauled loads of lumber and coal. The occasional swish of a whip could be heard as it sailed through the air from the driver's seat, landing on the animals' broad rumps.

Workmen clad in bibbed overalls and heavy boots laboured and sweated as they cleared sites for new homes and offices. Many fashionable people were driving along the streets in automobiles. The men wore smart suits and bowler hats, and the women showed off their elegant gowns.

Marusia was not used to seeing so many people. She admired the well-dressed ladies. Then came stark reality as she looked down at her plain blouse and skirt, and stout black shoes. The tie on her babushka almost suffocated her. She felt ashamed, and at that moment her fervent desire was to be back at home with her family.

James sensed her discomfort and, putting a reassuring hand on her shoulder, he said poetically,

> Let not these riches turn your head
> For soon they'll all be old.
> Material things in a million years
> Can't replace the 'beauty' of your soul.

The streetcar rumbled over the top of the newly built High Level Bridge alongside the train tracks. It was a scary journey, but there was so much to see, including the picturesque Legislative Building, with its well-kept grounds, and the red brick University of Alberta on the south side of the river.

It did not take them long to reach the convent. James rang the bell, and a plump, pleasant-faced nun opened the door to welcome them. James introduced himself and Marusia, and Sister Theresa assured him that his charge would be well cared for. The good sisters would do their best to find suitable employment for her as soon as possible.

Marusia watched James descend the front steps. He stopped, waved, and quickly walked away. An empty feeling filled his heart. Suddenly he realized what he had not wanted to admit — that he was in love with this wisp of a girl whom he was leaving all alone in a big city.

He turned and bounded up the steps two at a time before the sister had had time to close the door. Taking Marusia's hands in his, he looked into her eyes and said tenderly, "My beautiful Marusia. I cannot leave you here. Why don't you marry me?"

Marusia slowly withdrew her hands and replied seriously, "You don't know what you are saying. It's impossible to think of marriage. I have made a commitment to my family which I cannot break." Although she respected James, she knew she did not love him, yet she could not bear to tell him so.

James understood, and kissing her tenderly on the cheek, he whispered, "Goodbye my love." He turned, ran down the steps quickly, and walked away without a backward glance.

Marusia took a step forward as if to follow him, then she changed her mind. She felt Sister Theresa's gentle hand on her shoulder as the nun said quietly, "Come, my child. I'll show you to your room."

11

Marusia had been in the convent for three days and she still had not found work. On the morning of the third day she felt restless and worried. She left the breakfast table, her food untouched, and walked into the garden. At the far end she found Sister Theresa seated at an easel, brush in hand, painting a landscape. The nun heard Marusia's footsteps and smiled. "I just can't seem to get the right colour for the clouds," she said.

Marusia studied the scene for a moment, then suggested, "Try mixing a little more black into the blue."

"Thank you," said Sister Theresa as she stirred the paints on her palette. "You have an eye for colour, my child. Do you do any painting?"

"Every spare moment I can get," replied Marusia.

"In that case, I'll bring out another easel and palette so that you can join me." She soon returned with painting materials, and the two settled down to work. Time passed quickly and Marusia began to recreate a scene of the old homestead. She felt relaxed and happy.

When lunchtime neared, the nun rose and stood looking over Marusia's shoulder. "You paint well, Marusia. Have you ever thought of studying art?"

"I would love to very much, but I don't have the time or the

money. Perhaps someday . . ." Her voice trailed off.

A little later that afternoon Sister Theresa summoned Marusia to her office. A middle-aged couple, expensively dressed, stopped their conversation as she entered. The nun turned to them and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, this is Marusia Zhoda. She comes from a farm about fifty miles from here, and is new to our city. She wishes to find employment as a housemaid."

Mrs. Brooke did not acknowledge the introduction. Instead, she turned to her husband and remarked sarcastically, "One of the immigrant peasants, dear."

Mr. Brooke responded with a grunt. It was hard to tell what he thought of his wife's comment.

Mrs. Brooke peered through her lorgnette, looking the girl up and down as though she were a piece of furniture. "She looks strong enough, Jonathan," she remarked. Mr. Brooke nodded his head.

Turning to Sister Theresa, Mrs. Brooke said, "The girl appears fit enough to work. It's only a matter of communication. So many of these girls speak only their own language."

Marusia began to seethe inside. Choking back her anger she replied in English, "Mrs. Brooke, ma'am, I have completed the fifth grade at the Dniester School."

Unabashed, Mrs. Brooke turned to her husband. "Perhaps she will do."

"I'm sure the girl will suit us," he replied as he patted his wife's hand.

"We'll hire the girl on one condition," said Mrs. Brooke. "Should she prove unsatisfactory, we'll bring her back to you, Sister Theresa."

The nun was inwardly annoyed at Mrs. Brooke's attitude but she managed to appear unconcerned as she answered, "Very well, Mrs. Brooke."

"You are hired," said Marusia's new employer. "We will pay you twenty dollars a month, plus room and board. You'll have each Sunday afternoon and evening off."

Marusia murmured her thanks, and Sister Theresa told her to collect her belongings.

Marusia returned with the cardboard box, which Mrs. Brooke stared at in disdain. She opened her mouth to say something but decided against it. "Jonathan, let us go home." She walked

towards the door, followed by her husband and Marusia.

Marusia thanked Sister Theresa for her hospitality, and the nun whispered, "If you should need me, you know where to find me."

Marusia climbed into the back of an opulent-looking car while her employers sat like two statues in the front seat. In the ordinary way Marusia would have enjoyed the journey as it was the first time she had ridden in an automobile, but today she was too scared and miserable to register the experience.

The Brookes' two-storeyed brick house, with a large veranda, overlooked the North Saskatchewan River. Marusia gazed at it in wonder. What a contrast from her small home on the Alberta prairie.

The couple, followed by their new maid, walked up the broad steps. Mr. Brooke unlocked the front door, which led into a large foyer.

In the cool interior of this big house, Marusia was spellbound by the sight of the rich mahogany table, the plush upholstered sofa and chairs, the velvet curtains at the bay windows, and the shiny, waxed oak floors. Mrs. Brooke took her down a long hallway and entered the vast kitchen, off which was a small bedroom with a mirrored dresser, a closet, and a small night table.

"This will be your room," said Mrs. Brooke. "When you have freshened up, meet me in the kitchen and we'll go over your duties."

Marusia closed the door, took her clothes out of the cardboard box, and washed her hands and face, drying them on a hand towel which hung on a rack. She combed her long hair and rebraided it neatly.

After putting on a fresh skirt and blouse, she took a last look at herself in the large mirror. Satisfied with her appearance, she entered the kitchen where Mrs. Brooke was waiting.

"I have a work schedule for you," she said. "Let me tell you that we are very punctual here and everything must be on time. You will wash and iron on Mondays, dust the furniture, make the beds, and cook every day, and wash and wax the floors every Friday. Meals must be served on time as my husband is very particular. The garden at the back of the house is also your responsibility." Pausing to catch her breath, she continued,

"Can you cook?"

"As well as my mother has taught me," Marusia replied.

"Very well, then. We'll have fried chicken tonight. Do you know how to prepare it?"

Marusia managed to remain calm. How dare this woman insult her. She looked at her mistress and replied, "I think I'll do just fine."

"Then, I'll leave you while I rest for a short time. I've had a most trying day. I'll be down half an hour before dinner to show you how to set the table."

Mrs. Brooke ascended the stairway leading to her bedroom. Marusia rekindled the embers in the large wood and coal stove, then began to prepare the meal.

Mrs. Brooke kept her word and arrived in the kitchen just before the hour of six. Over her arm she carried a black dress, a white apron, and a cap, which she placed over the back of a kitchen chair. "I expect you to take those unsuitable clothes off and wear this uniform when you serve dinner."

Marusia blushed. Mrs. Brooke's cold, penetrating stare made her feel stark naked. Picking up the uniform, she hurried into her room, emerging a few minutes later suitably clad. The startled Mrs. Brooke had to admit to herself that the right clothes could transform the girl's looks. She made no comment but proceeded to give instructions on how she wished the table to be set in the large dining room.

At that moment the front door opened and quick steps were heard in the hallway. A cheerful, boisterous voice hailed, "I'm home, mother."

"I'm in the kitchen, Sydney dear. I want to speak to you."

Sydney paused for a moment in the open doorway, then came inside. He was a handsome young man with wavy blond hair. He carried his tall, lithe body well.

"This is our new maid, Marusia," she said. "She has just arrived from a farm. She is probably unreliable like all the other peasant girls, but she was the only one the convent could recommend." With a wait-and-see look, she took her son's arm and contined, "I do hope she will be satisfactory. I am so tired of having to hire a new maid almost every month."

Marusia stood in the middle of the room, deeply embarrassed. It was a miracle, she thought, how anyone could stay even

a month and take abuse from this disagreeable woman. She looked up shyly at the young man and was impressed by the difference in his attitude towards her.

Sydney in turn gazed at the beautiful young girl and tried to make her feel at ease. "Welcome, Marusia," he said quietly. Marusia smiled and turned her head. She did not want him to see the tears that had welled up in her eyes.

She was very nervous as she served dinner, but the meal was a success. Mr. Brooke and Sydney complimented her on her cooking. Mrs. Brooke, however, had been more critical. There was too much salt in the potatoes, but she observed that in time the maid's cooking would improve.

To keep the big house spotless required much hard work. Marusia laboured from dawn to late at night. She washed the family clothes and linens by hand on a washboard in a large, galvanized tub, and hung them to dry on a line outside the kitchen door. She ironed them with a sadiron heated on the stove. Waxing and washing the floors was a heavy task, as was the care of the garden. The produce had to be dug and stored in the root cellar for use in the winter. All the meals were prepared under Mrs. Brooke's strict supervision.

It was back-breaking work, and when she fell into bed at the end of the day she was exhausted. The continuous, harping drone of her mistress's voice got on her nerves. Many times she wanted to quit, but she knew that work was hard to find. The thought of her twenty-dollar monthly wage held her back. Her family was depending on her until the next crop could be harvested.

Marusia was often annoyed at Mr. Brooke's arrogance, but she had learned to tolerate him. Sydney was the only ray of sunshine in that bleak, spotless house on the hill.

Mr. Brooke did not have any specific business but was out during the day on the pretext of working in his office. However, he spent his time in various clubs in the city. He could well afford to be idle, as he received a substantial monthly allowance from his father in England, which made it possible for him to live in style. Unknown to his wife and son, he was a "remittance man," the black sheep of an aristocratic family. As a young man he had led a wild life, much to the chagrin of his family. Although they tolerated many of his escapades, the final blow came one night

when Jonathan engaged in a drunken brawl in a London club. He had struck his opponent, causing him to hit his head on a marble pillar and slump to the floor, apparently dead.

Jonathan fled home and confessed what he had done. His father quickly made arrangements with a ship's captain, paid him handsomely, and before Jonathan had time to protest he found himself in mid-Atlantic on his way to Canada. Later he discovered a letter from his father in his pocket, instructing him to write home under the assumed name of "John Blake" when he arrived at his destination. Thereafter a monthly payment of a thousand dollars would be sent to him on the promise that he never return to England.

Jonathan never knew that the man he had struck had recovered and that he was not a murderer. But his family did not want him to return to the family estate in case he again disgraced the Brooke name.

So Jonathan settled in Edmonton and married Florence Brown, a haughty young woman from a prominent wealthy family. He built the red brick house on the hill, and together they took their place in Edmonton society. A year later Sydney, their only child, was born.

On her first Sunday off, Marusia decided to attend vespers at a Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church on Jasper Avenue, a few blocks from the Brooke mansion. She dressed in her best clothes, the red peasant skirt, embroidered blouse, and black embroidered vest. Anna's soft leather boots fitted her perfectly.

As Marusia came out of her room into the hallway, Mrs. Brooke was descending the stairs. At the sight of the girl clad in her traditional costume, she stopped short. Greatly agitated she exclaimed, "My lands, young woman, have you lost your senses? Where are you going in that outfit?"

"I'm on my way to church, ma'am. It's my Sunday best," replied Marusia.

"Mercy me, what will the neighbours say?" lamented Mrs. Brooke as she clutched at her breast and collapsed in a limp heap on the stairs.

Hearing the commotion, Sydney and his father ran out of the study. They helped the distraught woman to a couch, and Mr. Brooke calmed his wife as well as he could. He glanced over his shoulder at the maid, but remained silent.

"No one could care less what Marusia is wearing," said Sydney. "For goodness sake, leave the girl alone."

Marusia made no comment. She walked out of the back door and closed it quietly behind her. She was relieved to get into the open air and away from that forbidding house so full of gloom and hatred. She thought of her family, happy on the homestead despite the mud floors and roughly hewn furniture made by her father's expert hands. But in that lowly abode were warmth, love, and laughter. She felt more homesick than ever.

She walked towards Jasper Avenue and the little church. It was an Indian summer, and the many-coloured autumn leaves fell gently from the trees around her, crackling softly under her feet.

All along the street groups of people were gathered on the sidewalks and in their yards. They were discussing world events. Only two months ago the citizens of Alberta had been unconcerned over the news that Germany was at war, but now they had to face reality.

When Marusia reached the steps of the church, she heard the approaching rat-tat-tat of drums. A squad of recruits, dressed in their stiff new khaki uniforms, made a striking picture as they marched down the street and past the church. The people on the sidewalks applauded the band as it played "The Maple Leaf Forever."

These men were but a few of the hundreds of Albertans, young and old, who waited in long lines in front of the armouries to enlist for active duty within the first weeks of the war. While the two Edmonton newspapers and the country Ukrainian paper, *Novyny*, had carried accounts of the drift towards war in Europe, Albertans had only gradually grown more concerned about these faraway events than about the expansion of their businesses and the running of their farms.

The heavy loss of British lives at the Battle of Mons was a rude awakening. Suddenly all Albertans realized that the war in Europe was also their war.

When the crowd began to disperse, Marusia entered the church, where she was engulfed by peace and quietness. She knelt down to pray.

The months passed swiftly and the cold, icy grasp of the

northwest winds was replaced by mild chinooks. The promise of spring was in the air again.

Marusia's hard and lonely life was made tolerable by Sydney Brooke who, aggravated by his mother's biting sarcasm, often came to her rescue. He felt it his duty to protect her. She was good, honest, and beautiful, and so different from the other girls he had met.

Sydney, now twenty-two, was in his second year as a law student at the University of Alberta. His parents were very proud of him, and his mother never failed to remind her friends of her son's accomplishments.

However, when his Albertan friends began to join up, he felt it his duty to serve his country, and to join his British relatives overseas.

In January 1915, Sydney had enlisted without telling his parents. When he first entered the house in his khaki uniform Florence Brooke became hysterical and rushed for the smelling salts. But Jonathan assured her that their son was right in wanting to defend his country. Marusia watched the scene from the kitchen door. How handsome Sydney looked in his army uniform!

While Sydney was still in the early months of his training, he was granted a short leave, and Mrs. Brooke arranged a dinner party for six prominent families. Deborah Stanley, an accomplished pianist and daughter of Mrs. Brooke's closest friends, was included on the guest list. Mrs. Brooke made no secret of the fact that she wanted Deborah as her daughter-in-law.

On the night of the dinner party Marusia was not at her best. She had a throbbing headache and longed to go to her room and lie down. But there was no time to rest, and she slaved over the hot stove throughout the afternoon.

The guests arrived on time, and Marusia heard the pleasant sounds of laughter from the living room. Deborah was playing the piano, and the clink of glasses rang into the kitchen as the company toasted their hero. Marusia served dinner punctually as the clock chimed seven o'clock. She had become an expert cook, and the first two courses were a great success.

Marusia cleared the table and brought in the dessert and coffee. She had made a delicious cherry pie, which she had cut into

wedges ready to serve from a mobile tea cart. Alas, as she was about to place a serving before Mrs. Brooke, her mistress waved her hand wildly to emphasize a point, striking the plate and tipping its contents with a plop into her ample lap.

Before Marusia had time to apologize, Mrs. Brooke uttered a loud shriek, watching as the pie slithered down the skirt of her expensive brocade dress. Then, to the amazement of her guests, she sprang from her seat and gave the stunned, speechless girl a resounding slap on the face.

Jonathan Brooke pushed back his chair and tried to calm his wife. Sydney immediately darted to Marusia's side. "I must apologize for my mother's behaviour," he said.

With a look of stark disbelief, the young girl touched her stinging cheek. Her mistress was indeed a tyrant. With a loud sob, she ran to her room, locked the door, and fell prone upon the bed. Her pent-up emotions, held in check for so many months, were all at once unleashed. She cried until she was utterly exhausted and could cry no more.

Mrs. Brooke gradually gained her self-control and apologized to her guests for the incident. But the merriment of the evening was over. One by one the guests made their excuses and departed. Mrs. Brooke retreated to her bedroom, and her husband left the house.

Marusia lay on her bed, utterly spent from her hard day's work and the mental strain. Her mind was made up. She remembered Sister Theresa's words, "If you need me, you know where to find me." Tomorrow she would pack her few belongings and return to the convent.

12

Marusia spent a restless night. At daybreak, she dressed, packed her belongings in a cardboard box and tied it with strong string. The house was very quiet. Box in hand, she left her bedroom and headed for the front door. As she passed the living room, she heard a groan. She glanced in and saw Jonathan Brooke sprawled on the couch. He groaned again.

Alarmed, she set her box on the floor and walked to his side. Perhaps the man was ill, she thought; but then the smell of liquor hit her nostrils. Scattered on the floor lay an opened letter and some unpaid bills.

She gathered them up to place them on the end table, when the word "kill" caught her eye. Marusia was not in the habit of reading other people's mail, but curiosity got the better of her.

Her eyes widened as she read:

> Dear Jonathan,
> This is to inform you that as of now your monthly remittance of one thousand dollars will be discontinued. Your mother's failing health, enormous doctors' bills, and the outbreak of war have had a drastic effect on our financial circumstances. I assume that by now you are well established in Canada and do not re-

quire my assistance. By the way, I have a confession to make. You did not kill the man in the club. You only stunned him. Therefore you are free to come home and visit us at any time. Please forgive me.

Your loving father

Her hand trembled as she reread the letter. So this man had lived a lie! She picked up the scattered bills and studied them. They were unpaid accounts from various expensive establishments, usually for two people. She knew that Jonathan Brooke had not taken his wife to these fancy places. She was usually at home alone in the evenings when they were not entertaining.

An ugly picture of Jonathan Brooke arose in her mind. Then she thought of his wife. "Oh sweet revenge," she whispered. "What a rude awakening you'll have when you find this letter." Then she placed both it and the bills in full view on the table.

As she turned to leave, she caught sight of Sydney coming up the walk towards the house. For a moment, Marusia was torn with indecision. Revenge would not be so sweet if it also meant hurting Sydney.

She quickly scooped up the papers and stuffed them into Jonathan Brooke's pocket, straightening just as Sydney opened the door and strode into the hallway. From the haggard look on his face, she realized he had been out all night.

Sydney looked down at the box on the floor and then at Marusia. "You really are leaving?"

"Yes."

"But where will you go?"

"To the convent." As Marusia bent to pick up her belongings, Sydney caught her hands and drew her towards him.

"I've been walking all night," he said, "thinking." He gathered her into his arms and, in a broken, husky voice, whispered, "I love you, Marusia."

Marusia looked up into his smouldering blue eyes and saw the love shining there. How handsome he was, and what a gentleman. He started to say something else, when suddenly there came a groan from the living room. The sound startled him and he glanced over to where his father lay on the couch. "Is he ill?"

"No, Sydney, he's drunk."

Perplexed, he said, "I've never seen my father drunk in my life."

At that moment, Florence Brooke's voice came from the top of the stairs. "Is that you, Sydney?"

"Yes, mother, I'm in the living room."

Mrs Brooke descended the stairs. The events of the previous evening had played havoc with her appearance. She seemed chagrined, vaguely aware that her behaviour had lost her the respect of her wealthy friends, yet she still blamed the immigrant girl for everything. She glanced at the disarray and at her husband on the couch. "Poor Jonathan," she said. "It was more than he could take." She then turned to Marusia and said very coldly, "Isn't your place in the kitchen?" She did not see the box on the floor.

Sydney had a hard time controlling his anger. He took Marusia's hand in his and said, "Sit down, mother. I want to talk to you. I've decided to ask Marusia to marry me."

Florence Brooke stared at her son in amazement. First she tried to reason with him, then to plead; then she broke down and began to weep loudly. "We'll disown you, cut you off from your inheritance," she threatened between sobs. Little did she know that there was none. Suddenly she turned on Marusia and shrieked, "You're the cause of all this trouble, you wretched girl!"

Marusia could no longer tolerate this loathsome woman. "Please, Sydney," she begged, "take me back to the convent."

Sydney took one last, compassionate look at both of his parents, picked up the box from the floor, and took Marusia's hand in his. Together they walked out into the bright sunshine and did not look back.

They took a streetcar to the convent, where Sister Theresa greeted them with a smile. When she left them alone for a few minutes in the waiting room, Sydney said, "You never did give me an answer. Will you marry me, my dearest Marusia?"

She knew that she could conceal her feelings no longer. She had been in love with him for some time. Much as she would have liked to discuss her romance with Anna, there was no time — his battalion, Sydney told her, would be going east in a matter of weeks, perhaps less, then sailing to England.

Held in Sydney's tender embrace, she looked shyly up into his face. Her answer lay in her eyes.

The nuns arranged for Father Phillip to marry the couple the next afternoon. Meanwhile they decorated the tiny chapel with spring flowers.

Sydney arrived at the convent an hour before the ceremony carrying a large box under his arm. Marusia watched him through the window as he bounded up the front steps two at a time. He looked so handsome in his uniform.

She ran forward eagerly to open the door. Sydney kissed her and handed her the box. "This is for you, darling," he said. "I'll see you in the chapel."

"Thank you Sydney," she replied as she took the gift and went to her room to change. She did not want to keep Father Phillip waiting.

She laid the box on the bed and unwrapped it carefully. Inside the white tissue paper lay a beautiful dress of white muslin, with a petticoat to match, and a pair of white shoes. In all her twenty years she had never owned anything so exquisite.

She had just finished dressing when there was a soft tap at the door. "May I come in, my child?" Sister Theresa asked.

Marusia opened the door, and on seeing the young girl in her wedding gown, the nun smiled with pleasure. Marusia made a charming bride. In one hand Sister Theresa held a small box, in the other a bouquet of flowers. She laid the flowers on the dresser and opened the box, which contained a sheer white veil.

The sister helped Marusia adjust her veil and, after a few final touches, they both left the room and made their way to the chapel.

The late afternoon sun streamed through the west window, casting a soft glow on the bride and groom as they walked slowly towards the altar. With Sister Theresa at the piano, the wedding music filled the small chapel.

The gardener at the convent was best man, and his wife the matron of honour. The couple stood before the altar, and Father Phillip recited the marriage vows. When he came to the words, "I now pronounce you man and wife," Sydney bent down and kissed his bride.

This was so different from the usual colourful, exuberant

Ukrainian wedding, but Marusia was too happy to dwell on the thought that she was missing her family and friends around her.

After the ceremony Sister Theresa served tea in the study, and then it was time to leave. Marusia returned to her room to collect her belongings. On the bed lay a smart valise with a note attached. It was a present from the nuns.

Marusia was delighted. She quickly transferred her clothes from her old cardboard box and packed them into the valise. She laid her wedding dress and veil on top, then donned a skirt and blouse, and a light sweater. She looked carefully around the room to make sure that everything was left tidy. She closed the valise, placed her shabby luggage by the trash can, and went to join her husband.

The couple thanked the priest and all the nuns. Then arm-in-arm they walked to the streetcar and climbed aboard. The car rumbled along, finally stopping near a boardinghouse a short distance from the armoury. Sydney's army allowance paid for their room and board.

Until now Marusia had never realized that two people could be so completely happy. It was wonderful to love and be loved. In Sydney's arms the war in Europe seemed so far away. But their honeymoon was over all too soon.

Marusia had written to her parents telling them that she was now Mrs. Sydney Brooke, and that she would bring her new husband to meet them very shortly. However, before the end of May, Colonel Griesbach's 49th Battalion was ordered to entrain for the east en route to England.

On the evening of departure, Marusia and Sydney joined the civilians and uniformed men thronging the station platform in the rain. Mothers, fathers, sweethearts, and wives were there to bid goodbye to their loved ones. The loud strains from a band playing "The Maple Leaf Forever" rose into the air. Amid tears, kisses, and au revoirs, the boys in khaki began to climb aboard the waiting troop trains.

Marusia and Sydney stood apart from the rest of the crowd, oblivious to everyone but themselves. At last it was time for them to part. Although her heart was heavy, Marusia did not cry. She was drained of tears. The one person who meant so much to her was going out of her life. How could she bear it!

Sydney clasped his wife in a final, tender embrace. As he

looked into her woebegone eyes, he said, "Cheer up my dearest. The war can't last forever. With half of my army allowance going to you, you won't have to work. Take care of yourself and wait for me. I'll write as often as I can."

"Send your letters to the convent," Marusia replied, "until I know what my permanent address will be." Then with a catch in her throat she whispered, "Goodbye my darling husband. May God bless you and take care of you until you come back to me."

Sydney held her in his arms as if he wished he could hold her forever. The train began to move. She spoke to him with her eyes only, for she feared that if she uttered one word she would scream in utter frustration at the havoc war played with human lives.

Sydney was the last to board the train. He grabbed the steel bar on the back of the last coach and swung himself up just in time. As the train gained speed, he waved a last farewell. Marusia waved back with hot, scalding tears blinding her eyes. Long after the train had disappeared into the darkness she stood there, a lost, lonely figure. Finally she walked back slowly to their one room in the boardinghouse where they had spent their few happy weeks together. She wondered what she would do with her time. Now she had to make plans for the future.

With the help of Marusia's monthly payments, Prokip had been able to meet his loan instalments at the newly established Linden and Bahry Insurance and Loan Company in Mundare. After the poor crop and the previous year's recession, 1915 looked more promising. With the war raging in Europe, the demand for farm produce increased, and the prairie farmers began to emerge from a dismal period, and even to regain confidence in better times ahead.

Marusia felt that she had done her duty in helping her family in time of need. Now she was free as a bird and feeling very independent.

She took the streetcar to St. Mary's Convent where she was received with warmth and understanding. The nuns assured her that Sydney would come home safe and sound.

After tea, Sister Theresa asked Marusia what she intended to do. Marusia put down her cup, thought for a moment, then

replied, "I think I will look for another job. With the money from that, and Sydney's allowance, I will have enough to enrol in night classes at the art school."

"An excellent idea," replied the nun. "I have always thought that you have great talent as an artist and should not give up your painting."

"Thank you for your faith in me, Sister," she replied. Her growing self-confidence made her feel good.

She was surprised and pleased when Sister Theresa added, "One of our helpers has just left and we are looking for someone to help us with the little ones. Would you consider taking the job? We would be very happy to have you here. The pay is twenty-five dollars a month with room and board."

Marusia was elated. She now had a job and a chance to pursue her career. On an impulse, she jumped from her chair and kissed the nun on the cheek. "Thank you very much, Sister. I will bring my things in the morning."

She wrote to her parents telling them that Sydney had embarked for the front, and asking for news of Anna, whose latest child was due very soon. She suggested that her father or James White might meet her at the station in Mundare as soon as she could get a holiday from the convent.

Marusia found great happiness in her work. She was used to looking after young children. She wrote to Sydney every day. Every other spare moment she spent at her easel. In the evenings she attended art classes.

It was not long after embarking on this placid, satisfying life that Marusia discovered she was pregnant. At first she wondered how she would manage, then she thought of bearing Sydney's child and how wonderful it would be for them both. She decided to say nothing to her parents or to the nuns at this time, but to continue her work at the convent.

A month after Marusia had visited the doctor to confirm her pregnancy, Sister Theresa brought a letter to her in the garden. It was from Lesia. Her faced paled as she read:

> Dear Marusia,
> Petro has gotten a teaching position at the Poltava School and will be leaving home in two weeks. I am so happy for him. At first he was going to stay home but

mama talked him out of it. But mama is very sick and has lost our baby brother. She cannot do much now. Harvesting will begin soon and although papa didn't want me to tell you I decided to let you know that we need you at home. Please write and tell me if you can come.

Your loving sister Lesia

The letter fluttered to the ground and lay at her feet. Marusia stared into space, saying nothing. Her little world of peace and contentment was shattered. Sister Theresa sensed her turmoil and touched her lightly on the arm as she inquired, "What is it my dear? Bad news?"

Marusia began to cry. She needed her husband now more than ever. Her heart was breaking and she was afraid that her mother might die. She had another big decision to make.

Sister Theresa let her weep until her tears could no longer flow. At last she looked up and smiled wistfully at the kind nun who had been such a good friend to her.

"My mama is very sick," she said. "I will have to go home at once."

13

As the train chugged into the station at Mundare, Marusia could see Petro, short and stocky, and the tall, slim figure of James. James' face lit up when he saw her. As soon as she stepped down onto the platform he was at her side to carry her two heavy suitcases. "Welcome back, Marusia. It's so good to see you again. I have often wondered how you *really* were." He looked at her searchingly.

Marusia found herself blushing as she answered primly, "I'm quite well, thank you James. It's kind of you both to come for me. I do appreciate it very much."

She looked at his tanned face and added, "You look fine. What have you been up to?"

"I've been helping your father and the boys with the haying," he replied with a smile. "It's a change from my books. I've also been busy preparing my classes for the fall term."

"I hope you don't embarrass all the girls by keeping them after school as you did me. Remember?" she chided, a twinkle in her eye.

James threw back his head and laughed heartily at the recollection. "I was tempted to use the strap," he teased.

She put her hands on her hips. "I would never have forgiven you. I would have hated you for the rest of my life. So there!"

"Ah, then I gather that you do like me a little," he challenged.

Marusia felt uncomfortable under his penetrating stare and answered quickly, "You must remember that I am a married woman."

She turned away from James to greet Petro. "And how is my learned brother?" she asked.

Petro sensed her resentment. "Marusia, please don't be like that. I can only say that I'm very grateful to you for giving up your studies, otherwise my diploma would be gathering dust. It was mama's wish that you should come home. And she does need you, you know."

Marusia felt ashamed. She put her hand on Petro's arm affectionately. "Forget it. It will only be for a short while until mama is well again. How is papa and the rest of the family?"

"As well as can be expected," said Petro as he took one of the suitcases from James. "Come along, let's go home."

They made their way to the market square through a cloud of dust stirred up by a pair of trotting horses as they hauled their load along the main street of the small village, which seemed deserted compared to the hustle and bustle of the city.

James helped Marusia into the wagon. To touch her was like a draught of wine, heady and intoxicating. He longed to take her in his arms and tell her how much he cared for her. But he refrained from giving any sign of his thoughts, as he would not think of making advances to a married woman. Marusia seated herself between the two men, and James was content just to have her near him.

As they drew up to the homestead, Anna was already at the door to greet her, with Prokip and the other members of the family standing behind, wreathed in smiles.

"You look lovely, Marusia," said Anna. "Thank you for coming home."

Marusia looked at her mother's weary face. She was so thin and frail, and the lines in her forehead were deeper than ever. Marusia was filled with love and compassion, and she brushed away every rebellious thought she had been harbouring. Kissing Anna on the cheek, she said in a gentle but firm voice, "I have come to take care of you for as long as you need me. Now go and lie down, mama, and get some rest."

It did not take her long to get back into the swing of farm life. It was a good fall and there was no early frost; the golden fields of wheat ripened quickly. Prokip spent every spare moment repairing and greasing his binder, and getting his horse harness into shape. As soon as the crop was ready, harvesting began.

As the horse-drawn binder, with Prokip at the reins, made its way up and down the field of grain, and the cut sheaves fell into rows, Marusia, Lesia, and Mykolai walked behind and stooked them. When the sun and warm wind had dried the sheaves, the huge threshing machine went into action.

Prokip's bins were soon filled to overflowing. The price of wheat had risen from 91 cents a bushel to $1.33. So, much encouraged, Prokip and his farmer neighbours decided to double their seeded acreage the following spring. They were lucky not to be affected by the substantial increase in the price of land.

While the men worked in the fields, the women stored the garden produce in the root cellar, making Anna rest as much as possible.

Marusia noticed a great change on the prairie in the year that she had been away. As the farmers prospered, they were able to replace their mud-plastered cabins and thatched roofs with houses of timber and shingle.

Marusia worked doubly hard trying to make up for the time she had been away. But the long, trying days left her spent and listless. Before she fell asleep at night, she prayed for her unborn child, for the war to end, and for the safe return of her beloved Sydney. She lived only for his letters.

Anna worried over the drawn look on her daugher's face, and it was only then that Marusia told her that she was expecting a baby. She had not been able to bring herself to do so before.

Meanwhile Lesia had blossomed into a beautiful young woman, and was attracting the attention of her friend Parania's brother, a handsome young farmer, Pavlo Maxim, who had come to Canada with his parents at the age of four. His father had bought him a quarter section of land, and Pavlo felt that farming was the only way of life. But he needed a wife, and he was courting Lesia ardently.

The crops had been bountiful, and it was once more time to

celebrate the Harvest Festival. After the grain was in the bins the farmers and their families celebrated mass in the little log church.

On their return home, the Zhoda family tucked into one of Anna's memorable meals — roast goose, mashed potatoes, cold meats, green onions, radishes and cucumbers with sour cream, cottage cheese, sauerkraut with onion and oil, and rye bread. For dessert she served fresh fruit and baked *pampushky,* a yeast dough with a poppy seed filling.

As it had been a better year for them all, Prokip made plans to build a new home a quarter of a mile south of the original site. This meant hauling in timber during the winter. Since the area around the homestead had already been cleared, he had to travel twenty miles farther north, almost to the North Saskatchewan River, to fell timber for his building project.

The winter snowfall of 1915 was heavy, but the raw, biting winds did not hinder Prokip. He arose two hours after midnight, bundling himself in his sheepskin coat, with thick woollen trousers tucked into his fleece-lined boots. His beaver cap and mitts helped to keep out the cold. His lunch, which he carried in his breast pocket to keep it from freezing, usually consisted of salted bacon fat, brown bread and slices of raw onion. This was enough to sustain him until he returned home at night.

Each day he reached his destination before dawn, chopping down trees, clearing them of their branches, and piling them onto the sleigh, securing them with lengths of chain at the helm and stern. When dusk fell, he started his journey home. But before eating a hot supper which Anna always had ready for him, he still had to unload the logs, and feed and water his horses. He had time for only a few cat winks before he was up and out again.

The long winter months passed quickly for Prokip, and when spring arrived he had enough logs to build a large two-storeyed house.

After the spring seeding, he began work on the new home. With additional wood from a lumberyard in Mundare, and the help of two carpenters, the house began to take shape.

Anna was now well enough to do some work in the garden. Marusia had been a great help to her, and she did not mind the

extra work of cooking for the hired men. She was only too happy to know that they would have a comfortable home at last.

The final building was splendid. It had two storeys, with gabled windows, a black shingled roof, and white siding. There were four bedrooms upstairs, and a living and dining room with a kitchen downstairs. A large veranda encircled three sides. The oak floors were a pleasure to keep clean after the mud-plastered ones in the original cabin.

Prokip continued to make improvements to the homestead. He bought Anna a big wood and coal stove for the kitchen, and a potbellied heater for the living room. He had considerably increased his stock of milk cows and horses, and he built a new barn to shelter them. He also put up a milk house, and purchased a cream separator. Some of the milk was fed to the pigs, and the rest made into cottage cheese. Anna and Marusia churned the cream into butter and sold any surplus to the neighbouring townsfolk. Another lean-to shed stored the harness. A chicken coop, pigsty, and an outhouse completed the new setup.

After the house and outbuilding were completed, Prokip's next task was to dig a deep well and crib it with lumber. The water was drawn from the well in a galvanized pail on a stout length of rope. A wooden trough on a stand was placed beside the well for the cattle and horses to drink from. Prokip also constructed an outside pich made of bricks, an improvement on the former one made from willow. He covered it with a mud plaster roof, and Anna declared that she could bake her best and tastiest bread in this oven.

The good crop and the high price of wheat enabled Prokip to pay all the bills for the new house and barns, and the family was debt free at last.

Shortly before the Zhodas installed themselves in their new home, young Pavlo asked if he could speak to Prokip in private. Lesia looked at her parents and blushed, as she knew that Pavlo was going to ask her father for her hand in marriage.

The two men walked to the wheatfield where Pavlo turned to Prokip and said, "I expect to have a good crop this year. I already have a team of horses, two head of cattle, and a few hogs, and I have just finished building my house."

Prokip looked intently at the young man. "I have been

watching you, Pavlo," he said. "For a youngster you are doing very well."

"Thank you *Pany* Zhoda," he replied. Encouraged by this praise, and before he lost his nerve, he quickly continued. "I am in love with your daughter Lesia. May I have your consent to marry her?"

Prokip took out his pipe, filled and lit it, and took a long drag on its stem. He knew what his answer would be but he wanted to keep his future son-in-law in suspense.

Pavlo began to fidget and Prokip relented. "You have my permission and blessing. Take care of my little girl. Come, we will have to tell my wife."

They returned to the house where they found Anna and the girls waiting expectantly. Prokip looked at his wife and nodded his head. Anna went into an adjoining room and returned with an embroidered hand towel which she tied around Pavlo's left arm, a Ukrainian custom of acceptance of a son-in-law. Had they rejected him, Anna would have presented him with a pumpkin.

The next two weeks were full of excitement. Anna, Marusia, and Lesia were busy on the trousseau, and Marusia offered to lend her sister her elegant white wedding dress that Sydney had chosen with such care, and the veil that Sister Theresa had given her. They also made coloured crepe paper flowers and streamers. Prokip butchered a hog; Anna cured a ham and made sausage.

A week before the ceremony, Prokip harnessed a light-footed mare to his buggy, and he and Mykolai made their rounds of the neighbours, extending invitations to the Zhoda-Maxim wedding.

For the wedding feast, Anna, her daughters, and Lena Plotkov prepared a dozen plump hens and roasted two home-cured hams. They also made ***holubtsi,*** cabbage rolls; ***kholodets,*** a jellied dish of boiled pigs' feet and pork hocks; poppy seed tortes; and a prune pampushky, deep fried in oil.

Lesia and Marusia were exhausted when they climbed upstairs to the bedroom they would share for the last time. Marusia, who was expecting her baby very soon, was worn out. She would have loved to settle down to a twelve-hour rest, but she did not want to spoil Lesia's wedding day. The two

girls looked out of the window where the night was as bright as day; a full moon hung in the cloudless sky. The gentle breeze carried the perfume of the evening-scented stocks which grew below their window. The occasional hoot of an owl broke the silence of the night.

They remained silent for a long while, each engrossed in her own thoughts. Anna's step on the stairs brought them back to reality. Marusia put her arm around Lesia's waist and said, "Come, little sister. Time to get some rest. You've a big day ahead of you."

Next day before sunrise, Prokip built a large fire in the outside pich. When the oven was thoroughly heated, Anna raked out the coals and placed the stuffed hens, cabbage rolls, and *kulesha,* a cornmeal dish, inside. She applied a seal of mud plaster around the door so that no heat could escape. The food would be cooked by the time the wedding party returned from the church.

Marusia watched Lesia, helped by her bridesmaid, Christina Plotkov, don her bridal gown. She had mixed feelings. She was happy that Lesia was marrying Pavlo, who would make a good husband, but she knew that she would miss her sister. They had shared so many happy moments and hardships. But her main thoughts were of Sydney. Oh how wonderful it would be for him to be at her side on this special day.

She smiled as she felt the baby within her kick vigorously. It would not be long before the birth. She wondered if her firstborn would be a boy. The early rumour that had spread throughout the settlement, that the oldest Zhoda girl had come home in shame, no longer bothered her. The old women of the district had nothing better to do than to indulge in malicious gossip. She wondered where Sydney was at this moment, and prayed silently for the turmoil and holocaust in Europe to end.

She was brought out of her daydream abruptly by Christina. "Marusia, look, doesn't your sister make a lovely bride?"

Marusia looked at Lesia and smiled. She was truly beautiful. The white muslin dress fitted her well. Her long, fine net veil was decorated with sprigs of *myrt,* tiny white flowers from an evergreen plant regarded as an emblem of love. On her head rested a wreath of the same blossoms. Christina handed her a bouquet of small crepe paper flowers, with long flowing rib-

bons of white, pink, blue, and yellow.

"I do so want you to be happy little sister," whispered Marusia as she embraced the bride-to-be.

At that moment Anna entered the room. Her eyes misted as she looked at her young daughter who tomorrow would be installed in her own home. She tried to quell the empty feeling within her; Lesia, and then soon Marusia, would no longer be by her side.

Anna held a miniature Bible that she had brought from the old country and treasured throughout the years. She would have given it to Marusia had she been able to celebrate her wedding with the family. She kissed Lesia and handed her the Bible as she said, "Within these pages is the Light and the Way. Follow it my dear child and you shall never want."

With a choked sob Lesia cried "Mama!" and clung to Anna for a long moment.

Anna understood. That one word said a thousand things. She gently disengaged herself from her daughter's embrace and said, "Come, we must not keep your bridegroom waiting."

A warm summer day greeted the bridal party as they climbed into a two-seated buggy which Prokip had just purchased. It was drawn by a pair of his finest horses and decorated with paper flowers and streamers.

Prokip, Lesia, and Anna sat in front, and Christina, Petro, Mykolai, and Elena crammed themselves into the back seat. Marusia stayed behind to help some neighbours set the table and make last-minute preparations for the wedding dinner. She did not feel she had enough energy left to go to the church with the others.

She had not slept well the night before, dozing only briefly. Once more she was troubled by the dream of being tossed on a rough sea in a ship from which she was unable to escape. But this time there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

Pavlo Maxim was waiting at the little log church with his best man and parents. As she descended from the buggy, Lesia looked startlingly beautiful, and he considered himself very lucky to win such a lovely bride.

Father Dmytro performed the brief and touching ceremony, and the marriage vows were sealed with silver bands which the bride and groom placed on each other's fingers.

Prokip and Anna left the wedding party first in order to ensure that all was in readiness before the married couple arrived. A long table had been set up in the dining room, in the centre of which was the *korovaj,* a wedding cake baked from sweet dough, covered with symbolic ornaments of doves and geese surrounded by a wreath of myrt. Beside the korovaj was a *jalynka,* a small spruce tree decorated with paper flowers. Long streamers ran the full length of the ceiling.

Anna picked up the korovaj and held it in her hands as she and Prokip greeted the bridal party at the door. She blessed the bride and groom, wishing them a long and happy life, and returned the wedding cake to its place on the table.

A fiddler then struck up a lively tune and the guests joined him in song. The bride and groom sat at the head of the table. The bridesmaid sat by the bride, and next to her sat the bride's brothers and sisters. The best man was seated by the groom, and next to him sat his parents and family.

The delicious food had been brought into the kitchen from the outside pich, and everyone felt very hungry as the tantalizing aroma floated into the dining room.

Father Dmytro said grace and again blessed the couple. Prokip proposed the *perepij.* The guests raised their glasses, drank deeply, and shouted, *"Vivat!"*

After the meal they all gathered in the living room as the fiddler played Ukrainian melodies, including the *kolomayjka,* romantic waltzes, and lively polkas. Some danced and sang, clapping their hands to the music. The older women, the *babas,* did not dance, but sat on benches chanting sad songs, bewailing the loss of the bride's innocence and her new role of total enslavement to her husband.

Then came the presentation, or *daruvania,* a Ukrainian custom during *perepyvania.* Those who could afford it brought gifts of money. Some brought live gifts. Lena's present was a hen. One family brought a pail of honey, another a sack of flour, and one of the more affluent neighbours, a pig. Poor Mykolai had the honour of putting the live gifts in a shed. Every contribution was welcomed and would give the bridal couple a good start in their married life.

The wedding merriment lasted well into the night. Marusia had slipped away unnoticed, and was lying on her bed when

Lesia entered the room at midnight to change from her wedding attire to a simple cotton dress for the short trip to her new home.

"Marusia, are you all right?" she inquired anxiously as she looked at her sister's pale face and the beads of sweat on her forehead.

"I'm fine, Lesia," she replied weakly. "Don't say anything to anyone, but ask mama to come up here as soon as she can."

As Lesia returned to Pavlo's side, she whispered to Anna, who quietly went upstairs.

Although the baby was not expected for a week or two, Marusia had overtired herself and was already in labour. Anna remained with her for a while, mopping her damp brow. "There, there, my love," she whispered. "It won't be long now."

When she heard the last of the guests leave, she called Prokip. "Heat up plenty of water," she commanded, "and please ask Lena to come and help me."

In the early morning, just before sunrise, the family waiting downstairs heard the shrill cry of a newborn babe — the first Zhoda grandchild, Sydney Brooke, Jr.

14

The Zhodas spent the yuletide season of 1916 quietly in the traditional Ukrainian way. Marusia's husband was the only absent member of the family. James White was invited to join them, an invitation he accepted eagerly. Before the Holy Eve supper he remembered the traditional custom and greeted them with the words "Christ is born," to which they answered in unison "Glorify Him."

Marusia tried to join in the laughter and songs, but her thoughts kept wandering to Sydney. Where was he at this moment, she wondered.

James noticed her sadness and seated himself on a bench beside her, putting his arm around her shoulders. "You mustn't be so downhearted on Christmas Eve," he coaxed. "Come on, Marusia, smile."

But Marusia could no longer suppress her feelings. She burst into tears, crying, "James, oh James, I hate this war and what it's doing to me. Not knowing where Sydney is and what's happening to him. I just can't go on."

James drew her dark head towards him and whispered tenderly, "There, there, my dear. You'll feel better soon."

Marusia let him calm her. As the kerosene lamp cast a soft glow on her tear-stained face, James looked down at her and

smiled, content just to hold her. For some time they remained silent, then she stood up. "Thank you, James," she said. "You are my pillar of strength and a true friend. I don't know what I would do without you."

Sydney Brooke answered the news of his son's birth with long, loving letters to Marusia, telling her how much he missed her and how he longed to see his son. He was now in France, and had seen his first major action with the 49th Battalion early in the new year. He wrote briefly and lightheartedly of the mud, the trenches, the horrors of battle he must have experienced, hoping to reassure her that he was well. He had written to his parents, he said, telling them that they were grandparents, and where his wife and son were living.

That year, between the newspaper accounts and Sydney's letters, Marusia followed where the war had taken him — Ypres ... the Somme...Vimy Ridge. Every day she dreaded the thought of the official-looking envelope that might end her hopes of ever seeing her beloved husband again.

During this period James White was spending a great deal of time at the Zhoda homestead. Petro and he had much in common, and he had the additional motive of wanting to watch over Marusia's welfare.

Petro realized the need for education among the new settlers. During the winter he set up classes for adults at the school. His students were mostly unmarried men and women who were too old to attend regular day classes and had to farm during the daylight hours.

Apart from teaching them to read and write, he organized a Ukrainian performing arts group. They put on concerts and plays that were well attended by the surrounding families who needed a respite from their gruelling work on the land. At the same time, it gave them a chance to remember their culture and traditions.

With the war raging in Europe, the placid months on the prairies came to an abrupt end for the Ukrainians. The government regarded immigrants from Austria, Germany, and other countries with which Canada was now at war with distrust; in 1917, the Canadian citizenship of many of them was cancelled, and they were disenfranchised.

There were a few agitators among the Ukrainian people themselves. Those who had relatives in the old country had been urged to join the Austrian army, and so they were considered enemies and interned on the least pretext. There was some talk of deporting them. Many industrial workers were fired from their jobs and some had their lands confiscated. Disenfranchised farmers who wanted to buy more land were not allowed to do so, and agitators were confined to a radius of ten miles unless they had a permit.

Petro Zhoda was unhappy about the restrictions forced upon his people, but he could not voice his disapproval. He strongly disagreed with the editor of the *Vegreville Observer,* who felt that the Ukrainian-Canadians should be banned from keeping up their traditions and language, which he thought would deter them from fighting for their country.

Petro was active in collecting funds for the Red Cross and the Patriotic War Fund. The majority of the Ukrainian settlers gave generously, but not all the farmers were able to contribute. It did not mean that they were against the cause, but there were many who had put less effort into cultivating their lands, and their returns were smaller. Some had settled on unproductive land, and many had large families where every cent was needed to maintain them. A five-dollar bill went a long way towards buying the barest necessities. Some of the settlers received letters from their relatives in Austria, imploring them to send just a few dollars as they were unable to make a living.

Mykhajlo Plotkov had left two brothers behind when he came to Canada, and he had not lost touch with his family. Being able to read and write, he corresponded with them frequently. But his health was failing and he was not as prosperous as his friend Prokip Zhoda. When his brothers called on him for financial aid, he gave as generously as he could. However, his last letter to his brother, Wasylj Plotkov, was intercepted and confiscated. From then on, Mykhajlo was a marked man and regarded with distrust by the authorities.

In June 1917, the Canadian government introduced conscription. In northern Alberta, where the majority of settlers were of Ukrainian stock, the famous 218th Battalion was formed. Contrary to the belief that the Ukrainian newcomers were enemies, the young men flocked to enlist to defend Canada,

not waiting to be conscripted.

Many of the agitators opposed conscription. They tried to evade enlistment and hid out in the bushes and cattle sheds. One night, two men who were hiding in a haystack on Mykhajlo Plotkov's homestead were spotted by a passerby, who reported them to the newly organized provincial police. Mykhajlo had no idea that the men were hiding on his land, and on the third day, when they emerged from their hiding place to beg for food, the cunning police constables, who had been watching the homestead, arrested them, along with Mykhajlo, who was accused of harbouring draft dodgers. They were all taken away and placed in a concentration camp in Vermilion.

Mykhajlo's youngest son, John, ran over to the Zhoda farm to report the sad news. The Zhoda family was heartbroken. Petro in particular was overcome with fury at this unjust arrest. Helplessly he beat his fists against the wall until they were bruised. Anna also could not control her grief. She gathered the young Plotkov boy to her bosom and promised to go over to Lena immediately to comfort her.

Prokip was visibly shaken. He raised his eyes heavenward and cried:

Good Lord in Heaven
I pray to Thee.
Cast off these shackles
And set us free.

Meanwhile, the conflict in Europe had finally touched the neutral United States and it entered the war. Americans who had emigated to Canada were relieved when the U.S. officially joined the Allies. James White, along with hundreds of his countrymen in Canada, enlisted immediately. Petro Zhoda also joined up.

Petro and James were ordered to leave for training in southern Alberta, and the night before they left, the Zhoda family, with their son-in-law Pavlo, gathered for a last dinner together. As Anna served one of her tasty meals, she studied her son Petro closely. Her heart ached for him. Inwardly she rebelled, but outwardly she remained calm. He was going out of her life, back across the wide Atlantic that had brought him a

few years earlier from a land of oppression to a free country. She thought of Mykhajlo Plotkov in a concentration camp and wondered where freedom lay.

The time came to say goodbye. James kissed Lesia and Elena, and shook hands with Pavlo, Mykolai, and Prokip. His tight grasp of Prokip's hand was more eloquent than words. Then he embraced Anna tenderly and thanked her for her kindness. She had been like a mother to him, ready to console and to comfort when he needed it.

Marusia stood apart from the others, holding her baby in her arms, rocking him gently as she watched the farewells. James walked over to her and smiled down at the baby. When little Sydney grasped his thumb in his chubby fist he pulled gently and the baby gurgled happily. Only then did he look into Marusia's eyes, longing to take her in his arms and to tell her how he felt about her. But she belonged to another man.

A fear struck his heart when he thought that he might never see her again, but he was careful not to show his emotion. He put his arms around mother and child and said, "Take care of yourself for the baby's sake." Then he kissed her cheek and walked quickly away.

Marusia managed a wan smile. A picture of her beloved Sydney flashed before her tear-filled eyes. The baby fidgeted and began to cry. She turned away quickly and walked to the stove to get the bottle of milk that was warming in a pan of water.

It was Petro's turn to say goodbye to his family. He embraced his two younger sisters who clung to him, loath to let him go. His uniform sleeve was wet from their tears.

Pavlo and Mykolai each gave him a manly handshake. They feared that if they uttered a word they would break down, and grown men do not cry.

Petro hugged his father and looked down at his lined, weather beaten face. There was no need for words. Prokip saw the love and respect in his son's eyes. To Petro his father seemed to shrink. His shoulders were hunched from the daily toil, and his black hair was streaked with grey. He looked much older than his years.

Prokip tried to conceal his anxiety. He put his gnarled hand on Petro's shoulder and said, "May God be your daily guide,

my son."

The lump in Petro's throat hurt and he could not reply. Turning to Marusia and his nephew, he looked at them lovingly. "Cheer up, my dear sister. I know how you are feeling. I'm sure Sydney will come back to you soon."

"Oh Petro, I'll pray and wait for that day to come, and for you to return safely," Marusia cried.

Anna had been standing aside, apparently quite composed. But when Petro reached his mother's side the tears streamed down her face. In anguish she cried, "Petro, my son, my son."

He had never seen his mother so distressed. Holding her tightly in his arms, he tried to comfort her, reluctant to leave her in such a state. Then he felt a light tap on his shoulder as James said quietly, "Petro, Tymofij is waiting outside. We must go."

Petro followed James to the door without a word. Tymofij drove them in a buggy to the CN station at Mundare, where they boarded the train to Edmonton. Shortly after, they began their training at a camp outside Calgary.

Letters from Sydney continued to arrive at irregular intervals. Somehow he had managed to survive the bloody battle of Vimy Ridge, where so many young Canadians had laid down their lives for the cause of freedom; after surviving that slaughter, he felt he led a charmed life.

After one particularly long gap without news from him, nearly two months, Marusia was almost frantic with worry. One afternoon as she watched for her father and brother to return from town, she stared into space, absorbed with her thoughts. Her hands lay idle in her lap.

Anna watched her daughter as she sat so motionless. Her heart was filled with compassion. Putting down the long string of braided onion and garlic on which she was working, she laid a reassuring hand on Marusia's shoulder and said, "Do not torture yourself, my love. I'm sure we'll have news from Sydney soon."

"Mama," replied Marusia. "This suspense is more than I can bear."

It was late afternoon. Their tasks were done and the rows of braided onion and garlic were hanging on pegs to dry.

Marusia picked up baby Sydney from a large apple box in

which he had been lying contentedly, basking in the warm sun. She carried him inside the house. Elena would take care of him while Marusia helped her mother with the evening chores; it was time to milk the cows. If only the war would end and Sydney could take her back to the city, away from farm life and the long hours of back-breaking work.

As she left the house she heard the rumble of the wagon coming from the south. As it turned in the gateway she ran to meet her father and Mykolai.

Prokip reined in the horses and climbed down slowly. In his hand he held a large brown envelope, which he handed to his daughter. Marusia ripped open the envelope with a terrible sense of foreboding. She scanned the brief message two or three times; she could not believe what she read. Finally the words sank in and made sense. The letter fluttered to the ground, and with a cry of anguish she fell in a dead faint at her father's feet.

Mykolai picked up the letter and translated the contents for Prokip. It was the usual official notice of a casualty at the front.

"My God, have mercy!" he exclaimed as he gathered Marusia in his arms and carried her into the house, laying her on a couch in the living room.

Anna knelt beside her daughter and chafed her cold hands."Oh dear, what's the matter?" asked Elena. The commotion woke the baby, and he began to cry lustily.

Marusia stirred and moaned. In an almost incoherent whisper she murmured, "No, no, it can't be. Not Sydney, my Sydney."

Anna cradled her daughter in her arms like a baby, trying to comfort her. Prokip stood by helplessly. He brushed away his tears with the sleeve of his jacket.

Mykolai and Elena slipped outside to attend to the evening chores by themselves, while their parents remained by Marusia's side.

It was not long before she gained control of herself. But she was void of any feeling. Her Sydney had left her; for the baby's sake she must go on alone.

Sydney Brooke was one of the many casualties at the Battle of Hill 70. He never knew the victory that was theirs. He was lost somewhere in the maze.

15

War or no war, life on the homestead had to continue as usual — with hard work and the will to survive. Marusia came out of her shell of mourning slowly. Anna was once more with child, and the responsibility of the heavy work fell on her daughter's shoulders. Anna was only able to undertake the light tasks around the house, although she continued to help with the milking.

Unlike many of his friends who wanted to work in the city, Mykolai Zhoda loved the land. His one desire was to be a good farmer like his father. He asked his parents' permission to enrol in the school of agriculture that had been set up in Vermilion the previous year. Anna was a strong believer in education and she persuaded Prokip to let him enter at the beginning of September. The heavy load of the harvest season was left in the hands of two people — Prokip and Marusia.

Elena, who was dark and lively like Marusia, had her eye on a life beyond the homestead limits. She was an excellent student at the Dniester School where James White had taught. After school she looked after young Sydney, fed the chickens, and gathered the eggs before doing her homework.

Prokip cut the grain with his horse-drawn binder, and Marusia put up the stooks. In the evenings after sundown,

and sometimes by the light of the moon, father and daughter stooked side by side until midnight. When the grain was dry, some of the neighbours helped with the threshing.

The Zhoda family did not hear from Petro or James until Christmas time. Their letters were postmarked England. Petro also enclosed a photograph of himself, which Anna cherished.

Sydney was two years old when Anna's last baby, a son, was born, after a long and difficult birth. They christened him Oleksa.

Petro and James finished their training in England and embarked for the western front. Before leaving for France, Petro wrote again, saying that he hoped the war would soon be over and he would be home again. Because of the censorship, he was unable to let them know that James had been sent to Italy, while he was on the way to the lines on the River Somme, where the Allied objective was to capture the city of Amiens.

Petro was a sapper and was assigned to mine the fortified arsenal at Amiens. Taking their strength for granted, the Germans relaxed their vigil and Petro could hear their voices as he crawled towards the arsenal.

"I wish this damned war was over and we could go home," he muttered to a comrade. A vivid picture of his family, his students, and their smiling faces flashed before him as he continued forward.

When the explosives were in place, the commanding officer yelled "Now!" With a blinding flash the arsenal was blown sky-high. The order was given to retreat but as the sappers began to crawl back to their trench Petro was caught in a heavy barrage of shells.

By early October the exhausted Germans knew they were beaten, and in the latter part of October 1918, they surrendered. The Armistice was signed on the eleventh day of November at eleven minutes to eleven in the morning.

All around the world people rejoiced. The four years of hell, blood, and tears were over. The Canadians heard the news that their boys were coming home at last.

The Zhodas waited anxiously for a letter from Petro telling them when he would arrive. But there was no news. Before they had heard of the Armistice, Prokip made a trip to town with a load of wheat. He called at the post office as usual,

where he was handed a long, official-looking envelope. He had a premonition that it contained bad news, and he hurried home so that Mykolai could read it for him. Mykolai confirmed his father's worst fears; Petro had been killed in action on the Somme. Prokip was overcome by grief.

As soon as the two men entered the house Anna sensed that something was terribly wrong. She looked at her husband with questioning eyes, but he avoided her gaze.

A deep fear clutched at her heart. "Tell me, Prokip," she cried. "What has happened? Is it Petro?" She wanted to know the truth but feared what she would hear.

Prokip took her hands and, looking into her eyes, said simply, "Petro will not be coming home, Anna."

Anna was stunned. She wrenched her hands from her husband's grasp and beat them against his chest, crying out like a wounded animal, "No, no, Prokip. Not my Petro."

She sank to her knees, her heartbroken sobs filling the room. "Petro, Petro, my son," she cried. "In vain have I brought you from the land of oppression to a land of freedom. But they took you back and killed you."

For days Anna lay in apathy, oblivious to everything around her. Marusia knew only too well the torture her mother was enduring. She looked after her tenderly and took charge of her little brother Oleksa.

Prokip resumed his daily round, his emotions kept to himself. There was not enough water in the well for the animals; he had to drive them each day to the creek where he cut a hole in the ice and let them have their fill. He feared for Anna. She had regained very little strength since the birth of Oleksa. Being a religious man, he took the matter up with his Maker. Every night he fell on his knees beside his bed and asked the Good Lord to spare her.

With Marusia's loving care, Anna began to respond. But a part of her was forever buried with her son in France.

The fierce struggle in Europe had taken a heavy toll of Canadian lives, including many of the sons of the Ukrainian settlers. Whether born in this country or not, they died together as one — loyal Canadians.

The Ukrainian population began to protest against the unjust treatment they had suffered during the war. Some of Prokip's

friends had had their lands taken from them, and they were not permitted to buy more. But, although they had been born in alien countries, they were now British subjects, and they demanded their citizenship rights under the Returned Soldiers' Association Act.

A Ukrainian delegation set up an interview with Prime Minister Robert Borden, and their cause was laid before him. The prime minister received them kindly and promised to grant the Ukrainians equality with other Canadians. Those interned in concentration camps on suspicion only were immediately released and sent back to their homes. Mykhajlo Plotkov was one of the first to rejoin his family.

Now that the Armistice was signed, families all over Canada made preparations to welcome home their heroes. But their joys were short-lived as another disaster was about to attack them.

The epidemic of Spanish influenza that was presently raging worldwide finally crept into Canada. That stalker of death did not pick its victims. The old and young were equally susceptible, and many people lived only two days after contracting the dreaded disease.

First it hit the cities, and in Edmonton and Calgary the fatalities rose alarmingly. Then it made its way into the remote hills and valleys of Alberta.

But it did not affect only civilians. After four years of fighting, thousands of Allied soldiers who had been spared during the horrors of war were stricken by the Spanish flu. Ships docking at cities where influenza was epidemic spread it through the contingents returning from the front, and the soldiers died at an alarming rate, lying in camps in makeshift shelters. Thousands never saw their homes again.

The Zhodas were unconcerned about events in Europe and did not believe that this epidemic could affect them. Marusia slept in an upstairs room with Oleksa and Sydney, so that Anna would not be disturbed in the night.

One morning, just before Christmas, she was awakened by Oleksa who was crying and restless. An occasional rasping cough escaped from his throat. Alarmed, she jumped out of bed and prepared a bottle of milk for the ailing infant. But he could not swallow; he pushed the nipple out of his mouth and con-

tinued to whimper. His forehead was burning.

Marusia crept into her parents' room and awakened her father. Anna heard her whispering and sat up in bed to ask what was wrong. "Little Oleksa is sick, mama," Marusia replied.

Prokip went to the cradle and felt his son's hot brow. Anna followed him with faltering steps. "Don't be afraid, Anna," he said. "He'll be all right in a little while."

Anna picked up Oleksa and sat down on the bed cradling his limp, hot body in her arms. The remainder of the family hovered around her. They did not know what to do.

Prokip stirred the fires in the living room and the kitchen stove. "Elena, bring down the cradle to the kitchen where it is warmer," he said.

By this time dawn was beginning to break. It was a cold, crisp morning and nothing stirred outside. The heavy hoarfrost lay thick upon the surrounding trees, which were visible through patches in the frosted windowpane. In a short while the sun's rays peeked through the east window and began to fill the kitchen where the family was gathered.

Oleksa's cradle was placed near the stove. Anna sat on a chair beside it, rocking it to and fro. The baby continued to cry.

Prokip went into the enclosed porch off the kitchen, returning with a handful of pussy willows that had been blessed on Palm Sunday. He laid five of them on a tin plate. From a cupboard he took a bottle of holy water and poured some of it into a bowl. He then roasted the pussy willows in the oven. When they turned black, he took them out and went over to the crib. As he prayed, he put the burnt pussy willows into the holy water and made the sign of the cross over the contents in the bowl and over the baby in the crib.

The family waited anxiously. If the pussy willows sank to the bottom of the bowl Oleksa would be fine. If they did not, then they could expect the worst.

Prokip then opened the kitchen door, dipped his finger in the holy water, and made a sign of the cross upon the doorstep, commanding the evil spirit that had made his son sick to depart. Prokip strongly believed that there was power and healing in prayer.

While they watched the pussy willows floating on the water,

there was a loud knock on the door. On the doorstep stood Mr. Sylvester, a travelling salesman who was well known in the neighbourhood.

"*Dobroho ranku* [good morning]," said Mr. Sylvester.

"It is not a good morning," replied Prokip, "but come inside all the same."

In the early days and well into the thirties, the settlers, especially the women, relied on the travelling salesmen. They rarely got to town, and looked forward to these visits for everything from needles and thread to spices, patent medicines, and bales of cloth.

Mr. Sylvester warmed his hands by the stove and took in the scene. He asked Prokip why he was holding a bowl of water with pussy willows. But the family did not laugh or joke with him as usual; their faces were downcast.

"Our son Oleksa is sick," said Prokip. "I am trying to chase the evil spirit out of this house."

Mr. Sylvester looked at the sick child. He did not want to alarm the family but he knew what was wrong. Taking Prokip aside he said, "I see you have not been in touch with your neighbours lately and don't know what's happening. It is not an evil spirit within these walls; it is a severe malady of the body which is sweeping the country. It is called the Spanish flu, and is taking a heavy toll of victims."

Prokip showed his alarm. "Don't be afraid, my friend," continued Mr. Sylvester. "I have just the remedy to help you all."

"What is it?" inquired Prokip.

"Rum, man, rum. A little in hot water or tea will ease an inflamed throat and restore vitality to the body."

Prokip Zhoda was an abstainer. He abhorred alcohol in any form and regarded it as the product of the devil. To his mind, it corrupted human lives and caused disunity in the home. To indulge in it was, to him, a sin. "No, no," he cried.

"My good man," insisted the salesman, "without such a remedy it could mean death to your family. You don't want to lose any of them do you?"

Sylvester was regarded by the settlers as a doctor of sorts, and many of his customers had complete faith in him.

Prokip was torn between his own convictions and what the salesman was telling him. What if he were right? He cast his

eyes to heaven as if to apologize to the Lord for his weakness, then asked quietly, "How much?"

"It's a dollar and twenty-five cents for a twenty-six-ounce bottle," Sylvester replied.

Prokip took down a tin can from the shelf and counted out the money. Marusia also made a few purchases, but with Oleksa sick the family was not in a buying mood.

Marusia prepared a hot lunch which Mr. Sylvester demolished with relish before going on to the next homestead to peddle his wares.

Prokip watched as the salesman drove away in his horse-drawn sleigh. He poured some warm tea into a cup and added half a teaspoon of rum. Then he went to the crib and dropped a little down the baby's throat. He continued this treatment three times a day. On the third day Oleksa seemed to perk up.

Elena and Mykolai, who was home on vacation, were the next to be stricken. In hoarse whispers they complained of sore throats, aching muscles, and throbbing headaches. They, too, were given tea and rum.

Prokip and Marusia brought down two beds from upstairs and set them up in the living room. It was easier to look after the invalids without having to climb the stairs.

Anna and Marusia caught the flu on the third day, and Sydney was the last to succumb. Prokip's whole family lay on their beds like logs, unable to do much for themselves.

Prokip feared for Anna. Her pallor frightened him. She had never properly recovered from the birth of Oleksa and the death of Petro. He wondered how much more she could take. He persuaded her to swallow the remedy, saying, "You *have* to get better my love. The children and I need you."

For four days the whole family remained at death's door. Besides feeding them tea and rum, Prokip boiled a fat hen and made them drink the broth. The stock of liquor began to diminish. He wished he had bought another bottle.

Meanwhile, the outside chores had to be done. After he had cared for his sick family and stoked the fires, he attended to the animals. As he drove the cattle and horses to the waterhole, he often wondered if he would get back. The weather was blustering and cold. He walked behind his herd against the wind, the thick snow covering him from head to toe. Unable to breathe

from the force of the wind, he often had to turn his back to catch his breath. But make it he did.

The crisis passed. One by one his family recovered. Prokip went through the whole ordeal untouched by the flu. He strongly believed that it was his deep faith and prayer that had saved his family — not the rum. God alone knew the answer!

The Spanish flu took a heavy toll of life on the prairies, but by the time the new year arrived the dreaded disease had begun to recede and the danger was over.

16

Shortly after the Armistice, James White returned from overseas. It felt good to be a civilian again and to cast off his khaki uniform. Since his parents were dead, he had no reason to return to the United States. Apart from some of his returned soldier friends, he did not know many people in Edmonton, and those were busy with their own affairs. So he took the train east to the Zhoda homestead, which was to him a second home. He also longed to see Marusia again.

The village of Mundare had grown from the small hamlet he knew. There were new offices, a lumber yard, a dentist's office and a lawyer's office, an ice cream parlor, a Chinese laundry, and a new National Home which was the centre of the community. He intended to walk to the homestead, twenty and some miles not being a long distance for a soldier.

As he passed the butcher's shop, a familiar figure walked out of the door. "Mykhajlo Plotkov! How good to see you," he exclaimed. "How have things been with you?"

Mykhajlo grasped James' hand in a vicelike grip, his face beaming with pleasure. "I'm glad you're back, my friend."

A look of sadness crossed his face, and he was silent as he thought about his ordeal in the concentration camp. But pushing the bitter memories aside, he said, "I have been home

for a couple of months. It's good to be a free man again. What are your plans, James my boy?"

"I'm not sure," James replied. "I think I'll look for a teaching position in my old school or one near it."

As they walked together towards the market place, Mykhajlo related some of his experiences in the camp. "Come and stay with us for a while," said Mykhajlo. But James politely declined, saying that he would appreciate a ride to the Zhodas'. It was then that Mykhajlo told him that Petro and Sydney had been killed in action. It took some time for James to recover from the bad news.

Mykhajlo unhitched his horses and climbed into the wagon after James. Together they drove due north, past the newly built Ukrainian Greek Catholic church. On arrival at the Zhoda homestead James jumped out and Mykhajlo continued his journey, promising to look him up the following day.

James knocked on the door which was opened by Anna. She was surprised and delighted to see him but she looked sad as, with a pang in her heart, she thought how wonderful it would have been if Petro were with him. James tried to cheer her. "I'm so very sorry about your loss, Anna. Petro was like a brother to me." Anna quickly recovered her composure and invited him in.

Prokip's face lit up at the sight of James. He rushed forward with outstretched hand crying, "Welcome home, son. Welcome home! It's so good to see you."

Then it was the turn of Mykolai and Elena to greet him. They plied him with questions about his war experiences. Finally he broke away from them and went over to Marusia, who was standing in the background. Taking both her hands in his, he looked with concern into her sad face and said quietly, "Mykhajlo told me of your loss, Marusia. I am very, very sorry."

"Thank you, James," she replied. "For my son's sake I have to build my life all over again."

Sydney clung to his mother's skirts and looked up at James with curiosity. James picked him up and soon made friends with him. He was popular with the whole family, and the Zhodas invited him to stay as their guest while he was picking up anew the threads of his life.

He learned about the ravages of the Spanish flu that had left many families in the district with the loss of one parent or both. The Mykytkas were one of the bereaved families. The flu had claimed Josophat Mykytka's wife and he had been left a widower with six children. He needed a wife to look after them and began to look around.

The woman who interested him most was Marusia Brooke. Although he was twice her age he knew that she was lonely and had the burden of bringing up a child. On one pretext or another, he made frequent visits to the Zhoda home, always making a point of talking to Marusia.

She detested these visits and tried to keep out of his way. But he would always remain until she came into the kitchen. One day, when no one was around, he decided to broach the subject of marriage. Marusia was busy at the stove preparing the evening meal. Josophat tiptoed up behind her, put his strong arms around her waist and, holding her in a tight grip, said, "Marry me, Marusia. You need a husband, your boy needs a father, and I need a wife. We would do well together."

"Let me go at once, Josophat," she commanded angrily as she tried to disengage herself from his arms. But he refused to move away and began to kiss the nape of her neck.

Thoroughly disgusted, she took the ladle from the pot of hot soup and whacked him on his hands. The ladle burned him, and he let out a cry of pain, releasing his hold on her waist. Angrily, he pulled her round to face him and shook her until her teeth chattered. "You bitch!" he shouted.

At that moment Anna entered the room, demanding an explanation. Marusia, embarrassed, replied angrily that it was time for Josophat to go home. He left without another word.

But Mykytka was a determined man. He did not give up easily, and he vowed to himself that he would marry this wilful girl who had aroused his desires.

The month of July was hot and sultry. Marusia did the milking in the cool early morning hours. One morning, as she sat on a wooden stool in the barn, milking Bossy, the big Holstein cow, she was too preoccupied to hear stealthy footsteps approaching. As she arose with a full paid of milk in her hand, she was met by Josophat who towered over her, blocking the door.

"Please excuse me," she said. "What are you doing here so

early in the morning?"

He did not answer, but stared at her with an impassive expression. She tried to pass him but he put a restraining hand on her shoulder. Frightened, she lifted the full pail of milk and threw the contents at him.

Josophat knocked the pail from her hands, grabbed her around the waist, and carried her to a corner of the barn where he threw her on a pile of straw. Through clenched teeth he muttered angrily, "I'll have you one way or another."

Marusia was petrified. She tried to scream but no sound came. She attempted to get up but his strong arms pinioned her to the ground and she was unable to move.

The rest of the milk spilled on the ground and the empty pail rolled under Bossy's hooves. The frightened cow lashed out and kicked it into the doorway of the barn.

At that moment Prokip was on his way to the horse barn a few yards away. He always worked his summer fallow in the cool of the morning and rested his animals in the peak heat of noon.

As he passed the cow barn he saw the empty pail roll out of the doorway. Old Bossy was a temperamental animal and his first thought was that she had hurt his daughter. He rushed in to investigate, and the scene that met his eyes aroused the devil in him. He grabbed a leather strap that hung on the wall, and with all his might brought it down on Mykytka's broad shoulders. In his fury he lashed him again and again. Mykytka raised both his hands to protect his face. He was helpless under the barrage of blows.

Marusia managed to crawl out of the way. Shaken, she ran to the door. As Prokip began to deliver another blow, an unseen hand grabbed the strap in midair. It was James. "Prokip, don't," he pleaded. "This beast is not worth killing."

Prokip tried once more to bring the strap down on the fallen man, but James pinned him to the wall of the stall until he had regained his composure. He looked over his shoulder at Josophat and thundered, "Don't let me catch you on these premises again."

The beaten man got up slowly and slunk out of the barn like a wounded animal.

After making sure that his daughter was unhurt, Prokip con-

tinued on his way to the horse barn, leaving James and Marusia alone.

James looked at her pale face and his heart went out to her. He had known for a long time that he was very much in love with her, and he hated the thought of her belonging to another man.

Gathering her into his arms he whispered, "I think, my love, in order to protect you from men such as Josophat, you should marry me."

Surprised but flattered, Marusia let James kiss her. She felt a certain kind of peace and contentment in his tender embrace.

Meanwhile, Mykolai had finished his course at the Vermilion School of Agriculture and had returned home. Prokip gave him 160 acres adjacent to his. Mykolai loved the land, and his one desire was to be a good farmer. He seeded his broken acreage in wheat, from the sale of which he was able to make a substantial down payment at a fixed interest rate on another 160 acres. All the time he was dreaming of a home of his own which he hoped to share with Tymofij's sister, Christina Plotkov.

The Alberta farmers at this time were restless and discontented. The fixed interest rate on borrowed money was not justified by the fluctuating farm produce prices. They felt the federal government had dealt unfairly with them. Large organized farmers' meetings were held throughout the district. Mykolai attended as many of them as he could and became a popular speaker as he addressed his fellow farmers, urging them to stand up for their rights. That same year The United Farmers of Alberta party was born.

17

One sunny Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1920, the Zhodas had just returned from church and were about to sit down to a dinner of roast chicken with all the trimmings when they heard the faint chug-chug of a car approaching the front yard. It was lucky that it was a dry day. If there had been rain, there was no way a car could make it down the muddy road.

The car stopped, and Bobyk, their faithful German shepherd who had been sleeping on the front step, rose to his feet with bristling hair. He bared his teeth and growled fiercely.

Prokip pushed his chair from the table and walked to the porch where he ordered the dog to lie down. To his amazement, he saw a shiny new Dodge pull up, in which a well-dressed man and woman were seated. Because of the growling dog they did not attempt to alight.

The man in the driving seat spoke first. "How do you do?" he asked politely. Prokip nodded his head in greeting.

Marusia followed her father to the door and was taken completely by surprise. Here was the last couple in the world she had ever expected to see again.

In a hushed voice she exclaimed, "Mr. and Mrs. Brooke ...." Her voice trailed off as she did not know what to say.

"Hello, Marusia. How are you?" asked Mrs. Brooke as she

studied the young woman standing hesitantly before her. Despite all the hard work on the farm, time had dealt kindly with her, and she had changed very little since the days of her service in the Brooke household.

"Forgive us for startling you," Mrs. Brooke added. "We should have written first."

Marusia quickly regained her composure and answered, "It's quite all right. Won't you please come into the house?"

The elderly couple looked suspiciously at the dog.

"He won't hurt you," said Marusia. She turned to Bobyk and commanded, "Lie down, boy." The dog obediently crouched at her feet.

Mr. Brooke alighted. Then he opened the door on his wife's side and helped her out.

Marusia explained to her father in Ukrainian who the strangers were.

Prokip beamed with pleasure as he extended his gnarled, calloused hand in greeting, which the Brookes shook in turn.

Marusia led the way to the house with the trio following. Inside the porch, his little face pressed against the screen door, stood four-year-old Sydney who, with his tousled blond hair, looked very like his father. "Mama!" he called as he ran to his mother.

"This is your grandson, Sydney," she announced proudly. Then turning to the child she said in Ukrainian, "Go to your *baba* and *dido*," indicating the strange couple. Anna was nowhere in sight so the bewildered child ran to Prokip and pressed his head against his grandfather's knee.

Mrs. Brooke stooped and took little Sydney's hand, pulling him gently towards her, trying to clasp him to her bosom. Unable to disguise her emotion, she cried in a broken voice, "Sydney, my Sydney." Then she began to weep. Alarmed, the boy cried too.

Mr. Brooke helped his wife to her feet and patted the little boy on the head. Sydney ran to his mother while Mrs. Brooke wiped her eyes on a dainty lace handkerchief.

The Brookes were escorted into the kitchen where Anna was busy at the stove dishing out the food. Elena was setting the dining room table.

"Mama, these are my late husband's parents," she explained

in Ukrainian. Anna wiped her hands on her apron and shook hands with the couple.

"Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, this is my mother," she said. Mr. Brooke shook her hand politely. After the rest of the family had met the Brookes, James White, who was a dinner guest, was introduced, and Elena set two more places at the long table.

After dinner Marusia led her guests into the living room, which was attractively furnished with a large chintz-covered sofa against one wall, a china cabinet with a large mirror, its top covered with a richly embroidered *rushnyk,* or runner, a wooden rocker, and a potbellied stove. White organdy curtains hung at the bay window, and the varnished wooden floors were covered with handwoven scatter rugs. The walls were adorned with many religious paintings, all brought from the old country and carefully preserved. Some of Marusia's artwork was also displayed, as well as a large handwoven *kylym,* or tapestry.

The Ukrainian women were very proud of their handiwork, and Anna was an expert in the art of weaving. Every year Prokip seeded an acre each of flax and hemp. He extracted the oil from the seeds, and the fibre was spun into thread for weaving. The oil was also used for cooking. After the flax and hemp were threshed and the seeds winnowed, Prokip soaked the fibres in water to soften them and pounded them to make them pliable, hemp fibre being much tougher than flax. Anna then spun the fibres into thread on her spinning wheel. She bleached some of the thread on the grass in the hot sun to whiten it, and dyed the rest in various shades of blue, green, yellow, red, orange, and black.

Anna wove her kylymy on a loom built by Prokip. Flax fibre made fine thread and was woven into linen, while the heavy hemp threads were used to make tapestries, bedspreads, and rugs for the floor.

During the first few years on the homestead Anna had clothed the entire family with handwoven hemp cloth. During the winter months her spinning wheel and loom were never idle. Hemp, being a hardy plant, adjusted well to the Alberta climate. Sheep's wool was also used to weave many of the colourful artistic pieces in the Zhoda home. Mr. and Mrs. Brooke both admired Anna's beautiful handiwork.

After they were all seated, Marusia served coffee and a walnut torte to her guests. James and Mr. Brooke seemed to get on well together.

Prokip and Anna listened politely as Mykolai translated their conversation. Although they understood the occasional word, they could not follow everything that was said. They had learned some English words from their children, but few of the original Ukrainian settlers had made a point of acquiring the English tongue. In fact, many spoke neither English nor Ukrainian, but understood one another perfectly when one farmer would say to another, *"Day hammyr nai pofiksuyu fense,"* which meant, "Give me a hammer and I'll fix the fence." Instead of the Ukrainian word *horniatko* for cup, they began to use the word *kopyk.*

After coffee Mrs. Brooke explained the reason for their surprise visit. "I know you are wondering why we are here," she said to Marusia. She took out a lavender-scented handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes as she continued. "The loss of our son has been a bitter blow. Our big house is empty and lonely. My husband is away all day and I have much idle time on my hands. I would like it very much if you would let little Sydney live with us."

Marusia was taken completely by surprise. Such a thought had never crossed her mind, although she had been wondering why the Brookes had visited her after such a long time. "My dear Mrs. Brooke, you must be joking," she replied.

Mr. Brooke patted his wife's hand and answered, "We can give him much more than you can in these godforsaken parts. We can provide him with a comfortable home and an education. He also needs a father."

"*You,* Mr. Brooke?" cried Marusia in dismay. "Never! Mrs. Brooke turned against me while I was in your home. You have both looked down on me. This I can forgive, but to give you my son is out of the question. I can give him the love which you never gave your own son."

A look of hurt surprise crossed Mrs. Brooke's face, but she remained silent.

Marusia looked at the elderly couple and felt sorry for them. After a moment's pause she said, "You may come and see Sydney as often as you want. But you can't take him away from me."

James walked to Marusia's side, laying a reassuring hand pon her shoulder. Turning to the Brookes, he said, "You will ave to see Sydney at *our* home. I want to marry Marusia if she ill have me. Her son will be my son."

There was nothing more to be said. Mr. and Mrs. Brooke real-zed that their hopes were shattered, and they made their leparture graciously but sadly.

18

As the horror of World War I faded, the face of Alberta began to change. The placidness of the prewar years on the prairies was a thing of the past. Aside from labour unrest, the whisky trade flourished. It was the vote of the common people at had introduced Prohibition in 1915. Bootlegging brought ith it a wave of lawlessness. The car had replaced the horse d mule, and with faster transportation the undercover liquor siness boomed.

The settlers realized that Prohibition was a grave problem — d a mistake. In 1923 the matter was again reviewed, and the vernment once more permitted the sale of liquor. To a few m all ethnic groups who foresaw big profit in the moon-ine trade, it became a way of life. Stills or "blind pigs" sprang in many remote places, and Prokip and Mykhajlo were rned about the effect this might have on the younger genera-n.

The railroad began to branch across the province, bringing e outlying communities closer together, and trains ran as far rth as the Peace River country. Not only were farm com-dities brought to the city centres, but wood, iron ore, coal, nber, and fish from lakes and streams found their way much ter to the processing factories. It was a link with greater sperity.

The discovery of oil and gas as early as 1914 in Turner Valley was only a forerunner of the wealth of "black gold" that lay untapped within the earth. The radio linkup across the province, as far north as Resolute Bay, was enthusiastically received, but it was not for some years that the Zhodas and their friends could afford such a luxury. In urban areas electricity linked the towns and cities. Cars and garages began to replace the horses and livery stables, and with this increasing prosperity it was not an uncommon sight to see a Buick or a Dodge sitting in a farmyard.

Then the iron bird of the sky, the aeroplane, came into its own, with regular mail and passenger services. Roads were graded, and bus services started up between Edmonton and Calgary. But it was a long time before these facilities were available to all the settlers.

Although inflation continued to rise, the people had more money to spend. And spend it they did, with little thought of tomorrow.

The settlers realized more and more the value of education, and with the help of the Department of Education they spent money freely on the building of schools. They were determined to give their children every advantage in life.

Mykolai Zhoda graduated from the school of agriculture and started to build a wooden frame house with a shingled roof on his 320 acres. When his home was completed, he proposed to Christina Plotkov. The parents of the young couple were very happy. Not only were they close friends of the Zhodas, but now also *svaty,* in-laws. Both families started to plan for the wedding.

Mykhajlo fattened a hog, and two weeks before the wedding Prokip helped him with the slaughter in the traditional Ukrainian manner. Mykhajlo raised his gun to his shoulder and took careful aim, the bullet finding its mark in the centre of the animal's forehead. When the pig fell, Prokip slit the animal's throat. The two men tied the hind legs of the carcass with rope and pulled it out of the pen into the clean grass, laying it beside a mound of dry straw which they lit to singe the bristles of the pig's hide until it was smooth. With buckets of water from the well they washed the carcass until it was creamy white.

Prokip was given the honour of cutting off the pig's head. He made a deep gash down the length of the underside, and after the heart, liver, kidneys, and fat had been removed, the two men quartered the carcass and took it to the house. From there on, the women took over, making hams, sausage, bacon, and head cheese. Two days before the wedding they prepared the traditional dishes in readiness for the big occasion at the Plotkov homestead.

Christina and Mykolai were married in the little country church by Father John, a young Ukrainian Greek Orthodox priest. He bestowed his blessing on the bride and groom and wished them long years of marital bliss. The wedding celebration lasted for two whole days and nights. The couple was showered with gifts of money, first at the Plotkov home and then at the Zhodas'.

Mykolai was a good farmer. He put up a white, lime-washed fence around his house and planted young maple saplings from the agricultural farm at Vermilion for a shelter belt. From an Edmonton nursery he purchased six crabapple trees, the Rescue, two apple trees, the hardy Battleford, and four plum trees. Gooseberry, raspberry, and blackberry bushes, and strawberry plants completed his orchard.

Mykolai left a space for a large garden, something he had learned from his mother. She always reasoned that even in the driest summer a well-stocked garden could provide enough food for the whole year. With the protective shelter belt of maple trees and a caragana hedge, their fruit trees and garden flourished.

Prokip and Anna began to realize that one by one their brood was leaving the nest, but the Sunday afternoon gatherings on the homestead continued, and knit the family even closer together.

Marusia was glad that her parents seemed happy, but she was far from content herself. Anna and Prokip relied on her too much. She had helped them in their time of need, but now she wanted desperately to escape from this hard life and start afresh with her son.

One August day she was in a particularly rebellious mood. Standing on the veranda she looked out on the tall stand of ripening wheat which would be ready for the binder in a few

weeks. She dreaded the thought of the many stooks she would have to put up.

When she was in this state of mind she found solace at her easel. Sitting on the grass in front of the house, she set up a canvas and began to paint.

Except for the querulous blue jays in a nearby tree, the lament of a robin in search of a juicy worm for its dinner, it was absolutely quiet and peaceful — in contrast with her own dark mood.

Then she heard a hawk's shrill screech high in the cloudless sky as it pursued an oriole. Suddenly, out of nowhere, another hawk appeared, also making a dive for the helpless oriole. The rapacious hunter resented the intrusion of a rival and dived at his opponent in fury. A battle began in earnest. So engrossed were they that for a few seconds both birds forgot their prey. In that instant of reprieve, the frightened oriole escaped, winging its way out of sight and reach of its enemies.

With deft strokes of the brush Marusia re-created the sky battle on canvas. She stood back and studied her work, yearning to be able to fly away like the oriole — away from the land and all that it entailed. Tears filled her eyes.

She had not noticed James' approach. He stood looking over her shoulder. "It's a beautiful piece of work, Marusia," he said admiringly. "You have so much talent."

Marusia tried to conceal her tears but failed.

James put his hand on her arm and, in a soft, soothing voice, begged her to cheer up. "Marusia, don't cry. I can't bear it." Then he took her in his arms. "You know how I love you," he said as he wiped the tears from her eyes. "You have not yet promised to marry me but you are fond of me, aren't you? I have been thinking about our marriage for several months, and have decided that I will try to get a teaching position in Edmonton. I would like to take you and little Sydney with me."

Marusia always felt peace and contentment with James. She pondered this idea for a few moments. In her heart she knew that she could never love anyone as much as Sydney, but she felt deep respect for James. Here was a chance for escape, a chance to pursue her love of art in a large city.

"Yes, James," she whispered. "Let us get married."

Prokip and Anna were delighted at the news, and the wed-

ding was arranged to take place before harvesting began. On the day of the ceremony, Mykhajlo Plotkov, his wife Lena, and son Tymofij drove the groom to the country church where, with Father John, they awaited the bride's arrival.

Prokip drove up to the church in his colourfully decorated buggy and helped Marusia, Anna, and Christina, the matron of honour, to alight. Mykolai brought Elena and the two little boys, Sydney and Oleksa, in his wagon.

James looked at his lovely bride with pride as she walked up the aisle on her father's arm. She was wearing a fashionable straight-cut pink dress with a row of pleats around the hem. A white felt cloche adorned by a fluffy feather hugged her dark curls. A silver crucifix was clasped around her neck, and she carried a bouquet of freshly cut carnations and baby's breath from Anna's garden.

As they neared the altar, she looked up at James as he stood there, waiting for her, so handsome and dignified in his pinstriped suit. A warm feeling, like a draught of wine, flowed through her veins, making her pulse race. The heels on her white pumps clicked softly as she quickened her step.

They stood at the altar with Mykolai, the best man, and Christina. Father John performed a simple and touching ceremony, and their marriage vows were sealed with gold bands.

The wedding feast, attended by family members and a few friends, was a gala affair, held at the Zhoda farm in the traditional Ukrainian style. The guests wined, dined, and danced the hopak, the kolomayjka, and the waltz to the music of a local fiddler, cymbalist, and drummer.

When the lilting strains of the waltz filled the room, James led Marusia onto the floor. They made a striking couple. James held his wife tightly and whispered in her ear, "I love you." She smiled at him and laid her head on his shoulder in deep contentment.

Prokip and Anna's gift pleased the couple the most. They deeded to them eighty acres of prime cultivated land across the road from their homestead.

James obtained a teaching post in a local school only ten miles from the Zhoda homestead, and he, Marusia and Sydney made their home in a small cabin beside the school.

Before classes resumed in September, James took his bride for a brief honeymoon in Edmonton. The Roaring Twenties had brought yet more changes to the city. When the couple alighted from the train they took a streetcar to the elegant Macdonald Hotel where they registered for a week.

They enjoyed a candlelight dinner while an orchestra played. They were engrossed with each other, oblivious to the other diners, and it was easy to see that they were newlyweds.

Before retiring for the night, they strolled along the bank of the North Saskatchewan River, admiring the awesome beauty of the western sunset. There were no longer any traces of the rutted trails leading to the east. The gravelled streets were now lined with newly built homes.

When dusk fell, Marusia and James were silent, and as the lights began to appear in the houses Marusia wondered what secrets — soon to be wrapped in the blanket of night — lay within.

The next day they made a tour of the city, their first stop by streetcar being the University of Alberta and its well-kept grounds.

The University of Alberta was created at the first session of the Alberta legislature in 1906. Two years later Dr. Henry Marshall Tory was appointed the first president. Classes opened in September of that year in temporary quarters, and for the next twenty years many faculties were developed.

James was most impressed with the Faculty of Education and hoped that in the near future he would be able to continue advanced studies. He applied for a teaching position in an Edmonton school for the following year.

Although some Edmontonians still opposed the amount of money spent on education, enrolment in the schools increased steadily.

The Whites' next stop was at the St. Mary's Convent where Marusia longed to see the kind sisters who had been her benefactors at a time of dire need. Needless to say, they received a royal welcome.

Marusia could not bring herself to visit Jonathan and Florence Brooke. She no longer held any animosity towards them, but in that house lay too many heartbreaking memories.

The population of Edmonton had doubled in the last decade.

Most of the horse-drawn vehicles had been replaced by shiny new automobiles. The younger drivers honked their horns loudly to attract attention.

Puffing engines pulled long freight cars filled with coal and lumber from the mines and forests, bringing goods to city holding sheds and sawmills. There was an atmosphere of peace and prosperity.

The Whites shopped at the big Hudson's Bay store on Jasper Avenue. Marusia had never seen so many beautiful articles before. James watched her with amusement, urging her to buy what she wanted. But she was not used to spending money freely, and selected only necessities and a few presents for her family. James also made some purchases for his new school.

The week went by very quickly. Soon it was time to go home. Marusia did not want to go back to the prairie, knowing that she would miss the glitter of city life. She longed for the day when James could become a teacher in Edmonton.

James loved to teach, and with Marusia at his side he had found his paradise in the little two-room house adjoining his school on the prairie.

Soon two special events filled his cup to overflowing. Eleven months after their marriage, Marusia gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Amelia. Although Sydney was like a son to him, James had longed for a child of his own, and they were delighted with their beautiful baby.

Marusia had a much easier birth than she had had with Sydney. The midwife was kind and gentle; and with James near her, Marusia felt relaxed. This appeared to be the beginning of a new and happy life for them both.

The second exciting event was the receipt of a letter from the Edmonton Public School Board informing James that he had been appointed to a teaching position at a school in the city, and he would begin his duties in the fall.

Marusia was as delighted as James. At last she would be able to live in the city where she could bring up her children and continue with her art studies.

That July was hot and sultry, a perfect time for haying. While the women prepared the meals, the men brought in the dry hay and stored it in the hayloft and in an enclosure behind the barn. They were in a jubilant mood and were going for their last load.

Prokip untied the horses, climbed into the rack, and unwound the reins from the top bar as he waited for James and Mykolai.

Mykolai threw his pitchfork onto the floor of the rack and jumped in, waiting for James to follow.

James tried to climb in, but he was unable to lift his leg to reach the floor of the rack. He slipped and fell. Mykolai laughed heartily. "Come on, James. You're acting like an old woman. Need a stepladder?"

Embarrassed, James got up slowly, scowled at Mykolai, and made another attempt to climb up, but could not. The muscles in his right leg seemed to be tied in knots and would not function. "Hey Mykolai, give me a hand," he called.

After the last load of hay had been stored, and as the two young men were walking towards the house, Mykolai remarked, "I'm sorry I laughed at you, James, but tell me, is something wrong? It's not the first time I've seen you stumble."

James replied slowly, "I don't know what the matter is, but sometimes I seem to lose the use of my leg. Look," he continued as he rolled up his pant legs, "do you notice anything?"

"My God, James, your right leg is much thinner than the left. Have you been to see a doctor?" Mykolai sounded alarmed.

A few days later James paid a visit to a doctor in town; his trouble was diagnosed as muscular dystrophy, a progressive wasting away of the muscles. The doctor blamed the disease on the war, saying it had probably been caused by long marches and the dampness of the trenches. James shivered as he remembered standing for days and months on end up to his knees in mud in the cold, slimy trenches of the front.

James had to write to the Edmonton school board telling them that he would be unable to accept the teaching position. He felt that he could remain at the country school for some while. But as the months went by, his condition grew worse and he was forced to resign from even that post.

Marusia was heartbroken, not only about the end of their plans to get away, but for her ailing husband, who began to depend more and more on her. The couple moved into Prokip

and Anna's house, and Prokip promised that in the spring he would build them a comfortable home on the northeast corner of the homestead.

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Father," said Mykolai one day, "the 160 acres of land adjacent to Pavlo Maxim's farm is up for sale. The price is a snap. I think I'll buy it." "Mykolai, you're dreaming. With wheat prices fluctuating, how are you going to pay for it?" The recession of 1921 was over, but the price of wheat was still low and unstable.

"I can mortgage my farm," said Mykolai promptly. "I have no debts, and the bank will surely give me a loan if they can hold my land as security."

"Don't be greedy, son. Hold on to what you have." Prokip shook his head. Young people were willing to gamble because they had not known the periods of dire poverty their elders had endured.

"You're so old-fashioned, father, afraid to go ahead with the times. The price of wheat is going to rise, especially if we all join the Wheat Pool. If we organize, we can protect ourselves."

"That is of little consequence," said Prokip. "Look at it this way. You want to buy more land; to work it properly, you'll need to replace the horse with a tractor, right?"

Mykolai nodded.

"The tractor that you buy will come from the East, and be sold to you at a high fixed price, while your wheat will bring

only the low world market price."

"But if we unite, that will change!"

Prokip knew it was useless to argue with his radical son. "Go ahead. Do as you wish," he said.

Mykolai bought the land and the tractor and mortgaged his farm to the hilt, as did most of his fellow farmers. He had great faith in the people who were attempting to better the lot of the farmer through organization.

There was R.B. Bennett, a politician from Calgary, who with a loan from the Canadian Bankers' Association and support from the United Grain Growers, established a Calgary office of the Wheat Pool. Henry Wise Wood, a farmer from southern Alberta, urged his fellow farmers to protest against the unfair tax imposed by the East. One prominent Ukrainian Canadian, Michael Luchkovich, also recognized the need for change, and organized farm groups among the Ukrainian settlers. He addressed rallies and meetings where he implored the farmers to unite.

Born of Ukrainian parents in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., Luchkovich emigrated to Canada at an early age, settling in Winnipeg, where he completed high school. In 1912 he received a permit to teach school in a Ukrainian settlement, and five years later obtained an Alberta government teaching certificate.

The Ukrainians recognized the need for representation by their own people. Who would better serve the purpose than Michael Luchkovich? In 1926 the strong UFA party nominated him to run in the Vegreville constituency where he was elected to the House of Commons, the first Ukrainian Member of Parliament.

Luchkovich was a just man. He tried to instill in others the fact that the tillers of the land, including "the men in sheepskin coats," were the salt of the earth and important providers for the hungry multitudes of the world. He was treated with great respect.

Although the war had brought Albertans more closely together as Canadians, the Ukrainians who had gone through four years of war were still discriminated against. But Luchkovich defended them in the House of Commons and helped restore their rights.

Throughout the twenties, the lot of the Alberta farmer improved. The year 1925 was an especially prosperous one, with a substantial wheat yield. The mechanization of farms increased, and many farmers doubled their wheat acreage. Prokip and Mykolai pooled their resources and purchased a big Case tractor. But the boom could not go on forever.

The first signs of the coming depression were in the southeast of Alberta where the farmers scanned the cloudless skies for rain which did not come. They watched their once-lush wheat fields burn up under the hot sun and the never-ending dust storms. Unable to survive, some of them began to travel north, many finding new homes by the North Saskatchewan River. Others went farther north, as far as the Peace River area, but here the frost ruined their crops as the half-ripened heads of grain had no chance to mature fully. The discouraged farmers pulled up stakes and headed south again.

Suddenly, with little warning, the prices for wheat and farm products fell drastically. The system of fixed marketing had been paying the farmers far more for their grain than it could be sold for on the world market, and the Wheat Pool faced bankruptcy. To save it, the government paid its overdraft at the bank.

It was not only the farmers who suffered. The stock market slumped, and the scarcity of money was felt throughout Canada.

The farmers demanded action from the UFA government under Brownlee. They signed a petition demanding a yearly minimum income of one thousand dollars, free education, old age pensions at sixty, and free medicare for the poor. Mykolai and Tymofij joined the thousands of farmers who marched to the Alberta Legislature to present this petition, but they were disbanded before they reached the Legislative Building.

Although most of the Ukrainian farmers worked hard to better their lot, some of them worked only when they felt like it and were as badly off twenty-five years later as they were when they first set foot on Canadian soil. But those who bent their backs to the land managed to eke out a livelihood of sorts. Although they had no money, they were able to provide their families with enough to eat.

Prokip and Anna, who had toiled hard all their lives, were

one of the luckier families. Anna's motto was "Never live for today only." With the depression to cope with, she enlarged her garden and managed to provide her family with vegetables the year round.

Prokip, on his trips to town, had brought back a number of empty twenty-gallon wooden cider barrels which Anna used to make pickles. Her pickles were renowned throughout the district.

She scrubbed the barrels, and when they were dry she sealed them with melted wax. Into the bottom of the barrels went mixed spice, garlic cloves, heads of dill weeds, and cucumbers and brine. These were placed in layers until the barrels were full. Anna left a small hole in the top of each barrel, and Prokip cut a wooden cork to fit securely into the hole. The barrels were then sealed with melted wax, and were not opened until the festive season.

Before the cows went dry in the fall, Anna made cottage cheese from partly whole and partly skimmed milk. After the sweet milk turned sour, she warmed it on the stove until the whey was separated from the cheese. The whey was fed to the hogs, and the cheese was put in a clean sugar sack. After squeezing out the excess moisture, she salted the mixture and stored it in crocks or wooden candy pails. A top layer of butter kept it fresh. Churned salted butter was also stored in crocks for winter use.

Every corner of the root cellar was used, with beets, carrots, turnips, parsnips, and potatoes stored in bins. In good years there was enough food to feed more than one family.

Prokip kept good his promise to Marusia and James, and settled them in a two-bedroom cottage on the homestead. Marusia took care of James and their two children, but it was a difficult time for her as her husband now relied on her almost completely.

Elena, who still had hopes of leaving the farm, enrolled in the School of Nursing in Vegreville, and hoped to obtain her RN certificate in three years. Apart from Sydney and Oleksa, who were attending school in the town, the work on the farm fell entirely on the shoulders of Prokip and Anna, with Marusia helping when she could.

They had the 82-acre oat field to stook. Anna had already

stooked 250 acres of grain. It was a gloomy period with the constant worry of how to meet the ever-pressing bills for the machinery, the land tax, and the gasoline for the tractor.

Anna was worn out. The interior and exterior of the house needed a fresh coat of paint. The kitchen linoleum was worn through to the boards in several places. The design on the carpet had disappeared, and the once-elegant chintz couch and leather rocking chair were falling apart. Anna worried about her children who were in the same predicament.

Although the coarse grain and wheat yields were adequate, the prices were not, and farmers were lucky to get twenty-five cents a bushel. But the grain still had to be harvested.

Many of the farmers who had stored their grain in the elevators had to pay storage. The 1932 crop was substantial, and Prokip and Mykolai had hauled 2000 bushels of golden grain to fill the waiting boxcars by the elevators. But the price of wheat was so poor that they had to take out an advance payment of a few dollars to pay their bills, leaving the remainder instorage in the hope of getting a better price in the near future. To their dismay, the price sank even lower and nothing was left for the producer. There was no sòlution in sight. It was ironic that in a vast country of plenty there should be such dire poverty.

When the grain was threshed, the straw was used to keep the barns and pigsties dry. During a feed shortage the straw was cut into *sichka,* small pieces, mixed with crushed oats, and fed to the horses and cattle. Piles of old straw were never burned in case of an emergency such as this.

The Zhoda offspring had their own commitments to meet, and Prokip and Anna had no outside help for all this work. Anna suggested to Prokip that he go to a neighbouring farm to seek help with the rest of the stooking.

Maryna and Wasylj Stepko and their ten children lived five miles from the Zhoda homestead. The depression had hit the large families the hardest, and the Stepko family had no livestock. It took many loaves to feed them, so they depended entirely on a good crop and a fair wheat price. The Zhodas decided to hire Wasylj, and to pay him with food.

Early the next morning Prokip harnessed old Liz, the mare,

to the buggy and drove to the Stepko homestead. It was the same mud-plastered thatched cabin which the Stepkos had built twenty-five years before. The heavy summer rains had washed away patches of plaster and left the poplar posts bare. The windowpanes were broken, and were stuffed with old rags to keep out the rain, flies, bats, and birds. A colony of nesting sparrows chirped in the straw of the thatched roof.

Maryna Stepko was busy at the woodpile, laying long poplar logs on a cut-off tree stump and expertly cutting them into lengths to fit the stove. Two of the younger girls carried the logs to the house, while two small boys stacked the extra wood beside the willow fence.

"Where is the *hospodar* [man of the house]?" Prokip inquired. He explained to Maryna that Anna was not well and he needed help with the stooking. He wished to speak to her husband.

Maryna led the way to the yard. She put a finger to her lips and whispered that her husband was a sick man. Prokip nodded in silence.

As they entered the yard, Prokip saw Wasylj lying on his back on a blanket in the shade of a large tree. When the hot sun reached him as it passed on its way to the west, he would move further into the shade. His snores were loud enough to frighten away the sparrows from their perches in the branches.

On the sole of each of his shoes "$1.75" had been written in white chalk. Marko, the oldest boy, explained to Prokip that this was his father's price — $1.75 a day for labour.

Prokip was flabbergasted. "A dollar seventy-five a day!" he exclaimed. "That man's not worth a quarter." He turned around and walked quickly back to the buggy.

Next morning the Zhodas were surprised to see Maryna Stepko and her two oldest sons at the door to offer their services. They worked well and Anna rewarded them generously with supplies of food.

Times did not improve. Many settlers who were too proud to beg held out as long as they could to avoid going on relief. But when they could no longer stand the pangs of hunger, they too joined the crowds at the soup kitchens and accepted gifts of warm clothing.

In the country beggars would walk for miles, knocking on

farmhouse doors, asking for money. One late afternoon in winter, during a fierce blizzard when the roads were impassable with drifting snow, the Zhodas heard a knock on their door. Who would venture out on a day like this? Anna ran to the door, fearing that there was bad news. Perhaps James was worse.

On the threshold stood a pathetic figure covered with hoarfrost from head to toe. Icicles hung on his beard and whiskers, and he gasped for breath. One overall leg was torn.

Anna invited him inside and shut the door quickly. The beggar followed her into the kitchen and shuffled over to the stove where he took off his threadbare mitts and warmed his hands. His teeth were chattering and he could not speak.

Prokip pulled a chair for the stranger close to the coal and wood fire, and the man sank into it gratefully. Prokip told him to take off his shoes, but he could not as his socks were frozen to his worn soles.

After he had thawed out, he removed his tattered coat and eagerly accepted a hot bowl of borshch, fried bacon fat, potatoes, and sauerkraut. He washed this down with a cup of hot coffee made from whole wheat roasted in the oven. Real coffee beans from the store were an unthinkable luxury.

When the stranger had eaten, he told them that his name was Jake Holliday. He added that at a neighbouring farmhouse the family had set their dog on him, tearing his pants.

He asked Anna for a needle and thread, and as they talked he mended the tear in his overalls and a hanging patch on the knee of his pants. Anna glanced at his threadbare topcoat and took an old coat of Mykolai's which was hanging on a peg in the porch, telling him to try it on. He grinned broadly and admitted that his begging had not been very successful recently. The destitute farmers he had approached had very little to spare for outsiders.

At bedtime, Anna could not bear to send him back into the cold, so she rolled out an old mattress on the kitchen floor close to the stove and told him to settle down for the night. She did not want to put him into one of her upstairs beds, as many of these beggars were crawling with lice.

The next morning, after a hot meal of oatmeal and coffee, Jake was ready to depart. Anna took a tin can from the kitchen

cupboard and gave him a dime.

When he reached the gate, Jake pulled a stump of chalk fr
his pocket and made a long green mark on the fence po
There is honour among thieves, and in the hungry thirties th
was also honour among beggars. Had he put a red mark on t
fence, the beggars who followed him would know that t
"pickings" at that farmhouse were poor.

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In the summer of 1933, Prokip and Anna were blessed with one more grandchild, making a total of nine. Marusia gave birth to her third child, a baby boy whom they named Simeon. Although James loved Sydney, he had so longed for a son of his own, and he was a proud father.

Mykolai and Christina now had four children, and Lesia and Pavlo two. Oleksa Zhoda and his uncle Sydney Brooke, who was only two years older, were inseparable and were both good students. Their parents were proud.

Prokip's and Anna's grandchildren loved to visit them. Anna taught her granddaughters Ukrainian embroidery and the art of decorating Easter eggs, while Prokip watched with pride as his grandsons played softball or a game of horseshoes with the neighbouring boys; but Sydney was different. He was not fond of sports.

On one such Sunday afternoon, the sound of loud cheering came through the Whites' opened cottage window. Sydney lay on the living room couch reading a book, while James read the newspaper. His interest was centred on new developments in the political arena of Alberta.

Sydney got up quickly and closed the window. "Distracting," he muttered, then returned to the couch and

kept on reading. James watched him from the corner of his eye.

There was a commotion at the door. Oleksa entered and said loudly, "C'mon, Syd. We're one guy short on the baseball field."

"Count me out," replied Sydney. "I prefer to read."

James put down his newspaper, looked at his stepson and said, "All work and no play isn't healthy. Go join the gang, Sydney."

"Can't dad. An education is more important to me than softball, if I want to make a good teacher."

"Is that your goal in life, son?"

"Yep," he answered, and James was pleased.

Turning to Oleksa, James asked, "And what is your goal, Oleksa?"

"To be a lawyer." He glanced at Sydney, then added, "But I still find time to play softball."

James smiled and returned to his newspaper. The politicians of Alberta were making history. There was a provincial election coming up, and in the air was a feeling of revolutionary change coming.

R.G. Reid was now head of the UFA party, and his adversary was a young evangelist by the name of William Aberhart, the Ontario-born son of a German immigrant. He had moved to Alberta where he taught high school in Calgary. On Sundays he devoted his time to broadcasting sermons on the radio, and became the dean of the newly formed Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute.

The arrival of the radio brought the people of Alberta closer together, and Aberhart's sermons were heard far and wide. Often on Sunday, the settlers who did not have a radio drove to the Zhoda farm and listened in with them, with Marusia and James interpreting when necessary.

His audiences sat entranced. William Aberhart was a good orator and his sermons put fear into the hearts of his listeners. Many thought that it was the wrath of God that had placed them in such dire need.

He frequently quoted from the Bible, emphasizing that although circumstances were against his listeners, they could conquer if they trusted in Christ.

Quoting from the Book of Matthew, he said: "Therefore I say

unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

Lena Plotkov, who never missed Aberhart's Sunday evening sermon, turned to James and asked, "What did the good man say?"

James replied in Ukrainian, "He is merely telling us that since Jesus looks after the birds of the air who neither sow nor harvest, He will look after all His children, for they are more precious in His eyes."

Lena crossed herself and reverently said, "Oh Holy Spirit. Thank You."

After Aberhart had finished his sermon he then turned to a different subject, politics. He said, "Remember we are in a depression; and it may get worse. I ask of you to first seek spiritual guidance. Jesus Christ will heed our plea and deliver us from these terrible days." He continued, "Follow me. Heed what I have to say, and with His help, we'll surmount all obstacles."

Anna turned to Marusia and fervently said, "I believe that he's guided by the wisdom of God and he's the answer to our prayers."

Aberhart was a convert to the doctrines of Major C.H. Douglas. He believed that social credit monetary policies would erase economic problems. He gradually introduced these theories into his sermons, and his audiences listened and responded. They believed that he would save them from the crippling depression and would solve their economic problems.

But this desperate period became even worse. The soup lines grew longer and many families abandoned their farms. They packed their belongings in their old cars, out of which they had taken the engines as they could not afford gasoline. These were known as "Bennett Buggies" after the prime minister. Those who did not have a buggy or a horse bundled what they could carry on their backs, and set out on foot.

Prokip Zhoda, like many of his fellow farmers, had joined

the mad rush to buy more land, and found himself heavily in debt, but refused to consider the idea of moving.

The Social Credit Party challenged Premier Reid and his UFA, gaining much of the support it needed from one major platform promise — to give to every man, woman, and child in the province a monthly dividend of twenty-five dollars.

Mykolai asked his family to support the Social Credit on that issue alone. All his father said was, "Sounds too good to be true," but Marusia promised that they would get her vote.

On election day in 1935, the Social Credit Party swept into power with a huge majority. They asked their leading spokesman, William Aberhart, to take over as their official leader, and he accepted the premiership.

The first of the promised "prosperity certificates" were issued, but when the federal government stepped in and said that only Ottawa had the power to print money, the general public rejected the certificates.

Not long after, James asked Prokip what he had done with his "Funny Money."

"For posterity's sake," said Prokip, "I framed it."

The first heavy snowfall of 1935 arrived early, and bitter winds piled the snow high against the buildings and fences. Walking or driving was hazardous; no sooner was a trail broken than it was covered again.

By Christmas the mercury dipped down to forty and fifty degrees below zero. Those who ventured into the cold blizzard were lost, wandering in circles until death claimed them, and their bodies were not found until the spring thaw.

Marusia's hardships increased tenfold. James was getting steadily worse. He could only walk across the room by holding on to the back of a chair which he pushed in front of him. He watched her struggle through the snowdrifts to bring in wood for the house, and to feed the chickens and hogs. She also had three cows to milk.

Amelia was now eleven years old, and although she helped her mother in the evenings and on weekends, she had to attend school each day. She was an average student but very high-spirited. Although she resembled James in appearance, she had the adventurous temperament of Marusia in the old days. Her

main preoccupation was music. She listened to the radio and constantly played a record player which Sydney had given her on her birthday. He was a generous brother and spent most of his spare-time earnings on his family. Amelia would sing along with the artists, and had a true and pleasant voice.

Sydney was a good student. He attended high school in a nearby town, boarding with a married couple, and only came home on weekends when weather permitted.

"Marusia," said James one very cold day, "I can't bear to see you work so hard while I lie here helpless. I had planned such a wonderful future for us, but I am such a burden."

Marusia sat on the bed where he was stretched out helplessly. "Don't ever talk like that again," she scolded. "I am your wife and I love you very much. You are *not* a burden." She bent down and kissed him on the lips.

He did not reply as he did not want Marusia to see how upset he was. She gave so much of herself and received so few of the things he had planned for her.

Marusia placed James' hands on her shoulders and whispered, "Just hold me, my love." They clung to each other, both caught in a web, not of their own making, but rendering them helpless.

A knock on the door brought them back to reality. Marusia ran to open it and found Prokip and Anna on the threshold. With a pleased smile she exclaimed, "Come out of the cold, my dears. I'll put the kettle on."

They brushed the snow from their coats and took off their boots. "How is James today?" Prokip asked.

"He's holding his own," Marusia replied. "Why don't you go and talk to him in his room while I get the tea."

"You look fine today, son," said Prokip as he seated himself in a chair by the bed. "Mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all, dad," replied James. "Smoke doesn't bother me, and I don't feel too bad." He winked at Marusia who was watching them from the doorway.

Anna plumped James' pillow, straightened the quilt, and handed him a book which had recently been published, *The Good Earth,* by Pearl Buck. "Oleksa asked me to give you this," she said.

"Thank you," replied James. Reading was one thing he could still enjoy if Marusia propped his books in front of him.

Marusia brought the tea tray to the bedside and served her parents. Then she woke up Simeon, who had been having a nap, and sat him on Anna's knee. She poured a cup of tea for her husband, holding it to his lips while he drank.

Prokip finished his tea, put his cup down and turned to James and Marusia with a determined look. "I would like you and the children to live with us for the rest of the winter," he said. "We have plenty of room and it would be easier to heat one house only."

It didn't take Marusia long to make up her mind, but she waited for James to reply. "I don't want to be a burden to anyone," he said. "It won't be easy, but Marusia has to make the decision."

Lifting James in and out of bed was a strain, and as Sydney was seldom there to help her, Marusia accepted the invitation. She would have preferred to be alone with her husband and children, but she had no choice but to agree.

"Then it is settled," said Anna. "We will help you move tomorrow."

Anna and Prokip brought down three beds from upstairs for the visitors. It was a tight squeeze for everyone, as the severe cold and frequent blizzards often prevented Amelia from attending school.

This arrangement continued until the spring, Anna sharing the care of James. In her spare time Marusia bundled herself up and went over to their cottage to paint in solitude when it was not too cold.

Spring arrived late, and with it came renewed hope for the farmers. The Whites returned to their own home, and Prokip and Mykolai took turns working their fields. They still used horses as the precious Case tractor stood idle in the shed for lack of fuel.

There was much moisture in the ground from the heavy snowfall of the past winter. The overturned black furrows in the wheat fields glistened in the sun as Prokip ploughed. He worked hard to seed his grain as early as possible.

Anna was busy building a hotbed against the south wall of the lean-to. She hauled loads of rotted manure from behind the cow barn, pitchforking them into the bottom of the bed, then covering it with rich, moist loam.

When the bed was ready, she seeded cabbage, cauliflower, onion, and petunia seeds, covering them with a layer of black loam, pressing it down gently and watering it. She covered the top of the hotbed with an old screen door to keep out the cats and dogs who liked to sleep there, or an adventurous hen scratching for worms. The manure in the bottom of the bed radiated heat, and the seedlings, which she watered daily, germinated quickly. At night she covered the bed with an old blanket to protect the plants from freezing. When the danger of frost was over in early June, she transplanted the young plants to her garden.

Prokip finished seeding his wheat, and it was Mykolai's turn to plough his field. One Sunday afternoon he arrived to drive the team to his home. The two big Percherons were in the pasture. The men, bridles in hand, walked towards them.

One of the Percherons and the saddle mare were grazing, but the other workhorse lay on the ground. As they approached, the prone horse got up quickly and started to run around in a wide circle. Prokip and Mykolai watched, puzzled.

Mykolai, bridle in hand, approached the agitated animal and said quietly, "Whoa, Prince, whoa!" The horse paid no attention but suddenly stopped, and with a groan fell to the ground dead.

"What are we going to do, papa?" Mykolai asked. "We can't plough with only one horse."

"We'll have to harness the Percheron with the saddle mare," his father replied.

They caught the two remaining horses and led them out of the pasture. As they closed the gate they looked back once more at the horse on ground. The coyotes will be happy, thought Mykolai.

That year many other farmers lost their horses to the dreaded disease encephalitis, or sleeping sickness. It was caused by a virus carried by the mosquito.

Throughout that spring the excess moisture in the ground was dried out by the hot sun. One afternoon Prokip and Anna scanned the skies for a sign of rain which was much needed.

"Anna," called Prokip. "We're going to be lucky after all. Come and look at that black cloud in the west."

Anna put down the pan of stunted pigweed which she had just gathered as there were no vegetables in the garden. Putting

her hand over her eyes to shade them from the glare of the sun, she exclaimed, "Mercy me, Prokip. You are right. We will get rain after all."

The cloud on the horizon loomed darker, and a slight wind began to stir the boughs of the trees and moan around the eaves of the house. The sound grew louder and louder.

"It may be a heavy downpour, Prokip. We had better get the poultry in."

They ran towards the hen house, opened the door which had been banged shut by the wind, propped it up with a long stick, and chased the young goslings, ducklings, and chicks inside. They unfastened the twine from around the feet of the clucking hens which had been tied to a peg in the ground to keep them from wandering too far.

The chicks usually crept under the hens' wings for protection. The goslings and ducklings liked to stand out in the rain with their beaks pointed to the sky until the heavy downpour drowned them. The young calves ran from an enclosure behind the barn and sought protection inside. When all the poultry was safely housed, Prokip and Anna ran to the shelter of the house.

The dark cloud approached quickly and the wind increased. Suddenly the sun was obscured from view, and in an instant it turned from day to night. Prokip began to pray. For the rest of the day a big dust storm blew. The wind moaned and whistled around the windows, and large boughs broke off the trees and crashed to the earth. It blew for several days without stopping, but no rain came.

A dust storm, in its unrelenting drive, has no mercy. Dust sneaks in through the tiniest crevices like a stealthy thief, sifting down and covering the interior of the houses.

Anna dusted, mopped, and swept every day to no avail. In utter despair she gave up and waited for the storm to abate.

As soon as the wind died down, Anna ran over to the Whites' cottage. They and their strongly built house had survived the storm unhurt.

By now the wheat, oats, and barley seedlings had sprouted. But from lack of rain and the clouds of dust, they turned yellow, shrivelled up and died. In unprotected areas, the forceful driving wind took the topsoil off, carried it across the

open fields, and obliterated everything from view. Anna's vegetable plants also died.

There would be no harvest to take in, and the Zhodas faced another bleak winter. Their fellow Albertans were in the same predicament, and relief handouts were increased.

"Prokip," said Anna one day, "someone is taking our chickens. It must be a coyote."

Prokip finished the piece of rye bread he was chewing, washed it down with hot tea, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I've heard them yelping for the last few days in the bush not too far away," he replied. "I think I'll keep vigil tonight."

Before Anna went to bed she counted her hens twice more to make sure of the exact number. In three days, two of the fattest ones had vanished.

When the sun went down behind the horizon, Prokip oiled his Winchester, put three bullets in his back pocket, and walked to the hen house. He made himself comfortable behind the coop and waited patiently for several hours. It was a moonlit night and he could see in all directions if a marauder approached.

The howling coyotes, their noses in the air, carried their song of lament heavenward. Tonight their raucous howling was louder than usual.

The hours went by slowly. Prokip grew drowsy and numb from sitting still, but he was persistent. He swore he would get his coyote and blow him to smithereens. He continued his watch every night for a week, but no prowler came near the place.

When Anna counted her hens again, one more was missing. From then on, they chased the hens inside the coop for the night and put a padlock on the door. By the end of the month two more fat hens had disappeared. A coyote could not unlock a door, reasoned Prokip. The mystery remained unsolved.

One Sunday afternoon in November, Anna invited all her family over to give them some of her food supplies. She took them to the granary where there were three large sacks filled with dried peas, beans, and corn. Anna never threw anything away. Any surplus, after it was dried, flailed, and winnowed, was stored.

She divided the contents from the sacks into three parts and gave them to Marusia, Lesia, and Mykolai. She also divided some milled white and rye flour with which they could cook *zatirka,* flour mixed with salt and water to form small lumps of dough which would be cooked in rapidly boiling water. If the family was lucky enough to have a piece of *solonyna,* back bacon, this was fried with onion to flavour the zatirka.

Anna also made some *kvas,* a thin drink of rye flour and water to which she added a pinch of yeast and sugar. She left this gruel to ferment for a day. It was not filling, but it helped to take away the pangs of hunger.

While Anna was making the kvas, Prokip hulled barley on an old-fashioned *stupa*, a hollowed-out block of wood with a thick wooden handle. He pounded the barley kernels, removing the husks and leaving the barley pearls ready for cooking.

Fortunately, the winters of 1936 and 1937 were not quite so severe. The cattle lived on straw, and to supplement their own meals Prokip would snare an occasional rabbit behind the barn.

In the knee-deep snow, Prokip and Mykolai cut down poplar trees and sold them for firewood to the townsfolk for one dollar a cord. They cut and sold fifteen cords. Fifteen dollars was a large sum of money and bought quite a few articles from the grocery store. Coal oil was thirty cents a gallon; fifty pounds of flour, ninety-five cents; two cans of salmon, twenty-five cents; ten pounds of sugar, sixty-five cents; beef, four cents a pound. If a farmer was lucky enough to have a cow for sale, he could expect to receive two cents a pound.

When their milk cow calved, Prokip bought oat sheaves, twenty for forty cents. He fed her straw and one oat sheaf a day. She gave enough milk to sustain her calf, and a little was left over to put on their breakfast oatmeal. Somehow they managed to survive the winter.

With spring came renewed dust storms, very little rain, and no relief in sight. Destitute Indian families joined the hordes of wandering beggars. Ragged and hungry, they always stopped at the Zhoda homestead and were never turned away. Anna and Marusia always shared with them what they had.

Easter Mass and the blessing of the paska were celebrated as usual, but the once heavily laden Easter baskets were much lighter. The settlers prayed fervently, asking God to once more

bestow His blessing upon them.

A week after Easter Sunday, Anna and Prokip were sitting down to supper when they heard a knock on the door. Prokip went to open it. On the threshold stood Josophat Mykytka.

Prokip was taken completely by surprise. Mykytka had not set foot in his yard since receiving the beating in the cow barn. Nevertheless, Prokip invited him in.

Anna set another plate and cup, and asked Mykytka to join them for supper. Josophat politely refused and came to the point at once.

"Prokip and Anna," he said, "I have a confession to make."

He looked down at his shoes, avoiding their gaze. "Father Thomas has told me to confess in order to clear my conscience and right myself with God."

"What have you done that was so sinful?" asked Prokip. Anna waited for his answer with keen interest.

"I am the culprit who stole your chickens. I wanted to get even with you for the beating you once gave me. Now I want to make amends." He looked Prokip in the eyes. "You can beat me if you wish. I deserve it."

Prokip was amazed but curious. "How did you do it?" he asked. "I watched and waited night after night. I didn't see you."

"I didn't come in the night, Prokip. I came in broad daylight. I took the hens out of the nest as they were laying their eggs. They didn't cackle or fly away."

He stopped speaking, a look of sadness crossing his face. "My family was starving. I had to find some way to feed them."

"And our dog. Didn't he bark or try to bite you?" Anna inquired.

"Oh no," replied Mykytka. "I saved the hen's head, feet, and innards after I killed it. Rinty looked forward to my visits."

After a moment's pause Anna said, "I'm glad that you have eased your conscience. There was no need to do that. All you should have done was to come to us. We would have shared what we had with you."

Prokip was a religious man. In his book of ethics a wrong must be righted. As a penance he levied on Mykytka a fine of five days free labour on the farm whenever he was needed.

Mykytka accepted these terms and departed.

The summer of 1937 continued to be arid with only a few scattered showers. Finally, at the end of August, a dark cloud came from the west. This time it brought relief.

The wind stirred the branches in the trees, the foxtail, and the yellowing grass. The heads of stunted grain swayed gently at first, then bowed low as the onslaught of the wind bore down on them. As it grew in strength, it knocked down fences, rolled over pails, boxes, and empty tin cans, carrying loose sheets of cardboard high into the sky where they floated like kites.

With the strong wind came the dust, the fine particles stinging like a lashing whip. But after the dust came the rain.

The heavens opened up and rain fell in torrents, watering the thirsty, parched land, and filling the empty creeks and bogs to overflowing. The yellow, withered grass turned green again. The dry spell was over.

The rain had come too late in the summer to fill out the heads of grain, but there was ample time to grow enough green feed to sustain the cattle during the winter months, bringing renewed hope to the Zhodas and the neighbouring farmers.

21

After the dust, the economy turned around, and the whole country prospered, including the tillers of the land. Anna and Prokip kept up the custom of family Sunday dinners at their home. It was a joy for Anna to have her children and grandchildren visit her after they all attended mass together.

On one such Sunday afternoon, they were sitting around the dining room table listening to the radio. "Allied soldiers invade Dieppe," the announcer proclaimed. "Canadian casualties are mounting."

"My God," said Oleksa. "Seems to be no end in sight to Hitler's bloody war. Our boys are dying like flies."

"I can't get over there fast enough," cried Sydney.

"Me too," Oleksa agreed.

Marusia's face paled. Anna looked at her son and grandson with questioning eyes. In a scarcely audible voice she asked, "And what do you two mean by that?"

"We've enlisted," they replied in unison. Then Oleksa continued, "It's time Hitler's gang of murderers was stopped."

"You must be joking," cried Marusia.

"No, mother. We leave for Camrose next week."

Marusia began to cry. Anna was visibly upset. The poignant memory of her lost son Petro came back to her. Without a

word she rushed from the table and went into the kitchen to cry. Prokip followed her and tried to comfort her.

Marusia buried her face in her hands. She had lost her first husband, and now her son was also going out of her life.

Sydney took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his mother's tear-stained face. "Mama, please don't cry," he implored.

"My son, I don't want to lose you too. I love you so much," she sobbed.

Sydney put his arms around her and led her to the couch. Seating himself beside her he said quietly, "I'll be back. I promise you." They sat in silence until Marusia had regained control of her emotions.

James took the news more philosophically. He was careful not to appear too concerned because of Marusia's fears. He clasped Sydney in his arms with deep affection, but said little.

Both Oleksa and Sydney assured their families that it would not be a long war, and that the Nazis would be defeated in no time at all.

On the day Sydney was to leave, Marusia went into her bedroom and returned with something in her hand. "Take this," she said. "I want you to keep it always."

Sydney took the gift from her. It was a slender locket with a picture of his mother and father. "It's beautiful, mama," he said.

"Your father gave it to me before he left for overseas. I want it to be a good luck charm for you," she said. "You were born out of our great love."

Sydney kissed her. "I'll treasure it forever. Now I must go."

The two young men trained at Camrose, completed their training at Currie Barracks in Calgary, and shortly afterward sailed for England. Both were good correspondents. Sydney wrote to say that there they were stationed in a country barracks for further training. Although the English countryside was relatively peaceful, the ravages of heavy bombing raids on seaports and parts of London were only too obvious. He also mentioned that he had had a chance to visit his relatives' estate in Warwickshire. But the elegant mansion and rose gardens which Jonathan Brooke had described with pride had been

razed to the ground in the blitz on Coventry. His grandfather and family, he learned, had all been killed.

Their letters grew few and far between, and censorship prevented their families from learning much about what they were doing, though those at home could glean some information. Oleksa had been sent to Italy, and Sydney to France.

Every time an official envelope arrived at the post office Marusia died a thousand deaths, thinking that she would hear that her son had suffered the fate of his father. Anna was more patient, but she thought constantly of her cherished son Petro, and the lines in her tired face became deeper as the days went by.

One day the dreaded envelope, addressed to the Zhodas, arrived at the post office. Prokip was afraid to open it. But this time it announced that their son Oleksa Zhoda had been wounded in action but was out of danger.

Anna took the news more calmly than her family had expected. Somehow she knew that she would see her son again.

Very soon after the official news, a letter arrived from Oleksa, postmarked England. In it he told her how he had been wounded in Holland but had had a miraculous escape. There were many veiled and sentimental mentions of a Dutch nurse who had looked after him until he was well enough to return to England.

"It sounds as if our Oleksa has fallen in love," Marusia remarked to her mother one day. "I hope he will want to come back to us." She was only joking, but the words brought fear to Anna's heart.

The war finally drew to its bloody close. The day that the German army surrendered to the Allies was one of great rejoicing on the Zhoda farm. The soldiers began to return home, and the Zhodas and the Whites waited impatiently for the arrival of their own young heroes.

It was mid-August, and Anna was digging potatoes for the evening meal while Prokip mended the fence in the pigsty. The old sow was an expert at breaking out as the grass on the other side of the fence was so inviting. With her long snout she uprooted the toughest of posts, lifted up the fence, and crawled out from beneath it, gorging herself on the succulent

greenery. Prokip vowed that after her piglets were weaned he would fatten her up and send her off to market.

They were in the midst of their chores when they heard the sound of an approaching car. Prokip smiled at Anna. "They are here," he said.

Anna was radiant, and ran to the car. To her amazement, Sydney was with Oleksa, and a smiling young woman. The two men had managed to contact each other in England before sailing and, although travelling separately, had arranged to return to their homes at the same time.

Sydney jumped out first and rushed into his grandparents' outstretched arms, crying excitedly, "*Baba, dido,* it's grand to see you." Then he was off like a streak of lightning to his own home nearby.

Oleksa helped the rosy-cheeked, blonde girl out of the car, and then hugged his parents tightly, drawing back to study their aging faces. "Oh, it's so good to be home," he said. "Mama, papa, meet my wife Meike. We got permission from my commanding officer to marry in Holland, but I didn't get a chance to let you know. In any case, I wanted it to be a surprise."

Prokip grasped his daughter-in-law's hands and welcomed her, then Anna put a motherly arm around the girl's slender shoulders and kissed her on the cheek.

Later that evening, the whole family, including Elena, who was home on vacation from the hospital where she worked, listened to Oleksa tell of how he had been wounded.

It was in Amsterdam, where his regiment was engaged in house-to-house battle as they routed the Nazis out of the city.

In one of the fiercest battles, Oleksa and a dozen of his comrades were barricaded across the street from the famous Rijks Museum where the Germans were entrenched.

Under cover of night and in a thick fog, several of them managed to slip across the street to the back entrance of the museum. They passed through the huge foyer, meeting no resistance from the enemy. Armed with submachine guns, they crept cautiously towards the stairway leading to the upper floor, but as they began to ascend the stairs the enemy opened fire from above. Oleksa's comrades, in the lead, fell back down the stairs, dead. As their bodies tumbled down on him, Oleksa

was knocked off his feet.

As he lay stunned, trying to gather his wits, he glimpsed a German trooper, gun in hand, towering over him. He quickly kicked out and the German's gun went off. Oleksa felt a searing pain in his left side, then heard, a moment later, more gunfire. The German's knees buckled under him and, as he fell, his body dropped onto Oleksa. After what seemed an eternity, two Canadian soldiers pulled the dead German's body off Oleksa, picked him up by the hands and feet, and carried him out of the range of fire through a tunnel and to an underground hideout across the street.

The Nazi trooper's bullet had missed Oleksa's heart, but he suffered a deep wound in his left side below the rib cage. Days passed before he was out of danger.

"The first thing I knew," said Oleksa, "I was in hospital with this beautiful girl leaning over me, offering me some warm broth."

Meike then took up the story and described how she had been working for the Dutch underground, and had helped to nurse him back to health.

It was a romantic interlude. Oleksa had never imagined himself falling in love, and when he was ordered back to England to convalesce he proposed to Meike if she would return with him to Canada.

Sydney had been silent throughout most of the meal. He had been dismayed by the sight of his father, now confined to a wheelchair, his health failing. Marusia did not want to press him to relate some of his own wartime experiences, but Elena turned to him and said, "Aren't you going to tell us anything, Sydney? You must have had some hair-raising moments too."

"I did." But he seemed reticent to speak of them. "There was one thing I wish I'd had a chance to do before I left."

"And what was that?" prompted his mother.

A faraway look came into his eyes. "Find the places in that foreign soil where father and Uncle Petro lay buried."

The room grew hushed but for Marusia's sigh. For a while no one spoke, remembering silently.

Sydney was anxious to do all he could for his mother, and to give her some of the luxuries which she had been so long

denied. As soon as possible, he entered the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta so that he could become a teacher like his stepfather.

Oleksa had not given up his boyhood dream of becoming a lawyer, and so he entered the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta. Meike, whose English was excellent, enrolled in a secretarial college so that she could help him financially until he graduated. Both men received war service grants to aid them in their studies.

The war had knitted all ethnic groups more closely as Canadians. The words "Bohunk" and "Galician" were seldom heard, and the children of Ukrainian settlers were now accepted in universities and colleges without prejudice.

With the end of hostilities, Alberta was experiencing a period of greater expansion and development. Albertans prospered as never before and, with the discovery of oil in the province, many of them became rich.

Good roads and schools were built, and everyone who wanted a job was able to find one. Schools began to be centralized, and the children were bussed into towns, leaving the little one-room schoolhouses empty, monuments to those dedicated teachers who had persevered under such adverse conditions to give the younger generation an education. Electric lines were strung up across the countryside, bringing electricity to farmhouses and isolated communities. Telephones, refrigerators, and running water became an accepted way of life.

Before Oleksa and Meike left for the city, Anna brought from her bedroom a large cardboard box which she handed to her new daughter-in-law. Inside was a beautiful handmade woollen quilt, and two pillows stuffed with eiderdown and goose feathers. The pillow cases were embroidered in the traditional Ukrainian design. Oleksa explained to his wife that such a gift was a token of acceptance into the family.

Marusia's present to the couple was her favourite painting of a man walking behind a plough drawn by a pair of oxen. The man was caught in a light shower of rain even while the sun shone, and gulls were flying down to pick the worms from the glistening furrows.

This picture in later years was to win an international award, but at that time no one imagined that Marusia's work would become well known.

22

It was spring once more. Prokip, who had been up since sunrise, was busy grafting his fruit trees. He took a small cutting of the crabapple tree, the Rescue, and inserted it into a slit in the trunk of the Battleford. He secured the two together with a length of sacking and bound them with a thin piece of wire.

The only sound at this hour was the mournful mooing of Daisy, one of the cows. They had weaned her calf two days before, and since then she had kept up her lament of protest. The calf also registered its woe in the barn.

Rinty, the German shepherd, was watching the cow out of the corner of his eye a few feet away from the pasture gate. Had it not been for the dog, Daisy would have jumped over the gate a long while ago. Occasionally Rinty sprang towards the cow and nipped her on the hind shank. Daisy kicked out vigorously, but Rinty was too agile for her. She kicked into space and quickly retreated a few yards. The dog sat back on his haunches and eyed the cow who threw up her head in angry protest, snorted loudly, and returned for another try.

Prokip came out of the orchard, called the dog, and together they wended their way towards the northwest end of the pasture to bring back the rest of the milk herd. At five o'clock in the morning, the cows were chased into their stalls where

Simeon and Marusia milked them.

By seven, the lowing of the cattle ceased. Their udders were relieved and the calves had had their fill. The hens also stopped their cackling, pecking contentedly at the kernels of wheat. The shrill squeal of the hogs was reduced to satisfied grunts as they gorged themselves on separated milk and kitchen swill.

Marusia left for her home and Prokip went to join Anna for breakfast. But before he reached the door, he saw a strange sight. A tall, lanky youth, dressed in jeans, a vividly coloured shirt, and dusty cowboy boots, with a guitar on his back, hove into sight.

As there had been no hobos around for a long while, Prokip was particularly curious; the more so when the young man approached him with a welcoming grin.

"Say, granddad, can you tell me where the Whites' house is?" he asked. "I've been hitchhiking for two days."

"Who do you want to see?" Prokip inquired cautiously.

"Oh, I'm a friend of Meeley's," the stranger replied in a strange, drawling voice. "She and I are thinkin' of gettin' married, and I want to meet her folks."

"Do you mean Amelia?" asked Prokip. He was astounded. Although his granddaughter had been working in town for some time, she had never brought any young man back with her on her visits home — at least not to his knowledge. He pointed out the house, shook his head in perplexity, and went indoors to break the news to Anna.

"Anna, there's a mighty strange lad roaming around here," he said. "He asked me the way to James' and Marusia's house, and even said he was thinking of marrying Amelia. What shall we do about it? It guess I'd better go over right away and help to get him off the premises. Marusia won't be able to manage alone."

Anna laid a restraining hand on his arm. "Come and have breakfast first, Prokip," she begged. "If they need help they'll let you know. We mustn't be interfering grandparents."

"Well I'll have plenty to say about this later," Prokip grumbled as he tucked into his porridge.

"In any case," Anna continued, "I've some important news too. Listen to this." She picked up a letter which Simeon had just brought in from the post office. "Elena has written to tell

us that she is engaged to be married to a Dr. Halyna, and that they intend to make their home in Vancouver, by the sea."

"And Mykolai says that his boy, Harasim, wants to be a pilot. Thank God Mykolai stayed on the farm and that we still have Lesia near us," he replied. "I don't like the way this family's scattering all over the place."

"Cheer up, Prokip. Elena's in-laws came to Canada from the Ukrainian province of Bukovina a year later than we did. Our new *svaty* are Ukrainian." She paused, then continued, "With the education they're getting these days, you can't expect all the young people to remain on the land. We must try to move with the times, even though it's difficult for us. Do give Elena your blessing."

Prokip was happy that Elena was to marry a Ukrainian and talked about making plans for the wedding, although he shook his head sadly and thought of the old days when parents and children banded together.

Meanwhile the mysterious stranger had reached the Whites' home. Marusia opened the door and although she was taken aback by his unorthodox appearance she was not as surprised as she might have been. Amelia had told her, with starry eyes, about the boy she had been singing with in a band, and who was teaching her music. She was obviously in love him.

"Come in. I know you want to see Amelia," she said. "She will be here in a minute."

"I guess I'll have to introduce myself," the young man replied. "I'm Larry Sherwin. I'm glad you know about us. It'll make things easier as you don't want to lose your daughter to a stranger."

Marusia was surprised at how well he expressed himself. He certainly appeared to be well educated, although his appearance belied the fact.

"Oh Larry, it's good to see you," called Amelia as she jumped down the last two steps and flung herself into his arms.

"Mama, this is the man I'm going to marry. Please don't say no. I've tried to warn dad that I may be going a long way away, but I don't want to worry him too much."

Lines had begun to appear on Marusia's once-beautiful face, and she looked into her daughter's eyes, seeing the laughter and hope shining in them. She remembered how she, too, had

longed to get away from the farm — at almost any price — and she could sympathize with Amelia's ambitions. But was this wise? It was a worrying decision to make, and she knew that she would have to present a valid reason to James, who would not be in wholehearted agreement.

The three sat and talked for a long while. Larry told Marusia that his father was a businessman in Texas. His mother was dead, and he had two brothers, both at university. He himself had had a good education, but preferred to pursue a career in music rather than commerce. He had served two years in the United States Army, and since then had been playing in country towns. As he became well known, he was in demand even in the big cities. He had now formed a small country and western music band, but he had ambitions to enlarge his repertoire and to compose as well as perform.

Amelia had always loved music and had an attractive, though untrained, voice. She sometimes sang with him, and she would obviously make him a good partner.

Eventually the trio went to see James, who was lying patiently in bed, wondering when he would have the opportunity of being let into their conversation.

James instantly liked Larry despite his unconventional appearance, and did not hesitate for long in agreeing to the marriage, adding that he would like to meet some of Larry's family if that were possible.

It was arranged that Amelia and Larry would get married in Edmonton within a couple of months. Simeon would accompany Marusia to the wedding. He would be best man, and Sydney would give her away. Larry said he hoped that at least one of his brothers would get to the ceremony.

Marusia always loved visiting Edmonton. She had spent a few brief holidays with Sydney who was teaching there, when Lesia had been free to look after James. But now this would be a grand opportunity to look around, and to visit the museum and art gallery. Perhaps she might even take one or two of her paintings to Sydney, to add to the small collection which he already had in his apartment.

But alas, once more her plans were frustrated. James grew steadily weaker and Marusia had to be with him constantly. She

would never forgive herself if anything happened to him while she was away.

So Amelia, like her mother before her, had a simple wedding in Edmonton, with her brothers Sydney and Simeon in attendance. Her aunt, Elena, and uncles Mykolai and Oleksa and their wives were also there, as well as a few friends of hers and Larry's. After the ceremony the bridal couple left for Houston, Texas to meet Larry's father and possibly to make their home there.

23

Except for Marusia, James, and their son Simeon, Anna and Prokip were now alone on the homestead. But life was not all work. It still had its good times. One of the most popular events was the annual pie social, celebrated after the harvest was in the bins. The proceeds from this, which was held in the Dniester School, always went towards a worthy cause. Each woman would bake a pie and put it in a box with a few tasty sandwiches. Some of the boxes also contained a bottle of rye. Each box was wrapped with great artistry and then auctioned to the highest bidder. It was a great secret as to which box contained the liquor, as this would fetch the highest price.

All the participants in this social, dressed in their Sunday best, converged on the school in cars and buggies. A band played popular tunes for an hour or so of dancing before the auction.

Prokip and Anna drove Mykhajlo and Lena Plotkov with them to the social. The guests sat on long benches around the large schoolroom. The women exchanged gossip about their homes and their children, while the men were engrossed in politics, their new rubber-tired tractors, and the modern combines.

Electricity had not yet reached all the rural areas. The

schoolroom was lighted by large, mantled coal-oil lamps which had to be pumped with air at intervals to maintain the bright lights. The orchestra members sat in one corner tuning their instruments before beginning their repertoire. John Maxim played the fiddle, his son Joe the accordian, and Mykhajlo Plotkov the cymbals. They opened with a spirited Ukrainian dance, the kolomayjka.

Prokip was in a lively mood. He invited Anna to dance and several other couples joined them. As they whirled around the dance floor, the old women who did not dance stopped their gossip, clapped their hands and sang. When the dance was over, Anna turned to Prokip and said breathlessly, "You are still a good dancer, my dear."

"Thank you, Anna. All Cossacks dance well," he replied jokingly.

Occasionally some of the men left the room to take a swig from a bottle of whisky or homemade brew — away from their wives' sharp eyes and scolding tongues.

The women hated Urko, the "still man." No one knew much about him, including his real name, except that he lived in a rundown shack by the river and accounted to no one. He owned no land and refused to do menial labour. Being a cunning individual, he managed to keep his still and stock of moonshine hidden from both the police and the law-abiding citizens who objected to the way he peddled his cheap but illegal wares at every social gathering.

The bidding on the pies was high. After the sale, food was served and coffee was brewed in a large canning pot on a stove in an adjoining kitchen.

However, this usually pleasant evening was marred for the Zhodas by the disappearance of Mykolai's two youngest sons, teenagers Max and Harvey.

"Have you seen the boys, father?" asked Mykolai anxiously.

"Not for some time," Prokip replied. "Young people nowadays don't have any sense of time."

Anna overheard their conversation. "They couldn't have gone far without their coats," she said. "They're hanging on pegs with the others and it's quite cold outside." She reflected for a moment, then added, "I saw Urko poke his head in the doorway earlier this evening. I'm sure that he came well sup-

plied. When it comes to community events, that man has a nose like a bloodhound."

Lena chuckled, "It's certainly big enough — like an onion bulb. I don't wish evil on my worst enemy, but it wouldn't be a sin if someone mixed some poison in his drink and got rid of the pest before he corrupts all our young people. However, I guess there would be others to carry on the work of the devil."

Anna was sorry to hear her neighbour air such vengeful thoughts, but she was sure that God would understand because Lena's own grandson was by no means a teetotaller. Making the sign of the cross to ward off evil, she said, "I only wish that Prokip had beaten the devil out of Urko on the day of *Provody,* when he brought his business to church in a gunnysack and hid it in a gully near the churchyard. However, Prokip smashed all his bottles and had the rat scurrying away in a hurry."

When Urko reappeared at the dance hall, three of the men followed him outside. The hunchbacked man pulled out a gallon of moonshine from its hiding place behind a bush and said, "That'll be twenty-five cents a drink."

"Don't you have a thirteen-ounce bottle, Urko?" asked one of them.

"That will cost you a dollar," Urko replied. "It's a long time since I sold a bottle for fifty cents."

"Then we'll each take a bottle," they chorused.

Urko handed three bottles to his customers, his eyes gleaming with greed as he pocketed the money, and cautioned them not to make any noise.

The men unscrewed the tops of their bottles, took long swigs, and uttered deep sighs of contentment as they praised Urko for his excellent brew. Wiping their mouths with the backs of their hands, they returned to the dance floor. Urko walked some distance behind, in the hope of luring some more customers.

Max and Harvey, who had been watching Urko for some while, waited until he approached the school door, then they went to his hiding place and dug with their hands in the loose leaves, finding a gallon crock and six more bottles of moonshine. When they heard Urko saying, "This way, boys," they quickly disappeared with their loot.

As he looked for his whisky, the moonshine maker cursed

loudly and shrieked, "I've been robbed!"

Max and Harvey buried the liquor beside the pole of a barbed-wire fence, keeping out two bottles for themselves.

"Max, do you know how many thirteen-ounce bottles a gallon holds?" Harvey asked excitedly.

"I'm not sure, but we'll make some money at the town dance next Saturday night," Max chuckled.

They found a straw pile in a nearby field, and as they sank into its softness, they unscrewed the bottles and drank deeply. The strong liquor choked them and paralysed their vocal cords momentarily. They both agreed that the stuff was indeed potent.

When they could speak again, Max remarked, "If Urko finds out that we were the ones who stole his moonshine, he'll probably kill us."

Laughing until his sides hurt, Harvey replied, "That's the least he can do. He won't dare report us to the police for theft because he'll land himself in jail."

As the liquor began to take effect, the two boys forgot their caution and began to sing lustily "Show Me The Way To Go Home." Their voices carried far, and Urko, who was still hunting for his moonshine, heard them. Picking up a stout stick he crept stealthily towards the merrymakers, and swearing under his breath muttered, "I'll show you the way to the morgue when I get my hands on you, you thieving devils."

Prokip also heard the singing and went to investigate. As he approached the straw pile he recognized his grandsons' voices. He took off his leather belt and muttered angrily, "If your parents can't discipline you, you scalawags, I'll have to do it for them."

As Prokip walked towards them Harvey raised the bottle to his mouth and said, "*Day Bozhy,* give unto us, Lord."

Max, raising his own bottle, replied, "Urko gave unto us today, for on Saturday night we'll be a few bucks richer."

"You will, will you?" yelled Urko, who had gotten there before Prokip. Standing over the two, stick in hand, he demanded, "Where is my whisky? I want it back at once."

"Finders keepers, Urko. Make us tell you," they taunted.

"I'll beat it out of you, you thieves," yelled Urko as he raised his hand to strike them. But before he could do so, Prokip

knocked the stick to the ground, at the same time giving the moonshiner a resounding whack with the belt across his crooked shoulders.

The surprised man spun around and, seeing the murderous look on Prokip's face, took off into the bush as quickly as his short legs could carry him.

Prokip stood over his grandsons and yelled, "On your feet, *bouvany* [idiots]!"

He took a firm hold of his belt and raised his hand. At that moment, Mykolai, who had heard the commotion, shouted, "Is that you, father?"

"Over here," replied Prokip angrily. "Let's get these drunken kids home."

Only Anna, Lena, and Mykolai's wife, Christina, noticed the absence of their husbands. They realized it had something to do with the boys as their coats were still hanging on the door. But the social proceeded happily, and Prokip and Mykolai rejoined them before it was time to go home.

The remainder of the fall passed uneventfully. Before winter set in, Prokip got in an ample supply of wood. He also purchased three tons of coal in town to make sure the fires were kept burning throughout the winter season.

Christmas that year was a specially joyous occasion. With the exception of Petro and Amelia, all of Prokip's and Anna's children were home, including their daughters- and sons-in-law. The festive season was celebrated in the traditional Ukrainian style, and after Christmas Anna spent her leisure time embroidering, carding wool, and making quilts and soft pillows.

Feather bees were also a part of life on the prairies among the Ukrainian people. They were held weekly during the winter months. Invitations were sent out to each family a week in advance, usually written by the schoolchildren and passed on to their friends at school who took them home to their mothers. The first feather bee this year was held in Anna's home.

The farm people looked forward to these events. The men took their wives to the parties and sat at the kitchen table, playing cards and sipping glasses of wine.

Lena Plotkov arrived at the Zhoda farm early on the evening of the feather bee, and asked Anna to set up the long table in the dining room because she would have company. When the

guests arrived, Anna brought in a hundred-pound flour bag stuffed with goose feathers, which she set in a corner of the kitchen. She then untied the sack, took out a few handfuls of feathers and placed them on the table. The women removed the hollow stems and quills, casting them on the floor and leaving the soft down and feathers on the table. As the pile grew, Anna scooped the feathers into a clean flour sack. In the spring she would wash them in lukewarm water and mild soap, and dry them in sacks hung on a clothesline. When the wind and sun had dried the feathers she would make them into soft pillows encased in featherproof ticking.

When the table had been cleared of feathers, the women washed their hands at the kitchen sink and helped to set the table. Their delicious provisions of sandwiches, cakes, and cookies, supplemented by coffee, Anna's dill pickles, and baked pampushky,were much enjoyed.

The evening passed quickly and after all the gossip had been exchanged the men and women sang plaintive songs about their beloved homeland, Ukraine. Lesia added a note of jollity to the occasion by telling jokes.

Before the guests dispersed for home, the women began to whisper together, deciding that the next feather bee would be held at Lena Plotkov's home the following week. Lena pretended not to hear.

When the kitchen was empty once more, Anna cleared the quills from the floor and packed them in cardboard boxes, which Prokip burned the next morning in a large galvanized barrel kept for the purpose.

The fall of 1950 was a good year, with a bountiful crop. The threshing crew arrived at the Zhoda farm after finishing threshing at the Plotkovs'. "Oh dear, supper will be late," thought Anna as she started to prepare a meal. She was feeling rather tired and often found herself out of breath, even when she was not working hard.

Despite her fatigue, she managed to serve a tasty meal of tender roast duck, which she had killed and prepared herself, stuffed with seasoned breadcrumbs. The aroma of good food quickly filled the room.

The fifteen members of the threshing crew unhitched the horses from the racks, watered them at the trough, unhar-

nessed them, and fed them oats and hay before entering the house. Anna could hear their hearty laughter through the kitchen window as she carried the food to the table.

She added a salad, pickles, and cold cuts of meat, as she knew their insatiable appetites. She could hear the loud clang of the dipper against the side of the galvanized pail as the men washed up and filed in one by one, greeting Anna with courtesy.

Prokip put on the radio and they waited patiently for a weather report. The announcer assured them that it would be warm and dry for a few more days. Those who had fields of grain unthreshed were jubilant. The hired help hoped for rain. A respite from pitching sheaves would be welcome, and a day or two of sleep would hurt no one.

After Prokip said grace, the hungry men tucked in with relish. For a while after the meal they sat around the table discussing politics, the price of wheat, and livestock. They all hoped the quota on bushels of wheat delivered to the elevators would increase, as they had bills to pay.

Prokip showed some of the workers to their sleeping quarters in the bunkhouse, while others who lived nearby climbed into their racks and drove towards home in a cloud of dust. On this still autumn night the rumbling of the wheels, the loud creak of the wagons, together with the clip-clop of the horses' hooves, could be heard for miles away.

But Anna's work was still not done. She began to clear the table and collect the dirty dishes. However, she often had to sit down to catch her breath. Prokip watched her anxiously.

Then, as she picked up a platter, it slipped from her fingers and smashed into pieces on the floor. Annoyed at her clumsiness, she brought out her straw broom and dustpan to clear the debris.

"I'll do that," said Prokip as he took the broom from his wife. "You sit down a while. You look tired out."

When he had swept up the broken pieces he went to the chair where Anna was sitting. Looking into her lack-lustre eyes he asked gently, "What's the matter, Anna? You don't look well to me. You are very pale."

Anna put her hand on her chest and explained, "It's the pain inside, Prokip. It comes and goes." After a pause she continued, "I'll be fine in a few minutes and I can wash dishes."

"You will do nothing of the kind, my dear," he insisted. "You can rest here or go to bed."

Prokip rolled up his sleeves, tied an apron around his waist, finished clearing the table, and filled a large tin pan with hot water. As he started on the washing up, Mykolai came in to say good night. He had been checking the horses in the barn before driving home. He had never before seen his father at the kitchen sink. He looked so out of place. He nearly laughed at the sight but refrained from doing so as something was obviously wrong.

Looking at both his parents with questioning eyes, he quickly went to this mother, laid a loving hand on her shoulder and asked, "Mama, tell me. What is it?"

"Don't be worried, Mykolai," she replied. "I'll be fine in a little while."

Prokip wiped his hands on the apron and said, "Mykolai, will you please ask Marusia if she will stay here tonight? Your mother needs a rest. The men will be in for breakfast at four-thirty in the morning."

Anna's condition did not improve, and Marusia stayed with her until the threshing was completed. Mykolai helped James across to the Zhoda house so that she could look after him at the same time.

Against Anna's wishes, Mykolai made an appointment for her to see a specialist at an Edmonton clinic, and one cool, crisp October day Marusia and Prokip took Anna for a complete checkup.

She was admitted to the General Hospital for observation and an electrocardiograph test. It was the first time Anna had slept apart from Prokip in a strange bed, and among strangers. The doctors and nurses saw that she was nervous and made every effort to make her stay as pleasant as possible. When Elena heard that her mother was in hospital, she came from Vancouver to care for her.

The day before Anna's release, Dr. Brown called the members of the family for a consultation. He warned them that Anna had a weak heart and needed plenty of rest.

Although no one would admit it, they realized that her condition was serious, and that she was nearing the end of her life as mother and provider for her family.

24

The day after Anna came home from the hospital, Elena stood in an alcove off the dining room, admiring one of Marusia's unfinished paintings. Her suitcase, packed and ready, waited in the hallway. She turned to her sister and said, "One of your best, Marusia. You're getting better by the day."

"Thank you. I'm glad you like it."

Outside, Simeon tooted the horn of his car.

"Simeon sure wants to get rid of me in a hurry," said Elena with a laugh. She kissed Marusia on the cheek, then added, "I'm glad that mama is in your good hands."

Marusia watched her svelte, smartly dressed sister pick up her suitcase and walk down the steps to the waiting car. She watched until they drove out of sight. Elena's parting words were a painful refrain in her mind. "Dear God," she asked herself, "why me? There's a whole world out there which I long to see, but I cannot leave."

The sound of a thud from the living room broke her reverie. James had dropped the book he was reading. Marusia erased from her face the turmoil that was in her heart and went to pick it up for him.

Before entering the kitchen to start supper, she walked over to the alcove, gathered together her paints, easel, and canvas,

and stored them in the closet. She now knew that her hopes were futile.

Much as she hated to admit it to herself, James was becoming more and more of a burden, though his kindness and uncomplaining patience made her lot easier than it might have been.

The one joy of her life was Simeon, who was a help not only to Marusia in caring for his father, but to Prokip as well. Simeon loved the land and was determined to become a successful farmer.

One blustery autumn day, while Marusia pumped water into the trough, Simeon drove the team of horses dragging a harrow into the yard. Prokip came out of the barn and started walking toward them.

"You're black as night, Simeon," said Marusia. "Go wash up. There's hot water in the summerhouse. I'll water the horses."

Simeon did not answer. He stood looking across the fields with a thoughtful expression on his face.

"Your mother is talking to you," said Prokip. "Aren't you listening?"

"I've been thinking, grandpa." Simeon pointed towards the dust blowing across the fallow field and piling in great mounds along the fence line. "There's a way to stop the loss of that good topsoil. We should plant a shelter belt."

Prokip nodded his head. To Marusia he said, "Your son is truly a son of the soil."

Prokip allowed Simeon to take over more and more of the farm management, and when he left school, he took over the work entirely.

Anna was failing fast, and Prokip was happy to have more time to devote to caring for his wife. He attended to her every need. When climbing the stairs became too much of an effort for her, he brought her bed down into the living room.

Elena and Lesia bought her a comfortable armchair where she could relax when not in bed. Anna was not used to so much leisure time. She could not remain idle so she occupied herself embroidering attractive Ukrainian blouses, shirts and *rushnyky,* or runners. Every day she read passages from the Bible.

November passed quickly. It was a good autumn and the first

snowfall was late. Simeon made weekly trips to town in his old Buick to purchase whatever his grandparents needed.

Three weeks before Christmas Marusia began to prepare for the festive season. She had to do most of the work because of Anna's failing health. Early one morning, however, Anna announced that she felt better and would take her breakfast in the kitchen with Prokip and Simeon. They were delighted to see that she looked more like her former self.

Simeon was a good cook. He served the breakfast, ate hurriedly, and dashed to the barn where Rosie, the cow, was in labour. Her water bag had broken an hour before, and the calf should have been born by now. When he entered the barn, Rosie was lying on her side. With every contraction she pushed hard, but without result.

Simeon examined her pelvis. The animal undoubtedly needed help. The head of the calf was quite large and she could not expel it. He ran to the house and called, "Grandpa, Rosie needs help or her calf will die. Can you give me a hand?"

"As soon as I help your grandma to bed," Prokip replied.

"You baby me too much, my husband," she replied. "I feel well today. I can manage on my own."

Prokip looked at his wife with concern, but he knew it was useless to argue with her. When she made up her mind, nothing could change it. So he put on his coat and cap and followed Simeon to the barn.

Anna looked around her kitchen. She had to admit to herself that the men were very tidy. Everything was spotless and in its right place. As she relaxed, she occasionally smiled as she recalled some of the good times in the past.

An hour went by. The men were still in the barn. Anna grew restless. She had work to do. A cushion top, a gift for Elena, had to be finished. She rose slowly from the kitchen table and walked into the living room. As she sank into her armchair, she reached out for the photograph of Petro and sat with it in her hand. Her needlework lay in her lap. She gazed at the picture for a long time. Many years had passed since she had lost her son, but the pain of that loss had not lessened.

As she stood up to replace the photo on the dresser she felt a sharp stab in her thorax. It was the most intense pain she had yet experienced. In agony, she clutched her chest and began to

moan, calling in a low, laboured voice, "Prokip, Prokip ...."

When the two men entered the barn, Prokip immmediately knew what to do. He found a stout piece of rope and tied it firmly around the calf's protruding feet. By this time its nose and hanging tongue had come into view. It was the head which was causing the obstruction. When Rosie pushed with each contraction, Prokip gently pulled on the rope tied to the feet. Simeon slowly drew out the head. Once the head and shoulders of the calf were freed, the birth followed quickly.

As soon as Rosie was relieved of her pain she got up and licked the newborn to dry it. The calf rose on its wobbly feet, nuzzled the cow's hind side, found a teat and suckled contentedly.

"It's a beautiful bull calf, grandpa. We'll keep him for a sire," said Simeon.

"As you wish, boy. Now let's go into the house and wash our hands. Anna will want to know that all is well with Rosie."

There was no sound in the house when Simeon and Prokip entered the kitchen. Anna was not there. "She must be resting," said Prokip. The two men washed up and tiptoed quietly to the living room.

Anna was lying back in her chair. Her unfinished needlework and Petro's picture lay at her feet; her left arm hung limply over the arm of the chair. Her face was very pale and she was quite still.

Prokip fell onto his knees beside her and took her limp hand in his. "Anna, speak to me," he implored. But there was no answer. Anna was dead.

After several minutes Prokip rose slowly from his knees and gathered his wife's lifeless body in his arms, carrying her to the bed and gently laying her on the handwoven bedspread.

He closed her staring eyes and, stifling his sobs, said to Simeon, "Let the family know."

And when Marusia hurried back with her son, she saw her father standing motionless beside the bed with bowed head. She came over and stood beside him. Her heart was filled with grief, but she did not cry. She then took her mother's limp hand in hers and, looking down into her ashen face, thought, "Even in death, my precious mother, to me you will always be

very much alive; for I will see a part of you in each one of us — your children. Mykolai has inherited your fortitude; Elena and Lesia your tact and foresight; Oleksa your wisdom; and I, my love, have inherited your strength and perseverance. You've always understood my rebellious moods and comforted me. You have taught me humility; for without these qualities I would have perished."

She took her mother's hands, crossed them on her breast, and kissed her forehead. Putting a comforting arm around Simeon's shoulders, she said, "Simeon, grandma would not want you to cry. Come, let's help grandpa to the kitchen and I'll make us all some tea."

Anna's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren gathered at the farmhouse to console Prokip. Mykolai drove to the undertakers and made arrangements for his mother's funeral. He also sent a message to Elena to return.

The hearse arrived to take Anna's body to the funeral home. The undertakers wrapped her in a shroud, and Marusia handed them the clothes in which her mother would be buried.

Mykolai asked the Catholic priest to conduct the prayer and funeral services and arranged with the gravediggers to prepare a grave in the cemetery beside the church.

Panakhyda, the prayer service, was to be held at eight o'clock the following evening. The living room was cleared of all furniture, except for long benches against the walls. In the kitchen, Marusia, Lena, and Lesia, with the help of their neighbours, prepared food for the dinner, *obid,* which would be held the day after the burial.

The undertakers carried the casket into the living room and set it on a stand. Then they opened the upper partition of the casket.

The weeping family members were comforted by their friends. But Prokip did not cry. He stood beside the casket of his beloved wife and gazed at her lifeless face. He was drained of all emotion, wishing that death would come and claim him also.

Anna lay in serene repose, her head resting on a cream satin pillow. She was dressed in her black crepe dress with a black silk shawl draped around her head. Her hands, folded on her chest, held a small gold crucifix. On top of the casket lay a

cross fashioned from freshly cut pink and white carnations. Another crucifix with a silver candleholder on each side was placed on a small table beside the coffin.

As more people arrived, each in turn knelt at the foot of the casket and said a silent prayer for the departed, after which they sat on benches and talked in subdued voices.

At last a priest and a *diak,* cantor, arrived. As they entered the living room the diak lighted the candles beside the coffin. Then the panakhyda for the soul of the deceased began. Father Thomas read from the Book of Psalms and the cantor sang the dirges.

The service lasted an hour, after which Father Thomas announced that the funeral mass would take place in the local church the following morning.

The mourners walked once more past the casket, an occasional muffled sob breaking the silence.

For those who wished to stay longer, refreshments were served in the dining room, and by eleven o'clock only Lena and Mykhajlo Plotkov and the Zhoda family were left. The house was very quiet.

One by one the members of the family took a few minutes to lie down and rest. Mykhajlo stoked the fires and Lena brought some water from the well.

Prokip was alone with Anna. He looked down at her still, peaceful face, once more reliving the good and bad times they had shared. He could not bear the thought that never again would those lips call his name, or those work-worn hands clasp his.

He bent down and laid his head on her breast, a sob escaping his lips. In desperation he cried, "Anna, my Anna. You are gone, but I must go on."

He was still sobbing when he felt a firm touch on his shoulder. "Prokip," said Mykhajlo. "Please don't cry. We can't bring Anna back."

He guided the bereaved man to the bench. It was a Ukrainian custom to keep an all-night vigil when a body lay in repose. So Mykhajlo and Lena sat with Prokip throughout the remainder of the night. When the first rosy haze appeared in the east, the wake was over.

It was a crisp and cool November morning for the funeral.

The family all wore dark clothes, the womenfolk with black shawls on their heads. Each member of the family had a black mourning ribbon tied around one arm.

The hearse pulled into the yard in front of the house at eight o'clock. The undertakers closed the coffin, and the pallbearers, Anna's grandsons, took their places, three on each side. They were: Marusia's boys, Sydney and Simeon; Lesia's son Anton; and Mykolai's sons Harasim, Harvey, and Max.

Each pallbearer took the towel-draped handle of the casket in his right hand and lifted it off the wheel base. Slowly they carried Anna's body through the front door for the last time, and placed it in the hearse. The weeping family followed. A long procession of cars, with their lights on, slowly followed the hearse to the church where the priests, friends, and neighbours were waiting.

The casket was borne into the church and placed before the altar. Bouquets and wreaths of flowers flanked the coffin on each side.

Father Thomas began the solemn funeral mass, the *Pokhoron.* The choir sang funeral dirges and the Lord's Prayer. The heavy perfume of the flowers, intermingled with the *ladan,* filled the air.

The Zhoda family received Holy Communion, and at the endof the mass Father Thomas delivered the eulogy.

"Dear family and friends," he began in a solemn voice, "today is a very sad occasion. We are gathered together to pay our respects and bid farewell to our beloved sister Anna, and to send her on her way to her eternal rest. We do not know the day nor the hour when God will call upon us to leave our loved ones and our worldly possessions behind to enter into his Kingdom.

"Anna was born in Ukraine on May 10, 1880, in the small village of Borschiew, of poor peasant parents. She married at the age of fifteen. Together with her husband Prokip and three small children, she fled a land of oppression, seeking freedom in a new land. They came to a strange country, eager to make a new and better life for themselves and their family. They worked, under adverse conditions, in close union with good Mother Earth who nurtured them and bestowed upon them many blessings. Anna was a true pioneer who helped build this

country into what it is today. She was predeceased by her oldest son Petro in 1918."

Father Thomas paused briefly and looked at Prokip as he continued. "Dear husband, I know your heart is heavy and your sorrow deep. You have lost your lifelong companion, the mother of your children. Do not grieve but rejoice because for her it is not the end but the beginning of an everlasting life in the house of the Lord; where she will feel no more pain; suffer no more sorrow or want. Let there be no animosity in your heart towards her. Forgive her if she had ever offended you, for life's road is not smooth but has many pitfalls."

Prokip took a white handkerchief from his pocket and wiped away the scalding tears from his weather-beaten face.

The priest then addressed Anna's children. "She has raised and loved you," he said. "Keep her memory alive and fresh in your hearts always."

The congregation then sang *"Vichnaya Pamyat"*, ["Eternal Memory"], after which they walked past the casket once more and kissed the crucifix of Christ which Father Thomas held in his hand.

The family remained till the last, and as Anna's children bade their last farewells, their heartbroken sobs were intermingled with the words, "Mama ... mama ...."

The undertakers closed the coffin and the pallbearers bore it to the freshly dug grave. Slowly the casket was lowered. Father Thomas delivered a short prayer, then threw a handful of soil on top of the coffin and sprinkled it with holy water before the grave was sealed. The many wreaths and bouquets were placed on top of the mound. The long line of vehicles then left the cemetery and entered the Zhoda farmyard.

While the funeral service was in progress, a few of the neighbours had been preparing the *obid,* the dinner. They set up two long tables in the dining and living rooms and covered them with white tablecloths. On the main table were three kolachi with candles on each side. Beside each table setting was a miniature kolach, with an apple, an orange, and a wax candle which was inserted into the bread.

When all the guests were assembled, they lit their candles and Father Thomas led them in prayer before the meal began. The kolachi were tokens of remembrance, and each person said

a prayer for the soul of the departed.

After dinner only a few close friends stayed behind to keep the Zhodas company for another night. For a whole year every member of the family would refrain from dancing, and after forty days a mass would be held at the church followed by a funeral dinner, a *spomynky,* at the house.

One more ceremony would take place after Easter, the *Provody,* when those who had lost relations gathered at the cemetery after High Mass and placed kolachi and fruit on the graves. The Zhoda children would take turns throughout the years to follow this ritual in memory of their mother.

After Anna had been laid to rest, Prokip was like a ship without a rudder. The house was strangely silent and very lonely. Simeon stayed with his grandfather, but he spent much time in the farmyard and fields, and on some evenings he visited his young friends away from home.

Although Mykolai, Lesia, and Oleksa asked Prokip to make his home with one of them, he flatly refused. This was the house where Anna and he had spent so many years together. Here he would stay.

But he had to make some definite plans. He could not remain entirely alone. As Marusia lived so near, she offered to help as much as she could. But James was bedridden and completely dependent on her.

"Simeon," said Prokip one day, "I have been doing a lot of thinking. You love the land. I love my home. I will deed the homestead to you in fair exchange — that I may spend the rest of my life here with you."

Simeon was taken by surprise. "What will my uncles and aunts say?" he asked.

"They can say anything they want. It's not important. The decision rests with me."

Prokip laid a hand on the young man's shoulder and continued, "I have already discussed the matter with them. Oleksa, as a lawyer, has more than ample means. Marusia, Lesia, Mykolai, and Elena have no objections."

He took out his pipe, filled and lit it, and took a long drag on the stem, exhaling the smoke as he pointed to the east. "You have an option either to buy or sell those two quarters adjoining this one. The proceeds from the sale are to be divided

equally among all my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. If you agree, we will draw up the papers with Oleksa's law firm."

Simeon reserved an acre of land for Prokip in a sheltered spot near the house, where his grandfather had planted some fruit trees. With his loving care the trees responded favourably and in their fourth year he was rewarded with his first crop of apples.

Simeon and the other members of his family sought Prokip's advice on many matters relating to the land, so he did not feel useless. He also enjoyed his trips to town on the first of every month to cash his pension cheque. Simeon always reserved that one day a month to drive his grandfather and the Plotkovs to town, and on his return Marusia usually had lunch ready for them. Although Prokip still missed Anna, his life was fairly full, and he was content.

James did not live long after this, and was finally laid to rest in the little cemetery next to the plot reserved for Prokip.

Marusia moved in with Prokip and Simeon as the men needed a woman in the house, and Prokip was now seventy-three and not so strong as he had been. She could not bear to leave them to care for themselves, but she kept her own little house in order and went there each day to paint.

Although she was self-taught, her technique was improving all the time. Despite the fact that she was becoming more satisfied with her efforts, she had no idea that others would appreciate her work and that she would eventually become the best known member of the Zhoda family.

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Prokip continued to work in his orchard and to help with the lighter chores, such as tending the poultry. In the evenings he would delight his great-grandchildren with stories of the past. Lesia's grandsons, Christopher and Joseph, were constantly at the homestead.

Sometimes he carved little animals for them, and one day he fashioned a flute from a willow stick with his jacknife, although his fingers were not so dextrous as they used to be, which annoyed him greatly. Nevertheless, he watched with amusement when the young boys tried to play it.

One morning Prokip heard a loud rumbling sound down the road, coming towards his gate. It turned out to be a gigantic grader which had begun to level and widen the road between the farms and the neighbouring town.

Christopher, who was staying with Prokip for a few days, rushed to the gate yelling, "Look, grandpa! What are those men doing?"

"They've come to grade the road in time for the school bus to take you to school," Prokip replied.

After breakfast Prokip and his great-grandson stood and watched the huge machines as they tore up mounds of earth and levelled the surface. Gradually the road took shape. To

Prokip, it seemed like only yesterday when his axe had felled the first mighty poplar so that he and his family could cross the flowing creek.

The next innovation on the farm was a rubber-tired tractor and combine. Simeon caught a ride with a neighbour into town to bring back the long-awaited modern machinery.

Prokip was busy scything a stand of pigweed and grass when he heard the tractor in the distance. He threw the grass to the squealing hogs in the pigsty, then slung his scythe over his shoulder and walked towards his grandson.

Simeon drove into the farmyard to show off his new purchase. He throttled the engine and put on the brake suddenly before jumping to the ground. "Well, grandpa, what to do you think of it?" he shouted.

Prokip looked at the scythe in his hand, then at the huge red combine and tractor. He shook his head in amazement. "Wonder of wonders," he muttered.

That same fall he watched Simeon working in the fields and marvelled at what one man could do to a stand of wheat in so short a time.

June 24, 1963 was a very special day. It was Prokip's eighty-fifth birthday. All the family who could do so gathered at the homestead to celebrate this important event. Sydney also brought a friend of his, Allen Thomas, who was delighted to be invited to join the family on this occasion.

The womenfolk prepared all Prokip's favourite Ukrainian dishes and baked a big birthday cake which they decorated with white frosting, with eight blue and five yellow candles. Each blue candle represented ten years of his life.

After dinner the candles on the cake were lit, and the great-grandchildren gathered around calling on Prokip to make a wish and blow the candles out.

Prokip drew in a deep breath and blew hard. He managed to extinguish them all at once. Christopher jumped up and down excitedly, "Grandpa's wish will come true. Grandpa's wish..."

"Shush, Chris!" exclaimed his brother Joseph as he nudged him with his elbow. "We want to hear grandpa speak."

There was instant silence. All eyes were turned towards Prokip.

Prokip rose and looked around the room at his family with pride. First he thanked them for the lovely day they had given him and for the many gifts he had received. Then he added, "Yes, my children, my wish has been granted many times over. I could not ask for more. God has bestowed upon me a fine family, and I thank Him."

After dinner they all gathered in the living room, discussing many matters of interest. Then Sydney announced, "I have been accepted at the University of Alberta to teach Ukrainian."

Prokip's interest was aroused as he had suffered enough by being able to speak only his mother tongue.

Sydney continued, "Ukrainian was introduced at the university two years ago along with the other languages already taught. As you know, I have been studying Ukrainian as well as English, so I am well qualified."

"But that's not all, father," said Oleksa. "The government of Alberta has granted permission for the erection of a monument in memory of the Ukrainian pioneers. It is going to be unveiled at Elk Island Park on August eighteenth this year."

Prokip was elated. His eyes misted. "A monument!" he exclaimed. "That's one ceremony I don't want to miss."

After most of the family had departed, Sydney, with his friend Allen Thomas, went into the kitchen where Marusia was washing the dishes.

"Mother," Sydney explained, "the real reason I brought Allen here is that he is very interested in your artwork. He has seen the paintings hanging in my apartment and in Oleksa's home, and he would very much like to see the others you have in your cottage."

Marusia was dumbfounded. She searched for words but could not express her feelings.

"Your painting *The Glistening Furrow* is a fine piece of art," said Allen. "I don't know when I have been so attracted by a composition. I have many friends in the art world and would like them to see your collection."

Marusia was delighted. She remembered Sister Theresa telling her that she had talent which, if developed, might change the course of her life.

She quickly wiped her hands on her apron and took the two

men across the yard to her little cottage at the end of the garden. She led them to her spare bedroom, which she had turned into a studio and where she had hung all her best work.

Allen Thomas walked around the room in silence. After a short while he turned to Marusia and said admiringly, "Did you know, Mrs. White, that you have a treasure trove here? I know of a national exhibition which will be held soon and I would very much like to include one or more of your paintings."

Sydney turned to his mother and said, "It means fame, and perhaps a trip to art galleries in London and New York."

Marusia blushed. She was not used to so much attention and flattery. Oh, if it were true, perhaps it would still be possible for her to leave the farm, that is if her father and Simeon were looked after. In a quiet voice she replied, "You have my permission to do so."

Sydney and Allen selected several paintings to take with them. Then they left for the city. Marusia heard nothing more and thought it was one more of her dreams.

The monument to the Ukrainian pioneers had been erected on a high, grassy knoll in Elk Island Park. A stand of aspen and willow rose in the background.

A few feet from the monument stood a mud-plastered whitewashed pioneer hut with a ***strikha,*** a thatched roof. Inside the hut were unique Ukrainian artifacts including a primitive pich, household wares, embroidery, agricultural implements, even a sheepskin coat.

Prokip with his family and friends, including his neighbours Mykhajlo and Lena, followed the throng of people up the steep incline to the top of the hill. The younger ones moved ahead quickly, and Prokip and the Plotkovs followed slowly with laboured steps.

When he at last reached the top, he took off his hat, wiped the sweat from his brow, and ran his fingers through this thinning grey hair as he patted it in place. He looked around him. There were so many people. What a wonderful sight, he reflected.

The Plotkovs and Prokip found a place to sit on a bench in full view of the monument as they listened to Ukrainian folk and national songs. Marusia watched her father wipe tears from

his eyes as he listened to a young Ukrainian Canadian recite the heartrending "Poems of Bondage" written by the noted Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. Then the whole crowd joined in songs in their native tongue. Prokip sang too, but his once-strong baritone voice was weak and wavery.

The unveiling ceremony began at two o'clock. Everyone stood to sing "O Canada." Their voices were carried by the breeze far across the lake, and were lost in the trees and bogs.

Marusia looked at her father's lined face, stooped shoulders and gnarled hands; and she was filled with compassion for the once-strong man who with his family had had the courage to bridge two continents. It seemed like only yesterday when he had bounced her on his knee; but time does not stand still, and the past years of toil had taken their toll.

She looked around her. He was not alone. Here also were his brethren; men and women who too had grown old and feeble; and who with their back-breaking labour had shaped a new country for future generations. She then saw the smiling, eager faces of youth who looked ahead, while the old and workworn wished only to put the past behind. Unashamed, Marusia cried.

John Decore, then a member of parliament, introduced the many dignitaries present at the ceremony. Speeches were made honouring the courage and determination of the pioneers, and greetings were read from the prime minister and the premier of Alberta. Michael Luchkovich asked those present to cherish the heritage passed on to them by their forebearers. The oldest settler, Peter Svarich, who had spent many of his eighty-seven years organizing schools in the surrounding district, laid a wreath at the foot of the monument. It was then blessed by Bishop Neil Savaryn of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church and Archbishop Andrey Metiuk of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox church. The choir sang the Lord's Prayer.

After the ceremony, Prokip walked slowly to the terrazzo stairs, glistening in the sun, took one step then stopped. "He's too feeble to make it on his own," thought Marusia. Quickly she moved to his side and took his arm. Together they walked to the top of the stairs and stood gazing at the black granite slab representing the enduring hardships of the pioneers. Etched on the face of the plaque was the figure of a ploughman, keeping a firm hold on the reins of his pair of oxen. Behind him, shining

over the mountains, was the sun, and on its disc were a maple leaf and a trident, the symbol of Ukraine. The inscription In Memory of the Ukrainian Pioneers in Western Canada, written in English and Ukrainian, was engraved on the left-hand corner of the granite slab.

Prokip stood for a long time, lost in his thoughts of years gone by. A light touch on his arm brought him back to the present. Marusia spoke softly. "Come, father, it's time to go."

Prokip turned to his daughter and said, "Your mother would have loved this day." Slowly he followed her down the steps and rejoined his family. They bade their father farewell, with a promise to visit him soon. Christopher took his hand and walked with him to a waiting car.

As the car approached the Zhoda homestead, Prokip looked at the tall, ripening heads of golden grain. In the distance, straight ahead over the treetops, loomed the spire of the church steeple.

Simeon drove to the front of the house, and Prokip alighted with great relief. The still air was sticky and humid, and he was stiff with sitting so long. Although it was late afternoon, the sun was intense. There was no breeze to ruffle the branches of the trees or to sway the green blades of grass and foxtail. The drone of the fireflies and the buzz of the honeybees in the clover patch filled the air. The hungry farm animals were lowing and squealing for their food.

Marusia quickly went into the house to change into her work clothes before attending to the farm chores. Simeon told Christopher to feed and water all the poultry.

"You've had a trying day, grandpa. You look dead beat. I'll help you into the house," he said.

"Shcheni, synku [not yet, son]," he replied. Simeon followed his mother into the house. Prokip was alone.

The old man shuffled slowly,
Painful was his walk.
His old bones were so weary,
Breathless did he talk
To no one in particular
For no one was around.

And as he moved he kept his eyes
Upon the rutted ground.
He did not see the wispy grass
Nor the well-worn holes.
He only felt the wrathful sun
And the nails in his soles.

The years were heavy on his brow,
Past worries lined his face.
His skin was hard from years of toil,
His teeth had lost their place.
On he walked in memories
Tired, but fulfilled.

Little time was left to him
And rest was all he willed.

Prokip reached the veranda of the house. Slowly he sat down in the old rocking chair and relaxed in its cushioned softness. Content, he smiled and closed his eyes.

Much later, when Simeon came to call him inside, he did not respond. Prokip Zhoda had earned his rest.

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After Prokip had been laid to rest beside Anna, Marusia and Simeon were alone on the homestead. Marusia's life was one of hard work and lonely evenings. Amelia had settled happily in Texas. She wrote cheerful letters, enclosing photos of her home and her two children. But it was hard for Marusia to be on her own so much. Christopher's visits were less frequent as he was now attending school, and Simeon spent most of his leisure time in the company of an attractive young Ukrainian girl who lived near Vegreville. Marusia had given up hope of hearing any good news about her paintings.

"Simeon," she said one morning at the breakfast table. "I have been watching you closely. You work so hard and I know that you need some leisure time and interesting company, otherwise your life would be too boring."

Her eyes twinkled as she continued, "I hope you're not going to be a bachelor all your life. Those early morning risings and late night hours are no good. I know all about Eva Semkov. She's a fine girl. Her parents came to Canada from Ukraine in 1927. If you really love her, why don't you marry her and bring her here?"

"I've already talked to her about it, mama, and I know she's fond of me," he replied. "We haven't told anyone yet as I

know we should mourn grandpa's death for a year. But I don't think he would mind if we got married fairly soon, do you?"

"Of course not," replied Marusia. "He would want you to be happy."

"We had thought of a quiet wedding in about a month from now," said Simeon. "I hope you will give us your blessing."

Marusia realized that she would not be planning a wedding party for any of her children. Sydney was still a bachelor who loved travelling abroad when not teaching school; Amelia had had a quiet wedding away from home and was now a full-fledged American; and now Simeon would be married from his bride's home in Vegreville.

The wedding took place in September in a traditional Ukrainian style. Marusia and other members of the family attended the ceremony, which was a quiet one because of the mourning period for Prokip. As Simeon stood at the altar with his bride, Marusia thought how much he resembled James.

After a brief honeymoon, the couple returned to the homestead. Marusia had moved back to her little cottage as there would be no room for two women to run the house.

She spent more and more time alone, although she was welcome at the big house any time. She had plenty of time to paint and derived much pleasure from the many books which James had collected.

Shortly after the wedding Simeon came home late from town, but before entering his house he went to the cottage and handed Marusia an important-looking white envelope which he had picked up at the post office.

She opened it with shaking hands. "Don't go, Simeon, until I see what's in it," she exclaimed. She hastily read it with utter disbelief. She looked at the address on the envelope again to make sure it was really for her.

Simeon was startled by the expression on his mother's face. "Mother, you're as white as a ghost!" he cried. "Whatever is it?"

Marusia sat down on a nearby chair as her legs had gone limp. She handed the letter to her son. He read eagerly.

A wide grin spread from ear to ear. Pulling her up to her feet, he hugged her. "Mother dear, I'm so proud of you. If anyone has earned a right to happiness, it's you. Think of all the places

you'll be able to visit. Now you can do all the things you have longed to do."

So it was true! Marusia had won first prize in an international painting competition. Sydney had entered one of her works without telling her. Her prize was a visit to eastern Canada, and also to art galleries in Paris and London.

Sydney had already heard the news, and he drove over in his new Pontiac to congratulate her. "Mother, I *knew* your talent would be recognized one day," he said. "You've had so little opportunity to concentrate on what you really want to do. I don't know how you've managed to complete so many paintings in the little time you've had from your hard work."

Sydney had always been her most ardent supporter. She thought with sorrow of how her little brother Petro had also admired her amateur efforts when they were children. He had never teased her about daydreaming as the other children had.

"Now you'll be able to live in a big city where you can show your work and continue your studies. And if you ever want to make Edmonton your home, you know there's always room with me," he said.

"I don't know," replied Marusia weakly. "I'm scared to death at the thought of leaving here and travelling all over the world at my age. I had so much confidence when I was young. That's why I didn't stop Amelia from going away. But now I don't know what I would do on my own among strange people. I would love to see famous paintings and meet other artists. I have so much to learn..." Her voice trailed off as she considered the problem.

Sydney, however, refused to listen to her protests. He would make arrangements to accompany her overseas. He loved to travel, and on his school holidays had visited many countries. He had hopes of becoming a well-known writer one day. He had had several articles and short stories published, and he had plenty of confidence in himself.

His strength communicated itself to Marusia, and she consented to make the break with her past, although she would not let herself think of the outcome of all this attention.

Plans were at last finalized and she was ready to leave the homestead, although she was not sure what to take with her

and what to wear. She would have to do some shopping in Edmonton first.

The night before she left for the city she started to pack her belongings. She took the photos of her two husbands, James and Sydney, from the mantelpiece and gazed at them for a long time. They each seemed to say to her, "Well done, my love." She smiled wistfully. The fine lines around her eyes and mouth were etched more deeply in the soft lamplight, and the strands of grey hair among the black shone like silver. She had no regrets for the years of devotion she had given to her loved ones. Carefully she placed the photos in the suitcase and closed the lid.

Oleksa had told her that when she returned from overseas if she didn't want to move in with Sydney he had found her a house in the city near to where he lived. "You'll love it," he said, "and just think, you won't have to do any more farm chores!"

When Sydney arrived to take her to Edmonton, Marusia begged him to wait for a little while. She felt she must take one last look around.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, picking up a piece of bread from the table and tucking it into her jacket pocket. She always took something with her to feed her friends, the birds.

Sydney called after her, "Don't be long mother. I don't like that dark cloud overhead. There's going to be a storm."

She stood on the bank of the creek and listened to its familiar gurgling sounds as the water ran merrily on its way. The wild ducks quacked as they bathed in its clear waters.

A tame blue jay greeted her with a loud caw and alighted on her shoulder. She took out the piece of bread and held it in the palm of her hand. The bird did not need an invitation. With a quick swoop it picked up the bread in its beak and flew off to the branch of a tree overhead. After swallowing the treat, it resumed its raucous protests as if to ask, "Are you really leaving us?"

A coyote came out of hiding and stood on a hilltop on the other side of the creek watching her. He pointed his nose skyward, and his loud, mournful yelps filled the still air. Then he quietly disappeared into the bush.

Suddenly a dark cloud obscured the sun, and bolts of lightning zigzagged across the sky, followed by a loud peal of

thunder. She felt the cool raindrops on her face and quickly took refuge beneath a tall tree. The soft cascades of autumn leaves fell around her like tears.

As soon as the cloud passed over, the sun came out and a brilliant rainbow formed an arc across the sky, seeming to touch the earth and enveloping the autumn splendour of the many-hued trees. She felt like setting up her easel to capture the breathtaking sight on canvas, but her paints were already packed.

As she stood there she realized that she was really too old to start a new life away from all the familiar scenes. If only her opportunity had come when she was Amelia's age, she would have had no such trepidation.

She walked slowly to the farmyard where Sydney was calling to her to hurry. Simeon and Eva helped her into the car, hugged her and wished her luck. "Come and visit us once in a while," they said.

Marusia did not tell them then, but she knew she could never leave for good. The rainbow, like a homing beacon, was calling her back.

All she said was, "Simeon, be sure you fix the storm windows and door in my cottage."

Sophia Shelest came to Canada with her parents and three younger brothers as a wide-eyed six-year-old. She attended school in Mundare, Alberta, where she met and eventually married Peter Slobodian. The young couple left Mundare, exchanging the relative comforts of a small prairie town for the rigours of a prairie farm. It is the time spent here on the land with her husband and their five children that has left the deepest impression on Sophia. She vividly recalls the long winter evenings, when the snow lay deep making the roads impassable, the family gathered about a wood and coal heater listening to in-laws tell tales of hardship and courage; tales of the old country, and tales of strong-willed people carving a future out of a new land. At the time Sophia filed these stories away, always dreaming that one day she would have the opportunity to put seemingly endless farm chores aside, and put pen to paper. With the publication of *The Glistening Furrow*, that dream has been fulfilled.

Sophia and Peter live in Edmonton, Alberta. She has published her second novel *Let the Soft Wind Blow* and is currently working on her third and fourth.