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MUSKEGO BOY



by
EDNA and HOWARD HONG.

WISCONSIN

Public School Library Regulations

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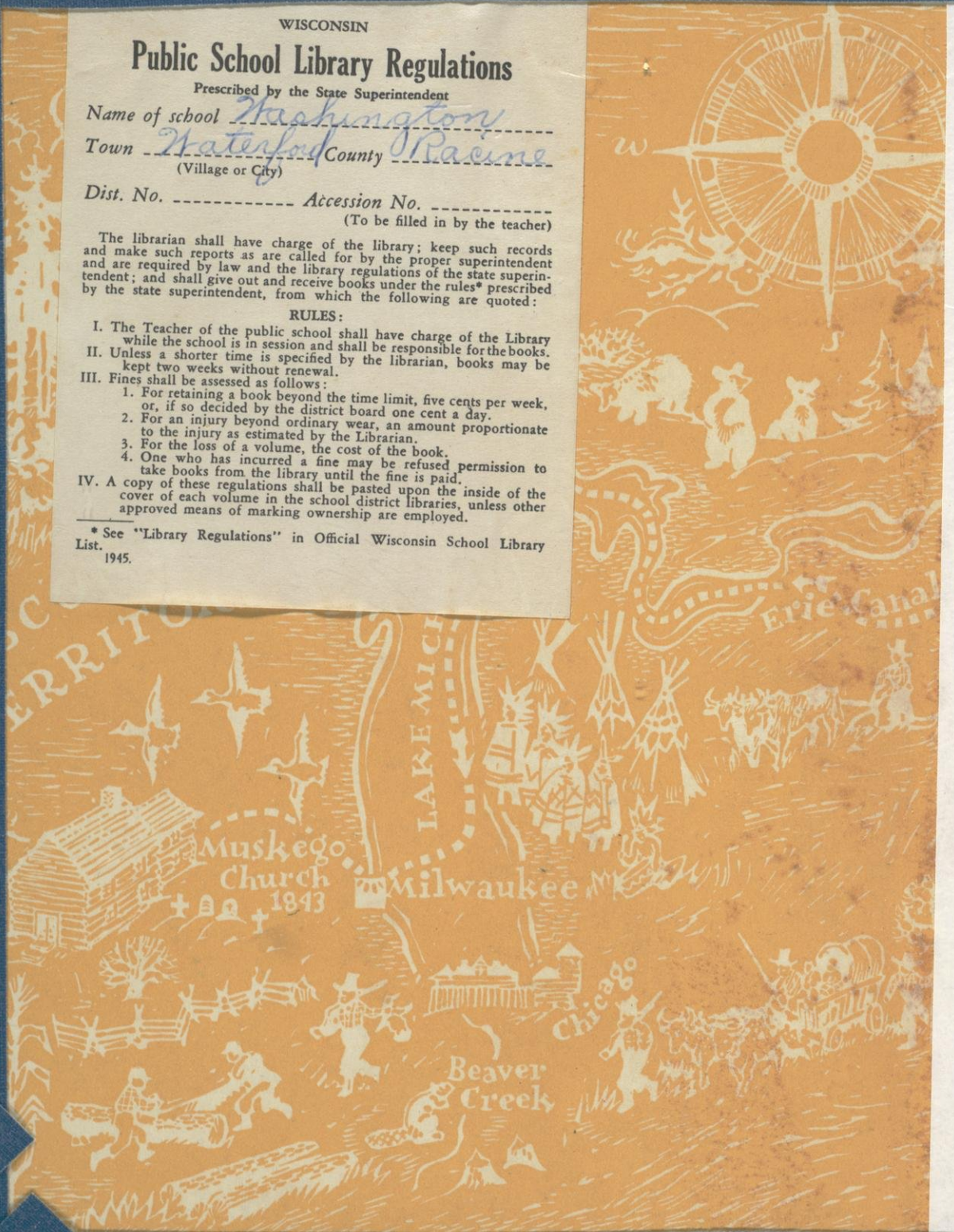
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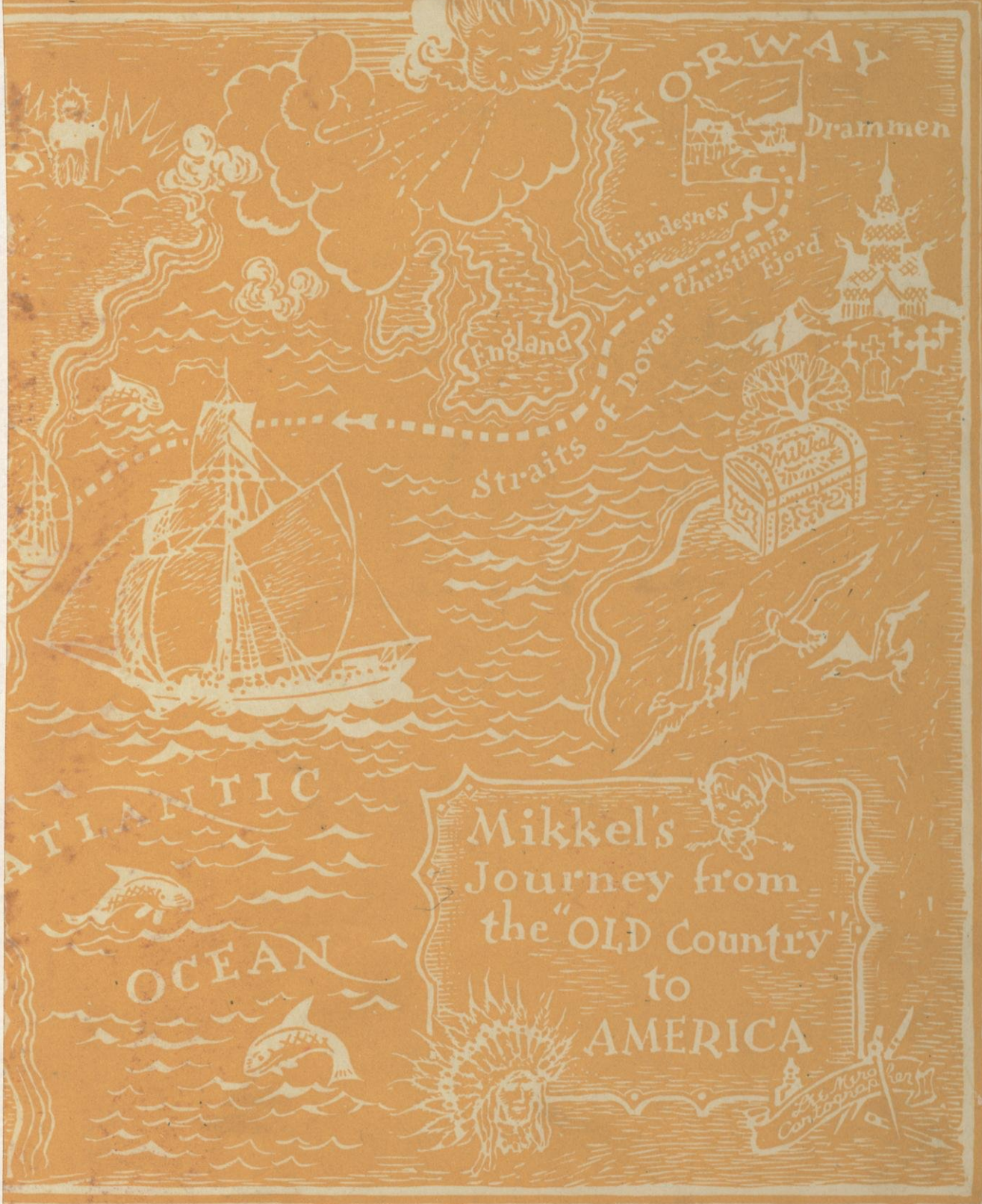
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 1. For retaining a book beyond the time limit, five cents per week, or, if so decided by the district board one cent a day.
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* See "Library Regulations" in Official Wisconsin School Library List. 1945.





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Drammen

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Mikkal's Trunk

ATLANTIC

OCEAN

Mikkal's Journey from the "OLD Country" to AMERICA

The Mikkal Company

MUSKIEGO

BOY



THE
MUSKIEGO
BOY

BY
J. W. M. ...

NEW YORK
... ..

...

MUSKEGO BOY

Mikkel



by EDNA and
HOWARD HONG
Illustrated by
LEE MERO

AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE
Minneapolis
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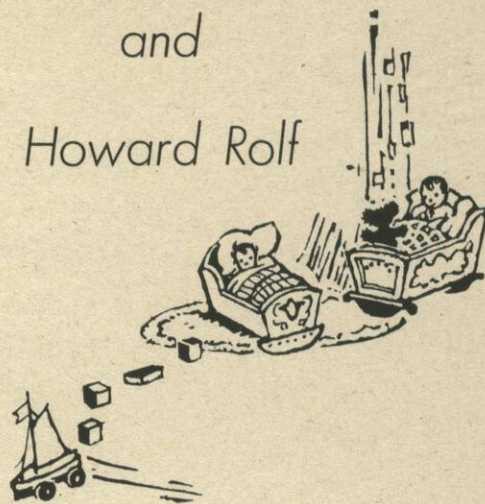
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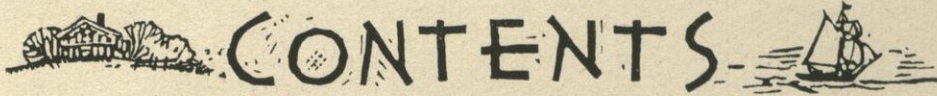


To Peder B.

and

Howard Rolf



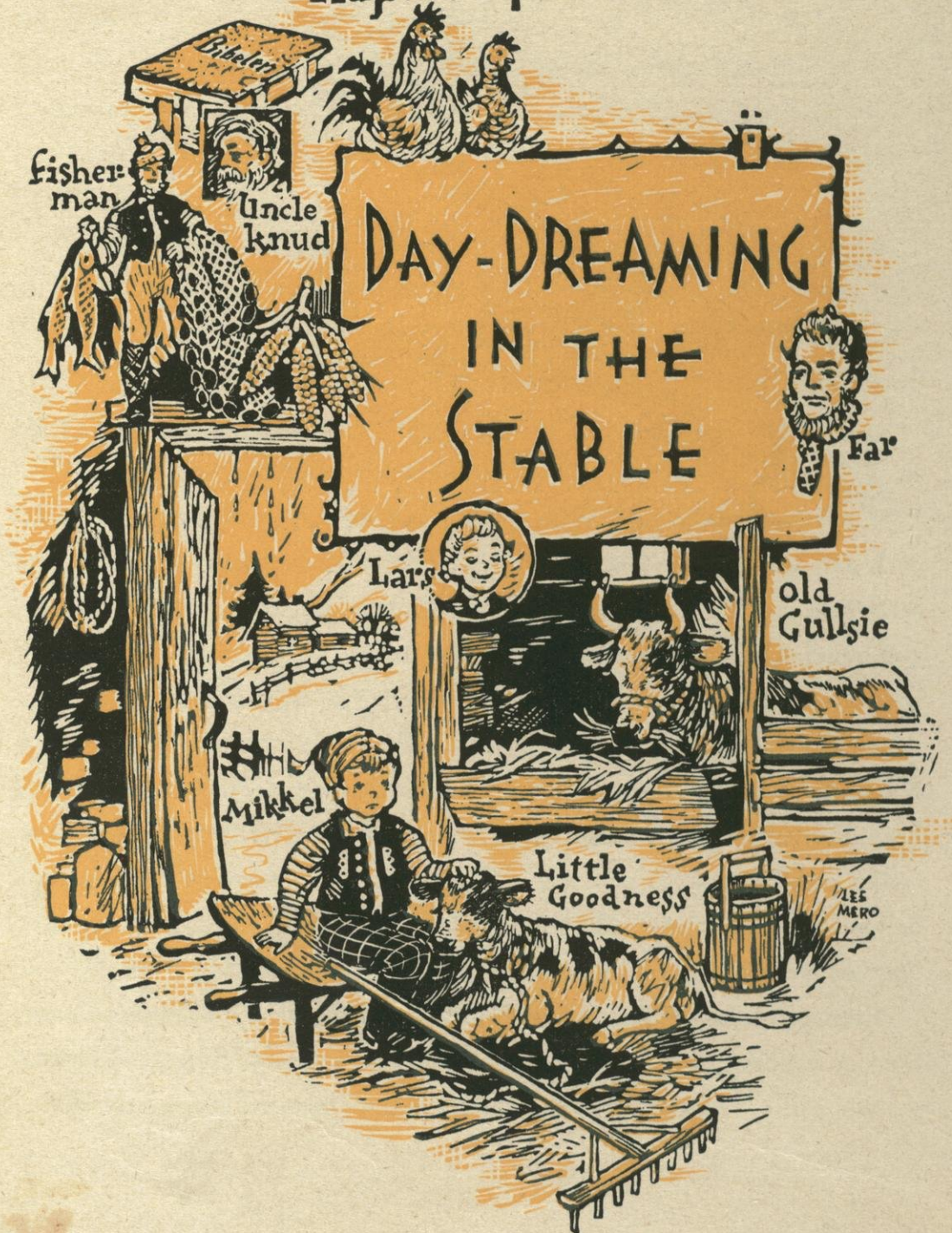


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Chapter I



Fisher-
man

Bible

Uncle
Knud

DAY-DREAMING
IN THE
STABLE

Far

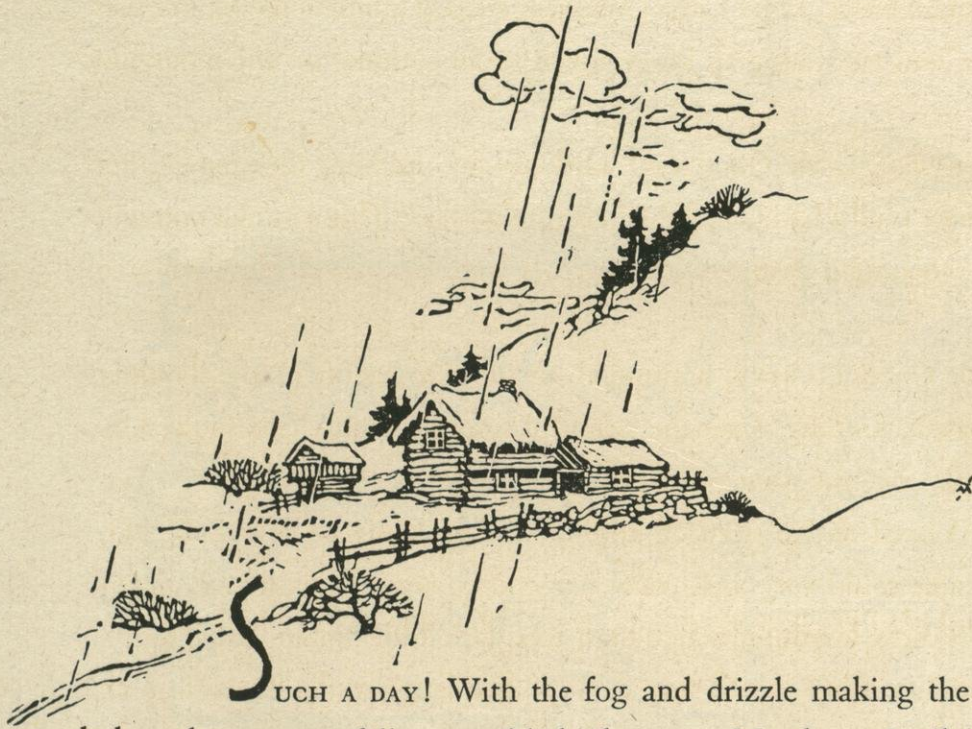
Lars

old
Gullsie

Mikkel

Little
Goodness

LEE
MERO



SUCH A DAY! With the fog and drizzle making the snow all dark and spongy, a fellow would think it was March or April instead of early February. It was the sort of day that made a person dream of spring and building dams in the mountain brook, only it was sour and unpleasant instead of spring-mellow. In short, it was a poor wretch of a day!

Besides, it was Sunday, and after church Far had gone to visit Uncle Knud. Bestemor sat wrapped in her shawl by the corner fireplace and read her Bible with the silver clasps. Mor was rocking Baby Kristi to sleep in her cradle, and Karen, silly girl, was mimicking Mor and pretending that her rag doll was a real, live baby. The only thing a red-cheeked, tow-headed eleven-year old boy could do on such a day was sit in the cowshed and mope.

Even gentle old Gullsi looked a little sour. She was probably sick and tired of standing in her dark, cramped stall and eating wild hay. No doubt she was wishing for the time when she could crop green grass beside the chat-

tering mountain brook. Only Little Goodness seemed contented, but she was just a heifer and too young to know much about summer on the mountain side.

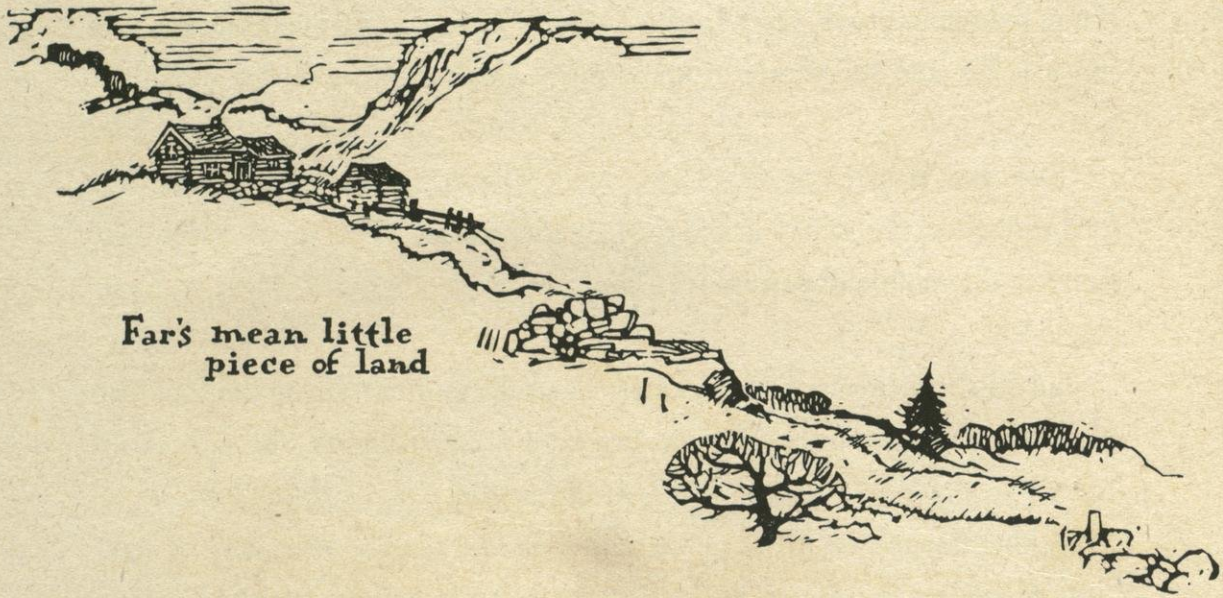
“Just you wait, Little Goodness,” said Mikkel, rubbing the spot on her forehead where Gullsi had licked the hair into waves. “This summer you will go up to the mountain pasture with the cows from the *gaard*. How will you like that?”

But Little Goodness knew nothing about the glorious life on the shoulder of the mountain, nothing about the beautiful summer nights. She showed no interest at all; she just went on chewing her cud.

Mikkel flopped on his stomach and chewed gloomily on a wisp of hay. Little Goodness could very well chew her cud contentedly and look sleepy—she didn’t know anything better than this dark little stable. Baby Kristi, not yet out of her cradle, could very well coo and laugh at the flames leaping up to the black throat of the chimney—she didn’t know anything better than the little one-room cottage with its sod roof, smoky beams, and white scoured floors.

But *he*—Mikkel—was eleven years old and he had been to the *gaard* in the valley! He had seen the big two-story house, with its tall chimneys, and all the barns and storehouses. That was the day Far had pointed out all the land that belonged to the *gaard*—everything from the river way up to the top of the mountain. How could anyone be satisfied after seeing that and coming back to Far’s place! Why, Far’s patch of land was hardly big enough for Gullsi and Little Goodness to turn around on! Then, too, Far didn’t even own it. He was just a houseman and had to work for the rich *gaardman* for the use of the land.

Far had to work for this mean little piece of land that hung onto the

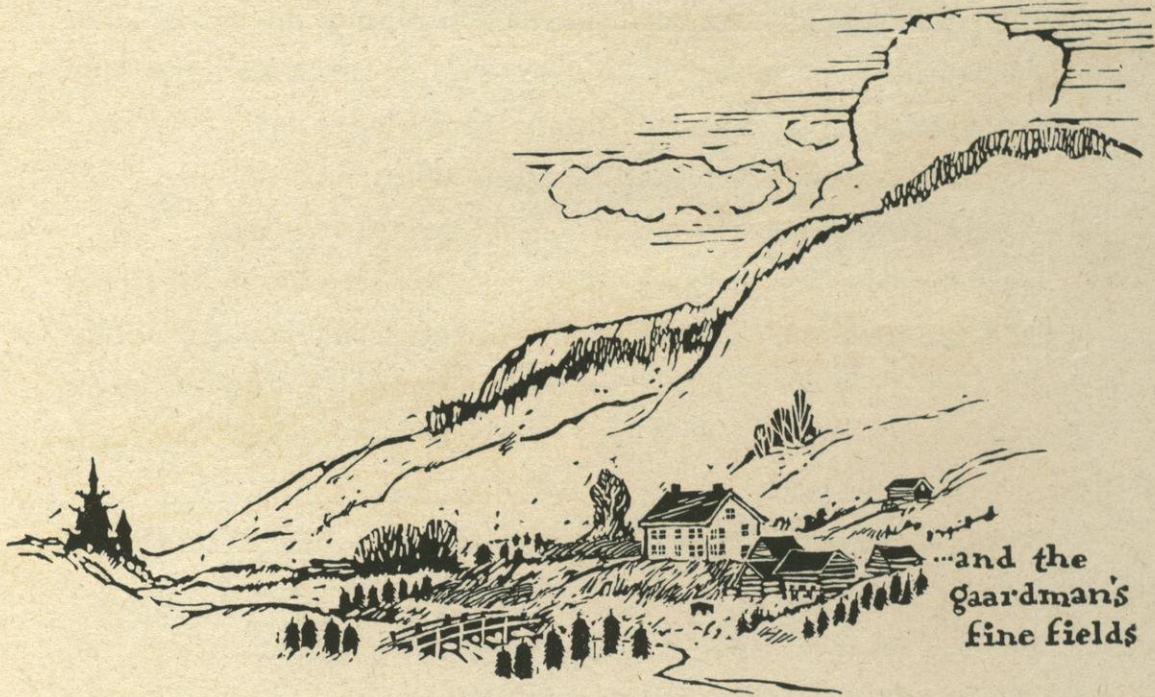


side of the mountain for dear life, and down below lived the rich gaardman with all his fine fields!

It wasn't fair!

And that wasn't all either! There was Lars, the gaardman's son. Mikkel could catch just as big fish as he down in the Drammen river in the valley below. In school he could say the Catechism ever so much better than Lars. But what of that? Lars would grow up and own the *gaard* some day, and Mikkel would be his houseman and have to take off his hat to him when he met him on the road. Like as not Lars would pretend he didn't even see him!

Mikkel jumped to his feet and clenched his fists. No, sir! Not on your life! He would run away and be a fisherman before he would be the house-



man of Lars! After he was confirmed he would sail around Norway, way up to the Lofoten islands, and fill his ship with fish and make so much money selling them in Christiania that he would be able to buy out Lars and move Far, Mor, Bestemor, Kristi, Karen, Gullsi, and Little Goodness—yes, and Uncle Knud and Aunt Martha, too—down to the big *gaard*. Then everybody would take his hat off to *him* just like this: Mikkel swept off his red pointed cap to Little Goodness and made a deep bow.

“Hallo! What is going on here?”

There was Far standing in the door with two wooden pails of water for the cows. Mikkel turned very red.

“Oh, is it you?” he cried. And then to make Far forget how silly he had been acting, he asked, “What did Uncle Knud have to say?”

“Oh, nothing much—just that he is going to America this spring.”

Far bent over and stroked Gullsi's ears while she drank her water. Mikkel could not see his face to tell whether he was fooling or not.

“What was that you said, Far?” he asked politely.

“Uncle Knud is going to America in the spring.”

Gullsi shook her head and sniffed the water out of her nose. Mikkel looked at Far with saucer eyes. To America! Way over there on the other side of the world? Over there where there were wild Indians who killed white people dead with bows and arrows? Why, it would be more sensible for Uncle Knud to go to the moon!

“What would you say if we were to go to America, too?” asked Far, still not looking at Mikkel.

Was Far out of his head? Would he really go far away to a strange land and never come back home again to the valley? But—but—hadn't he, Mikkel, been dreaming of running away just before Far came in? Wouldn't it be much better, after all, to go to America? What would Lars and the other fellows say to that!

“Far,” Mikkel asked suddenly, “is it true that people don't have to take off their hats to anybody in America? Is it true they smoke cigars and spit on the floor?”

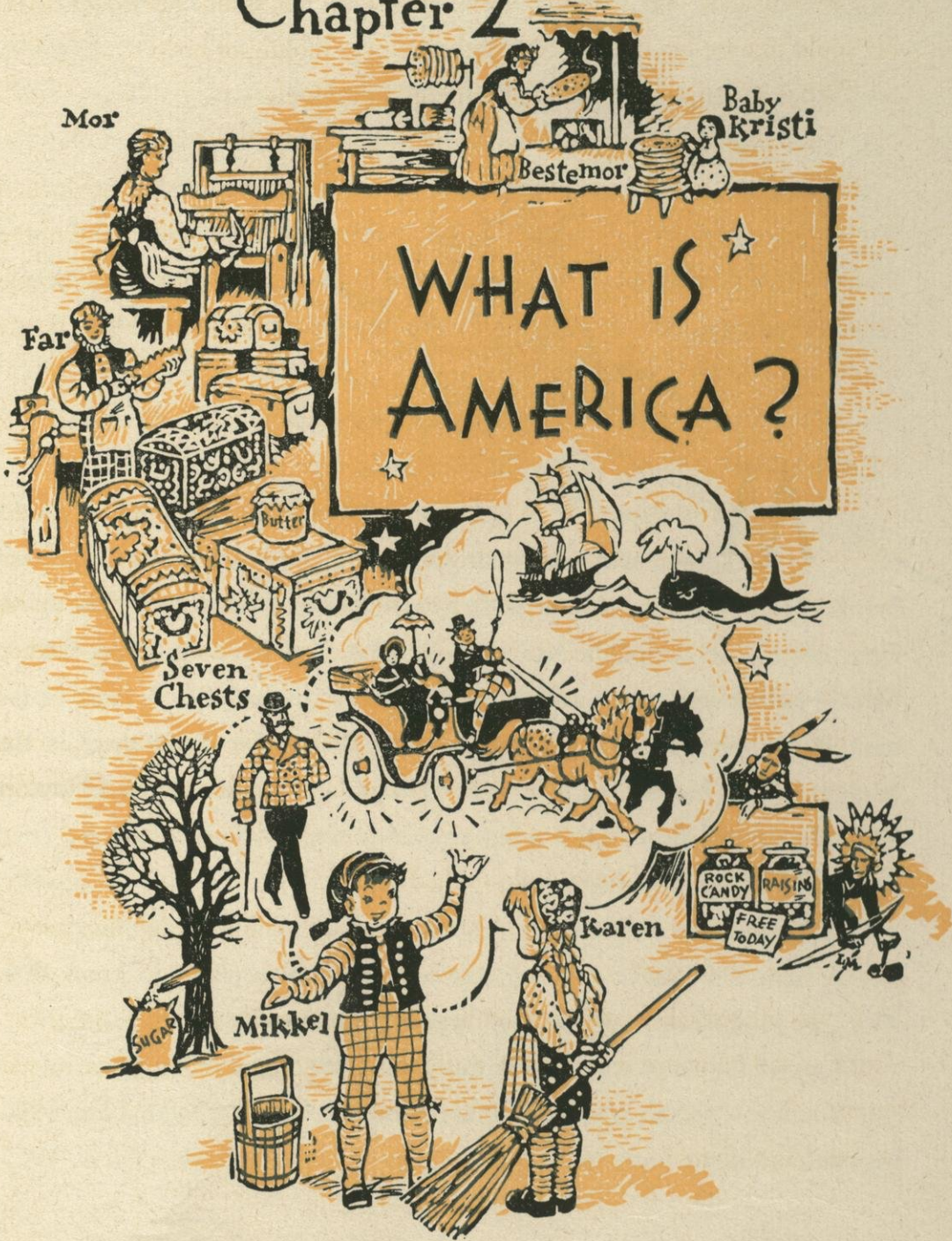
Far threw back his head and laughed.

“I don't know, son. Just as soon as the ice is out of the harbor this spring we'll go see, shall we?”

It was all settled then! No fooling! They were really going to America! And Far talked about it as calmly as if he were going to Drammen to sell butter.

That Far of his!

Chapter 2





MIKKEL WAS almost disgusted with the women folk. Instead of being *glad* when Far told them they were going to America, they *cried*. Bestemor looked out of the window and twisted a fold of her heavy skirt in her old bony hands. She couldn't see the church in the valley because of the mist, but it was very clear she was thinking of Bestefar down there in the graveyard. Mor hid her face against Baby Kristi and sobbed. Karen, of course, was only six and didn't know what everybody was upset about, but she cried because Mor and Bestemor cried.

Far looked very helpless.

"A man can't make a living here any more. You ought to know that, Mor," he said, almost as if he were begging Mor's pardon.

Mor and Bestemor went on crying.

"You know there's free land for everybody in America," added Far, looking more unhappy every minute.

Mor and Bestemor went on crying.

"I suppose you want to stay here and starve," Far said at last, getting a little huffy.

Mor raised her head. "Don't be angry, Far," she said gently. "I know we shall be better off in America. We have talked that over so many times. But just the same it is hard to leave this place and the people we have known all our lives and never—come back—home—again!"

Mor was off again, sobbing harder than ever. Even Baby Kristi started to wail. Bestemor stood by the window and repeated over and over again, "God help us! God help us!"

It was too much for Mikkel. His winter underwear all of a sudden seemed to be full of barley beards, and the one room cottage seemed unbearably hot and small. He tiptoed out quietly and went to the cowshed again. At least he could depend on Gullsi and Little Goodness to behave sensibly!

It wasn't three minutes before Karen came, too.

"Mikkel," she whispered, "what is America?"

Mikkel looked at her tear-smudged face. "Little goose," he said very huffily. "What are you crying for? America is the most wonderful place in the whole world."

"Is it?" asked Karen, looking very surprised. "Then why are Mor and Bestemor crying?"

"Because they're women and don't know any better!" snorted Mikkel.

"Is America as big as our valley?" asked Karen.

"Humph! It's bigger than Drammen and Sweden and Russia and all the kingdoms in the world put together!"

Karen had never heard of Russia, and she had seen only one Swede; so she still didn't have much of an idea about America.

"But what is it really like?" she insisted.

Mikkel shut his eyes and leaned back against the cowshed wall.

"You've never seen anything like it in all your life. Everybody is rich and rides in a carriage and wears velvet suits with silver buttons. They are so rich over there they give land away—ever so much more land than Lars's father has. You don't have to pay for anything, and you can eat raisins and rock candy all day long. How would you like that?"

"Will *we* ride in a carriage, too? Will I have a velvet dress with silver buttons?" cried Karen in great excitement.

"A carriage with golden wheels and four prancing white horses — and a red velvet dress with silver buttons as big as your porridge bowl—."

"Oh, Mikkel!" Karen shivered with delight. "It must be like heaven!"

* * *

After the first day of the big news Mor and Bestemor deserved credit for the way they acted about the whole matter. Mikkel soon lost his fears that the women folk were going to mope around and maybe make Far give up the notion, for the very next day Bestemor sat down at the spinning wheel and set it to whirring.

"One thing is certain, we'll have to have some clothes on our backs if we go over there," she said.

"Don't Americans have clothes, Bestemor?" asked Karen.

"There's no telling what those heathen wear," answered Bestemor. She looked so grim Karen didn't dare tell her about the velvet dress with silver buttons.

With Bestemor at the spinning wheel and Mor at the loom there soon was a roll of sturdy homespun ready to be sewed into dresses and suits and all that. Far, meanwhile, was busy sawing, planing, and hammering until there were

seven chests, beautifully decorated with red and blue designs, standing in a row.

"Why do we need so many?" asked Mikkel as Far hammered and filed a lock and key for the last chest. "Our clothes won't fill all those."

"We need food enough to last three months."

"Three months!"

"It takes that long to get to America and the ship captain isn't going to feed us."

It was Mor and Bestemor who saw to the food. For over a week they made flatbread on an iron plate in the fireplace. Mikkel had a hand in that, too, for it was he who turned the hand-mill and ground the potatoes boiled with their jackets on.

Every week they made butter and cheese and stored it away in special kegs for the journey. Far picked out the soundest potatoes from last year's crop and set them aside, and Mor filled a bag with dried peas.

Only once did Mikkel almost wish they were not going to America. That was the day Uncle Knud and Aunt Martha came over to help with butchering. Never once had Mikkel considered that Little Goodness was going to be sacrificed for America. Of course he knew they had to have plenty of salt meat for the journey, but who had the heart to eat such a friendly, gentle creature!

"Far," he begged, "does it have to be Little Goodness?"

"Gullsi has to give us milk to the last minute, and we have no pigs or sheep this winter. You know that, Mikkel."

Far was very kind but firm. Mikkel grabbed his cap and ran down the narrow road. It was a winter-crisp day, but he ran so fast he did not feel the cold biting his toes and bare fingers. Little Goodness's sad, gentle eyes haunted

him so he had no idea where he was going or how far. It wasn't until he met Lars and his friend Erik with their dogs and guns that he realized he was near the big *gaard* in the valley.

"Well, well, if it isn't the houseman's boy," said Lars. "What are you doing down here?"

Mikkel was too miserable to answer.

"Do you have the America-fever so bad up there that you can't talk any more?" asked Lars.

"So you're going to America to be an Indian," Erik chimed in.

By this time Mikkel was too angry to say anything at all.

"He'll probably never get to America," teased Lars. "The ship captain will sell him as a slave to the Turks or feed him to the whales."

"Or the animals in the sea will swallow the ship!" said Erik.

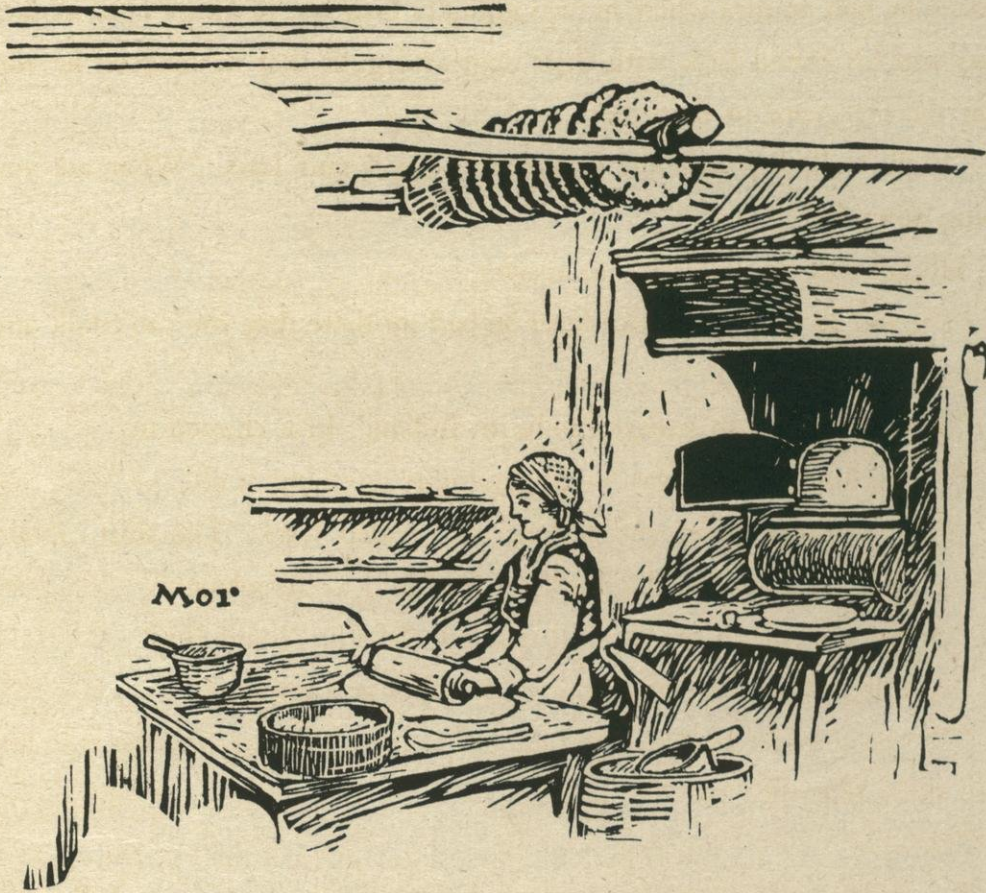
"And if he gets there at all the rattlesnakes will bite him."

"Or the summer heat will put an end to him. They say the sun is so hot over there that men die like flies."

"Or——"

But Mikkel would hear no more. He turned his back scornfully and started back up the mountain. If Lars and Erik would only talk sense, if they would talk like men instead of dunces and blockheads, he would stay and tell them what America was really like. Who ever heard of a Norwegian being a slave! And sea animals that swallowed ships! *Pytt!* Norwegians had been sailing the seas since the time of the Vikings, and everyone knew there were no sea animals *that* big. That is, everyone but simpletons like Lars and Erik!

Mikkel made sure the whole bloody business of butchering was over before he came home. When he finally went in the house he found every-



body sitting before the fire and talking about America. Nobody saw Mikkel come in.

“Even Heg, the innkeeper in Drammen, went to America two years ago this spring—in 1840—and they say that in his letters he writes nothing but good about America,” Uncle Knud was saying.

“It’s hard to believe there are great plains stretching for miles and miles, just waiting for someone to come and cultivate them,” Far mused. “And soil so rich they don’t have to fertilize it year after year the way they have to do here in the valley.”

“Ola-by-the-Spring was telling me that in America they get sugar out of trees. Can you believe that?” asked Aunt Martha.

“If our own countrymen who went over there say it is so, it must be true,” answered Uncle Knud. “They surely wouldn’t send back lies to us.”

“You believe everything these strangers say, but you won’t listen to what our own Bishop Neumann who was born right down there in Drammen says,” cried Bestemor in a fretful voice that didn’t sound like Bestemor’s voice at all. “He says we are not to think that bread falls in showers from heaven over there. Many a countryman of ours has found nothing but a grave in America.”

“Well, of course,” answered Far, “America isn’t a bed of roses.”

“And what about Sundays?” Bestemor went on, paying no attention to Far. “Bishop Neumann says there are no church bells to call us to worship, no churches, no minister to confirm Mikkel and Karen and Kristi, no one to give us the Lord’s Sacrament, no one to speak God’s Word at our graves. Why, we shall be worse than the heathen!”

Bestemor’s chin began to tremble, Mor and Aunt Martha looked troubled and ready to cry, and the men stared glumly into the fire. Only little Karen had anything to say.

“Don’t cry, Bestemor.” She patted the wrinkled old hands soothingly. “Don’t cry, ’cause in America we’re all going to ride in a carriage with golden wheels and we’re all going to have red velvet dresses with buttons as big as my porridge bowl. Mikkel says so.”

Good little Karen! She made even Bestemor smile.

But Mikkel began to wonder. What if Bestemor were right after all! What if there *were* no church bells or ministers! What if they *did* become like the heathen!

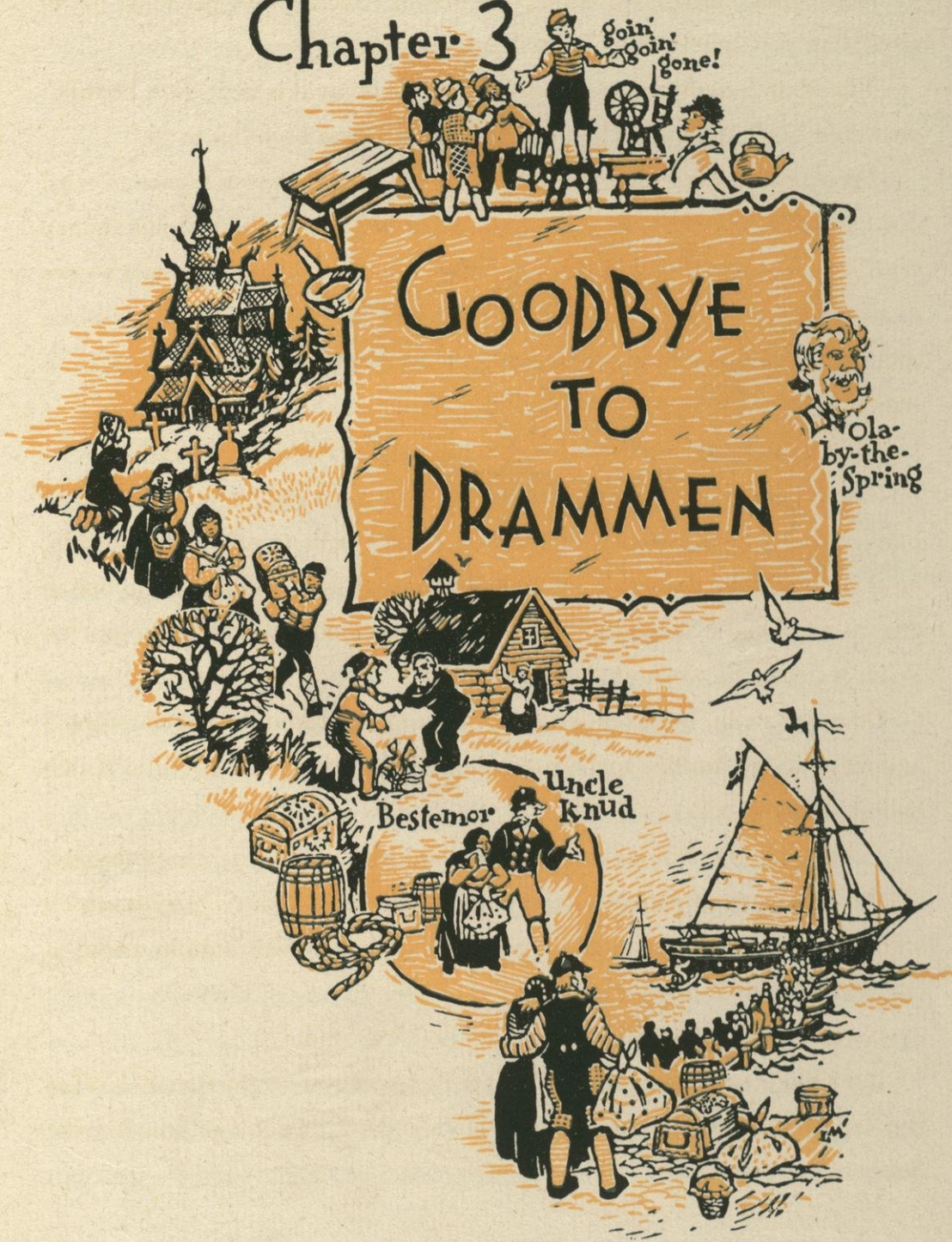
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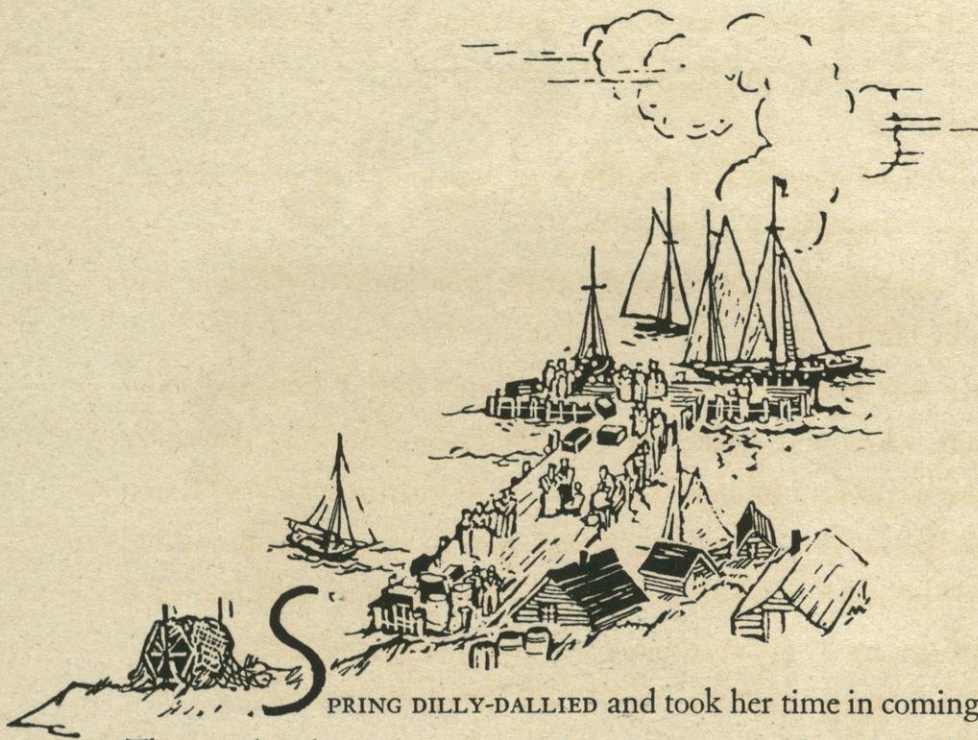
Goin' gone!
Goin' gone!

GOODBYE TO DRAMMEN

Ola-
by-the-
Spring

Bestemor
Uncle Knud





SPRING DILLY-DALLIED and took her time in coming to the valley.

The people who were going to America were ready to leave long before the sun had melted the ice in the harbor. Some who lived far back up the valley came too early and had to camp on the pier and wait until the ship could sail.

“Why don’t we camp on the pier, too?” asked Mikkel, who thought that would be more fun than waiting around on the mountain. “What if the ship goes without us?”

“Would to God it might!” muttered Bestemor.

“Kristian who works in the shipyards at Drammen will let us know when the boat is going to sail,” Far answered quietly, paying no attention to Bestemor.

Bestemor had been much worse since the auction. Before that she had been so busy with her spinning wheel that she had not said much about going to America. But now the spinning wheel was gone—sold for ten cents

to someone Mikkel had never seen before. Gone, too, were the loom and the copper kettle and the table and the griddle—everything that had been in the family for years.

As each piece had gone up to the auctioneer, Bestemor had plucked Far's sleeve and asked, "Can't we keep that?"

"We can't take the whole house to America—you know that!" Far had answered kindly but firmly.

If Bestemor only looked at things the way Karen did! Who cared about an old spinning wheel and a blackened griddle and a dented copper saucepan when there were beautiful new things to be had in America. Now Karen—little though she was—Karen *knew* it was silly to drag their funny old things to America. All Karen had in the world was her rag doll, but what did she do but trot up to the auctioneer and give it to him to sell.

"Do you really want to sell your doll?" the auctioneer had asked.

"Oh, yes," Karen had answered. "In America I shall have a fine porcelain doll with real hair."

Now if Bestemor would only be as sensible as Karen!

One day late in May Kristian came with news the boat would sail in forty-eight hours if the wind was right. Far went straight to Uncle Knud to tell him, and then to Ola-by-the-Spring, who was going to haul the chests down to the pier.

Early the next morning they started down the mountain.

Mikkel didn't know whether to be proud or ashamed when they went past the big *gaard* that belonged to Lars's father. He hoped Lars was looking and saw him starting off to America; he hoped Lars felt a little jealous. But maybe he was laughing at the funny sight—a whole troop of people, little and big, marching down the road and carrying all sorts of packs and knap-

sacks. Lars was very likely laughing because they had to walk to Drammen and couldn't ride in a fine carriage. He perhaps thought it was very funny that Bestemor was riding on top of a chest on Ola-by-the-Spring's wagon.

"Just you wait, Lars," Mikkell muttered, though Lars was nowhere to be seen. "When I come back again I shall have just as fine a carriage as the king. Just you wait!"

When they came to the churchyard they stopped to rest and pay a last visit to Bestefar's grave. The women folk cried and Far and Uncle Knud stood with their hats off. Bestemor stayed so long Far had to take her arm and lead her back to the road. For a long time after they started she hid her face in her black woolen shawl.

Never had it taken so long to go to Drammen. People came out of house after house to bid them good-bye, to send greetings to friends who were already in America, to scold them for going to a heathen land, to give them a little tidbit to eat on the way.

When at last they came to Drammen and Karen saw all the people and fine carriages and shop windows, she became so excited she hardly knew whether she was standing on her head or on her feet.

"Mikkell! Mikkell!" she cried, jumping up and down. "Is this America?"

Mikkell took a tight hold of Karen's hand. Red-faced, he looked about to see if anyone else had heard.

"Of course not, little goose!" he said very loudly, just in case someone *had* heard. "This is only Drammen. America is ten times—a hundred times—a *million times* bigger than this!"

As they went on shop clerks came out and shouted, "So you are going to America?"

Far just nodded his head and trudged on. He did not have time to stop

and answer all the curious questions and listen to all the advice people had to give.

When they came to the pier where a white-sailed ship lay at anchor on the quiet fjord, it was Mikkell's turn to be excited.

"Karen!" he shouted, "Look! Look! There's the ship that's going to take us to America!"

But Karen was too interested in the crowd on the wharf—sailors bustling about, women in bright kerchiefs trying to keep their children together, children playing hide-and-seek behind the barrels and trunks and coils of rope.

"Mikkell," Karen asked timidly, "who are they?"

"Who?" asked Mikkell, seeing nothing but the beautiful white sails and the sea gulls.

"All those people."

"Oh!" Mikkell gave a great start when he saw the crowd. Were *all* these people going to America too? It wasn't only Far and Mor and Uncle Knud and Aunt Martha and Bestemor who were going, then? Why, there was a boy about his own age, too, wearing a red cap!

Mikkell wanted to go over and talk to the boy with the red cap, but he was supposed to take care of Karen, and she would have to tag along. What would the new boy think of that?

"Mikkell! Mikkell!"

Far was pushing his way through the crowd.

"Why didn't you follow us?" Far asked in his huffiest voice, which wasn't so very huffy after all. "We are all ready to get on the boat and here you and Karen stand as if you were nailed to the spot. Don't you want to go to America?"

"Is America far?" asked Karen, whose feet were tired from the long walk.

"You won't have to walk another step," said Far, picking her up in his strong arms.

Many small boats had been anchored side by side to make a bridge to the ship. Karen squealed when they bobbed up and down, and Mor looked as if she were walking on thin ice. Mikkel, however, marched along as boldly as if the whole mountain were under his feet. He even turned around halfway across to watch Uncle Knud help Bestemor.

It was funny, but Bestemor looked exactly like Gullsi when the man who had bought her at the auction took her away. Bestemor had the same look in her eyes, and she shuffled along just as slowly as Gullsi had when the man led her down the road. But of course Bestemor didn't have a rope around her neck.

Mikkel had never been on a big sailboat in all his life. Now that he was on one for the first time, there was so much bustle and hustle he saw nothing but nimble-footed sailors loading cargo and people walking back and forth. All of them were not going to America, Mikkel decided. Some probably were friends and relatives come to say good-bye, although he couldn't tell who were going and who were staying. They *all* looked sad—that is, all the grown-ups did.

A sailor led them down some clumsy stairs into the low, dark space below the deck. Three lamps tried hard to light the big room. The first thing Mikkel saw when his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness was a row of bunks along both sides of the boat. The bunks were double-deckers, one built above the other, and were wide enough for four people. Each one was filled with fresh straw.

"There are seven of you and the baby," said the sailor. "You can have these two bunks here toward the stern. You must use your own bedclothes, you

know. Find the chests with the things you will need on the journey and tie them to the foot of your beds. Get settled as soon as possible. We are going to sail early tomorrow morning."



"Far," whispered Mikkel, "may I sleep on top?"

"You and Karen, Uncle and I will take the top bunk. You and Karen can get up there right now while I go find the chest with the bedclothes," answered Far.

"*Now?*" cried Mikkel. "Go to bed *now?* But, Far, may we not stay up and see everything?"

Karen, however, had seen enough for one day. "I want to go home," she whimpered. "I want to go home."

"God help us! God help us!" muttered Bestemor.

"We are all tired," said Far, "and it is later than you think. Remember,

the sun stays up long past your bedtime in May. Besides, you and Karen will get in everybody's way, and we have too much to do to watch you. It's best for you to be in bed. Then we know you are safe. Mor, give them some flatbread and cheese, and I'll find the bedclothes."

Long after Karen had closed her tired eyes in sleep, Mikkel lay and pouted and listened to the feet tramping on the deck right over his head. Imagine! Having to go to bed the minute one got on a ship for America!

"I suppose the boy with the red cap is seeing everything. I suppose he is running all over the ship. It isn't fair!" thought Mikkel.

Although Mikkel was determined to stay awake and learn all he could from noises and voices he heard, it was not long before his long eyelashes drooped down and lay against his rosy cheeks.

Mikkel woke with a start. A saucy sea-gull had just landed on his shoulder, but it turned out to be Far bending over him and shaking him.

"What is it, Far? Is it time to get Little Goodness and Gullsi for milking?"

"Have you forgotten we are on our way to America?" laughed Far.

"Has the boat started? Are we going?" cried Mikkel, sitting up so quickly he bumped his head against a beam.

"Not yet," answered Far, "but the minister is up on deck and is about to preach a farewell sermon to us. It may be a long time before you see a minister or hear a sermon again."

Mikkel was too sleepy to hear much of the sermon, but the minister said one thing over and over which he could not forget. It was, "Do not forget your fathers' God! Do not forget your fathers' God!"

When Mikkel was asleep in the upper bunk again, he dreamed of a church bell which boomed and thundered:

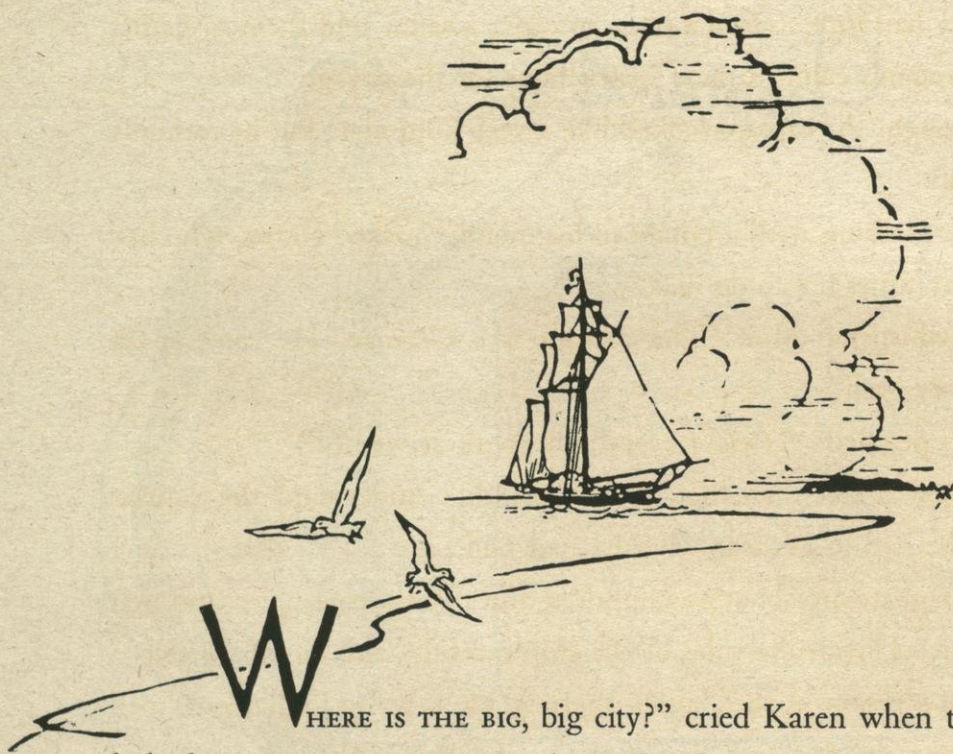
"Do not forget your fathers' God! Do not forget your fathers' God!"

Chapter 4



TWO MONTHS ON A SAIL BOAT





“HERE IS THE BIG, big city?” cried Karen when they came on deck the next morning. “Have the trolls taken it away?”

“Silly goose!” answered Mikkel. “Can’t you see we are sailing? We are on our way to America and have left Drammen behind.”

“But it isn’t very far behind yet,” Far told them. “We set sail at four this morning, but there is very little wind and we aren’t going any faster than a walking horse.”

“You see, even the winds are unwilling that we leave our good Norway,” Bestemor sighed.

“Come, come now! This is no time for regrets. We are on our way now, and that is that. Right now I’m wondering where we are going to cook our breakfast.”

Mor was very brisk and cheerful this morning. From the way she talked it seemed that she looked forward to the journey to America.

Before they had time to find a place to cook, a sailor told them to gather around the captain's cabin to hear instructions for the voyage.

Mikkel thought the captain looked like a very kind man, but he certainly talked queerly.

"Is the man talking with a potato in his mouth?" asked Karen, who had been told many times not to do that.

"Hush!" whispered Mor. "The captain is a German. He can't speak Norwegian very well."

Karen was puzzled. "Doesn't everybody speak as we do?"

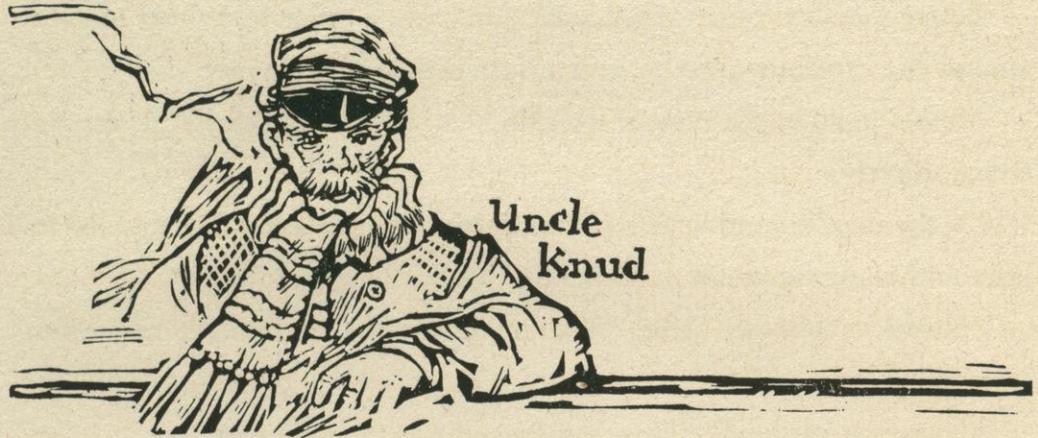
Mikkel knew better than that, but he couldn't understand the captain either. Later he had to ask Far what he had said.

"He told us there are about one hundred and twenty passengers and that we will have to obey all the rules of the ship carefully and do all we can to help make life pleasant in such small quarters. He is going to divide us men into seven gangs, one for each day of the week. We will have to scrub and sweep and clean up the deck and our quarters below. Each person is to get three quarts of water a day for cooking and drinking—"

"But Far!" Mikkel almost had to laugh. "Only three quarts! How silly! There's water all around us!"

"Are you such a landlubber, Mikkel, you don't know people can't drink ocean water?" laughed Uncle Knud. "Thousands of men surrounded by ocean water have died of thirst."

The captain had also told them that those who were not paying for board on ship were to prepare their food in the cooking shanty on deck. Since there were eighty-four who would have to get their meals in this way, they would have to take turns. The captain hoped there would be no rudeness, no pushing or shoving or cheating.



But they *did* push and shove! It was almost noon before meek little Mor could get into the smoky, grimy cooking shanty, and even then she was pushed out long before the porridge was done. A big mountain of a woman who had already had breakfast took Mor's kettle off the fire and put her own coffee pot on to boil for lunch! As for lunch, all Mor's family had was rye rusks and dried beef. Mor simply couldn't get near the cooking shanty to make any hot soup.

It wasn't until late afternoon that Far decided Mikkell was big enough to take care of himself on the ship. It wasn't until then Mikkell had a chance to talk to the boy with the red cap who looked to be his own age. He found him on deck watching the sailors cast out the anchor.

"Good-day," Mikkell said politely.

"Good-day."

"It looks as if we have stopped sailing," said Mikkell.

"No wind," said the boy.

"Maybe we won't ever get to America," said Mikkell after a long silence.

"*Pytt*," said the boy. "I'll swim."

"Oho! You can't do that! Nobody can swim to America!"

"I can," said the boy.

"You can't either!"

"I can, too!"

And that is the way Mikkel and Per came to be friends.

Of course the wind began to blow again, and the boat's sails swelled until they looked like great white bags. The ship sailed out of the narrow finger of water that pointed straight to Drammen and came into the great Christianiafjord. On the fourth day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, all the people on the boat said good-bye to Norway, for the sailors told them they were passing Lindesnes, the last point of land they would be able to see.

When they could see Norway no more, Bestemor pulled her black shawl closer, hobbled down the stairs, crept into the bunk and stayed there for the rest of the voyage. Mikkel tried to get her to come up on deck a week later when they came within sight of the high pillars of Yarmouth, England, but she turned her head away and would not come—not even when he told her the high pillars were part of Admiral Nelson's monument.

On Pentecost day Mor, Karen, and Mikkel, Uncle Knud and Aunt Martha sat on deck in the beautiful sunshine and listened to Far read a sermon. Mikkel listened very hard, but he could not help noticing a tall, fine-looking man and a sweet, pretty lady standing a few feet away watching them and listening to Far. When Far had finished, the stranger smiled at them and said, "Good-day! Thank you for God's Word."

Far and Mor both scrambled to their feet. Far bowed and Mor curtsied.

"Good-day, Herr and Fru Clausen," stammered Far, and then the cat got his tongue.

"I am glad to see that such God-fearing folk as you are going to America," the stranger said pleasantly.

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"Who was that?" chimed Mikkel and Karen together when the couple had walked away.

"That is Herr Clausen and his wife. He is a schoolmaster from Denmark."

"Are they high class people?" asked Mikkel.

"Can't you hear that from the way he talks, Mikkel?" asked Uncle Knud. "I tell you, that man speaks the finest book language I have ever heard!"

"If Herr and Fru Clausen are fine folk, they must live in one of the cabins on first deck, up there where the lumberman's son, Søren Bache, and the rich cabinetmaker from Drammen and his wife are."

"Of course," answered Mor, as if there were no question about that.

For dinner that Pentecost day they had cream porridge made from some precious evaporated cream which Mor had saved for this great Lord's day. Mor brought out some *lefse*, too—neatly folded like a handkerchief. What a feast it was after the sour milk and flatbread and potatoes they had been eating for over a week!

The real fun came when they neared the Straits of Dover. The wind whooped through the narrow channel and tried desperately to drive them back to Norway. Mikkel and Per leaned over the railing and watched the boat's nose plough through the waves. They laughed when the deck reared up like a balky horse and sent them tumbling. They *wanted* to laugh when they saw people carrying dirty water to throw overboard spill it all over someone carrying a kettle of newly-made soup—but they didn't!

It wasn't so funny, though, when the sailors ordered everybody below and fastened the hatches so the waves wouldn't wash in and drown them. It was terribly dark and hot and stuffy down below, and almost all the old



folks lay sick in their bunks. Mixed in with their moans and cries was the clatter and racket of buckets and crocks and kettles rolling and banging around on the floor. Of course there was no cooking done, as nobody could go on deck—so there was nothing to drink but cold water that really wasn't cold and already was beginning to taste "ishy" and stale.

You can imagine that on the first quiet day everybody who was able came out on deck. The old men sat staring at the sea and smoking their pipes. The old women knitted and talked, and to Mikkel's astonishment some who came from far back in the mountains smoked, too! The young people danced country dances and sang. Here is one of the songs they sang and danced to:

"Aa kjøre vatten og kjøre ved,
Og kjøre tømmer over heia,
Aa kjøre va dom kjøre vi',
Je kjøre gjenta mi eia.
Di raue roser og di auer blaa,
Di vakre gjenter holder je utaa,
Helst naar je faar den je vil ha,
Daa er det morosamt aa leva."

Mikkel and Per sometimes stopped their wrestling and climbing to watch the dances. Once, just in fun, Per began to hop and skip along with the young men and girls. A pretty girl with long braids and a bright blouse

grabbed his hands and whirled him around so fast his pointed red cap flew over the railing into the ocean.

“Per! Per!” screamed Mikkel. “Look! A fish is going after your cap!”

Sure enough, a great fish shot straight for Per’s red cap, but when it saw it wasn’t meat scraps from the cook’s kitchen, it turned up its nose and swam lazily away.

* * *

June went, and July came—and still Bestemor would not get up.

“Do come on deck today,” Far said time and time again. “The sea is like glass, and you need fresh air. Come for an hour, at least, and get away from the smell of rotting cheese down here.”

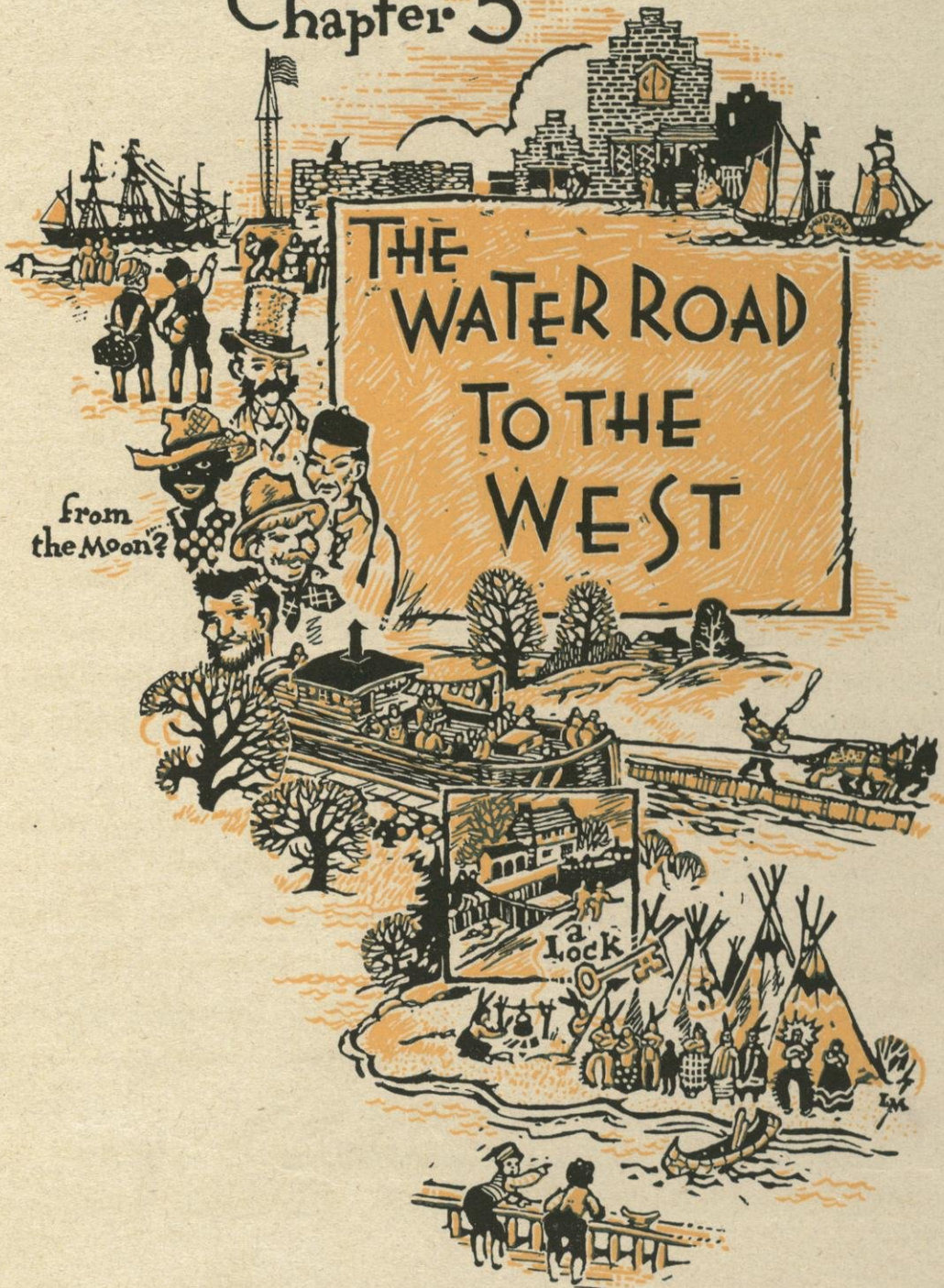
But Bestemor would not come. Even when Mikkel rushed down to tell her they were in sight of Newfoundland she would not come. It wasn’t until the day before they landed, exactly two months after they set sail from Drammen, that Mikkel heard something which he thought would really make Bestemor happy. He heard two men talking about it on deck, and it was such good news he was sure Bestemor would get right up and come see this beautiful America.

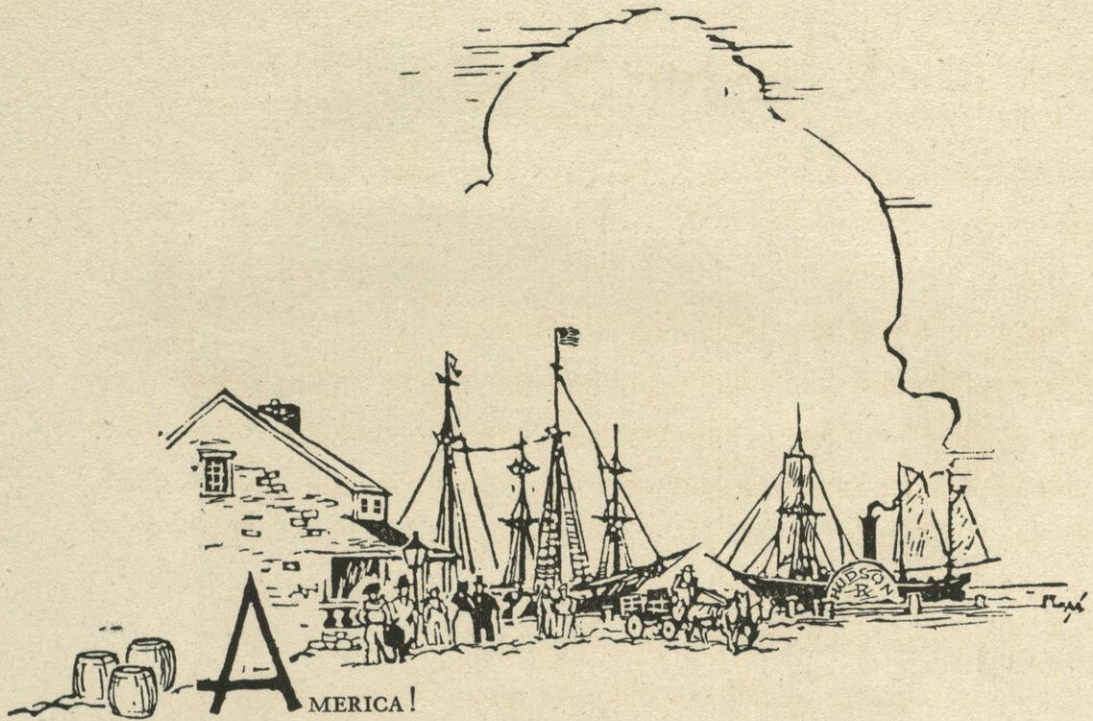
“Bestemor! Bestemor!” he cried, crawling into the bunk and shaking her thin shoulder. “Bestemor, we won’t be heathen after all! Herr Clausen, the schoolmaster from Denmark, maybe will come along and teach the Norwegian boys and girls in America the catechism. Did you hear, Bestemor? Aren’t you glad, Bestemor? Won’t you get up now?”

Bestemor reached out a weak, trembling hand and stroked Mikkel’s rosy cheek.

“Mikkel! Mikkel!” she whispered, “you are a good boy. I know there are many who will forget God in America, but not you, Mikkel. Not you!”

Chapter 5





Mikkel, Per, and Karen stood on deck and gaped at all the ships packed into the New York harbor. Sailboats! Why, a person couldn't count them! There were scores of steamboats, too—those marvelous new ships that almost flew across the water without using sails.

By looking at the flags Mikkel and Per tried to guess from what country each ship had come.

"There's the British Union Jack on that great steamboat," said Per, "and the sailboat beside it has a Swedish flag."

"There's a strange flag," cried Mikkel. "It's all speckled with stars in one corner, and it has—let's see—one, two, three, four, five,—six white stripes and seven red ones. I wonder what country has that flag?"

"Don't you really know?" a voice behind them asked.

"Oh, Herr Clausen," stammered Mikkel, snatching off his cap.

"That is to be your flag from now on, boys," said the tall schoolmaster.
"It is the flag of the United States of America."

"Oh!" exclaimed the two boys together.

"Each star stands for a state. There are twenty-six states and twenty-six stars."

"Oh!"

Per and Mikkel lost their voices in wonder!

Karen was more interested in the people swarming on the dock than she was in the flag. Such funny, funny people! Some of them looked like Far and Uncle Knud, but some were brown, some were yellow, and others, again, were black.

"Maybe they come from the moon," Karen murmured to herself.

"What is that?" laughed the schoolmaster.

"Do those strange people out there come from the moon?"

"Oh, Karen, hush!" sputtered Mikkel, vexed that the fine gentleman should have to listen to such foolishness.

Karen *always* asked such foolish questions. When the American doctor came on board and started talking to the captain, Karen rushed to Far and grabbed his hand tightly.

"Will he hurt us, Far? Will the man hurt us?"

"Why should he hurt us, little squirrel?"

"He sounds so angry. He sounds *terribly* angry."

"He's only talking English, my pet."

"Just you wait, Karen. You'll be talking English, too, in a year or so," said Uncle Knud.

Fortunately the doctor found everybody to be well, and after the customs officers had quickly looked at their few belongings, they were free to leave

the boat. But Far seemed in no hurry. He did not even leave the boat to buy fresh fish as some of the men did.

“Why don’t we go, Far?” blurted Mikkel impatiently.

“We have to wait for Søren Bache to arrange for a boat to take us inland. He has been in America before and will know what is best. There are plenty of men who want to cheat us out of every penny we have.”

“What do you mean, Far? Isn’t this America? Do we have to go farther yet?” Mikkel asked in surprise.

“Oho, my lad! So you thought we were all through traveling!” laughed Uncle Knud. “We Drammen folk are going to the middle of America. There are over a thousand miles and a month of traveling ahead of us yet.”

Mikkel frowned thoughtfully. Think of it! This wonderful country was so huge it took a month to get to the middle of it!

“Well,” he said finally, “can’t we get some fresh fish? I’m tired of porridge, porridge all the time.”

Far’s face became very sober. “We have no money for that, son.”

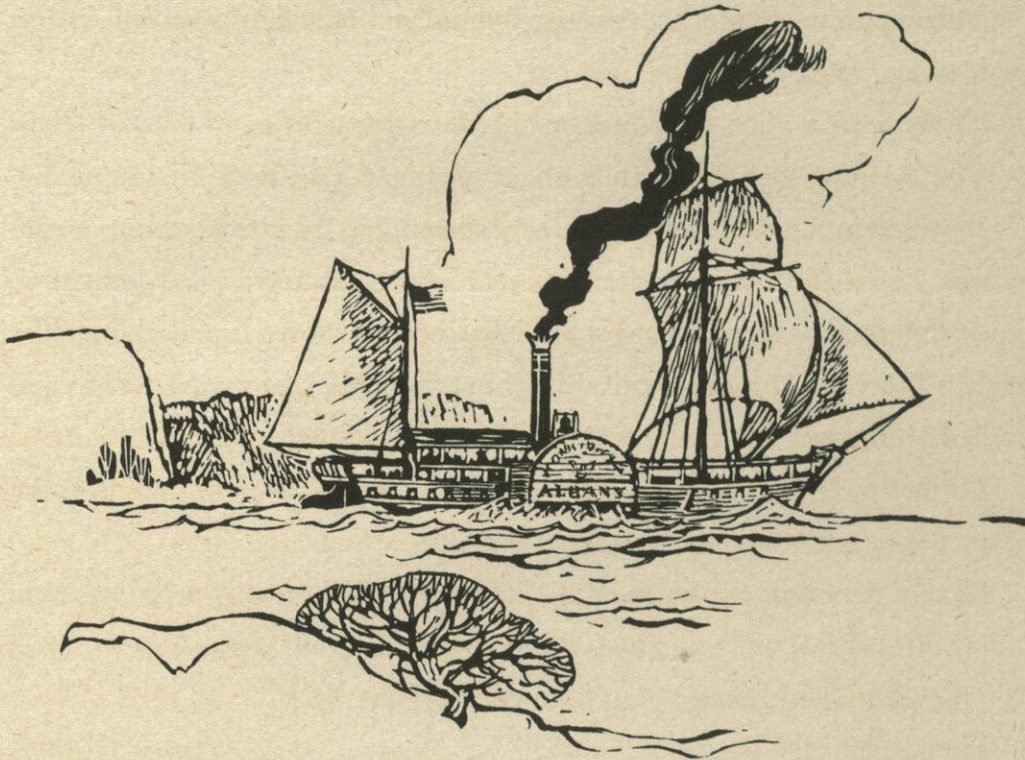
“But, Far!” chuckled Karen, “we don’t need money in America. We don’t have to pay for anything here. Mikkel said they are going to give us a carriage with golden wheels and four prancing horses, and all the rock candy and raisins we can eat, and I’m going to have a lovely red—”

“Nonsense!” Far’s voice was almost stern. “It’s time you and Mikkel got these fairy tales out of your heads. It’s not going to be easy to live in America at first. At least,” Far chuckled, “at least there won’t be rock candy and raisins for a while.”

“And no red velvet dress?” Karen asked, almost in tears.

“No red velvet dress.”

When they left the ship to board the boat that was to take them up the



Hudson River, Mikkel thought Far certainly must be mistaken about America. How could it be hard to live in a country where elegant marble palaces with seven and eight rows of shining windows turned out to be ordinary stores—just imagine, *stores!* How could anyone be poor in a country where nights were made splendid and fairylike by hundreds and thousands of gas lamps! It was impossible!

When they sailed up the beautiful Hudson River to Albany, Mikkel was more sure than ever that Far was wrong. They passed orchards of fruit trees, towering bluffs, pleasant valleys, bright little farms, and great castles.

“I’ll bet a prince or a count lives there,” said Per, pointing to a great house of stone haughtily perched high above the Hudson.

"There are no princes in America," answered Mikkel. "Everyone is just as good as anybody else."

"You mean a plain man lives in that?" exclaimed Per.

Yes, Far was surely all wrong about having a hard time in America!

It wasn't until they got on the canal boat at Albany that things began to look bad. Mikkel had never before been pushed and pulled around so much. Big, burly men carrying chests onto the boat shoved him back roughly, while a bossy-looking man with a high hat shouted and waved his arms and pushed him forward.

Mikkel hung on to Karen for dear life and at last found himself on the boat. A very angry Per was there to meet him.

"These Americans!" he snorted. "They drive us around as if we were cattle! And if you ask me, this is a cattle boat we're on. Come down and see for yourself! They haven't even cleaned up below deck."

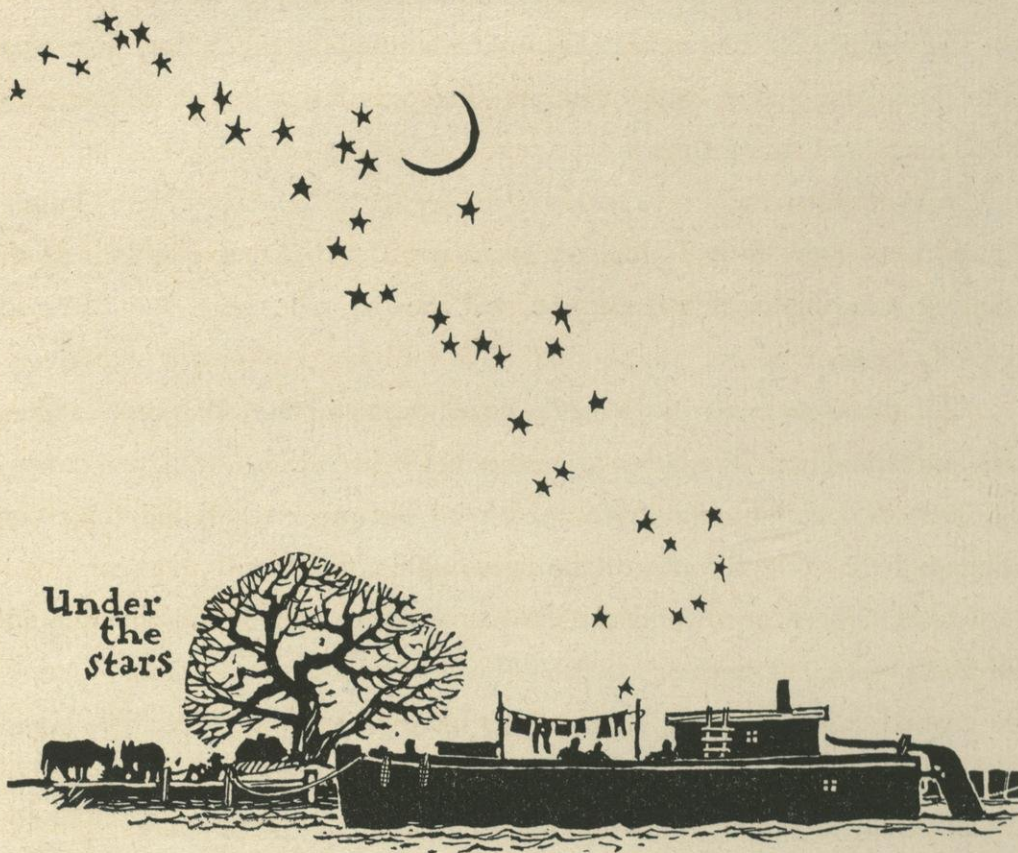
But Mikkel did not budge until he saw Far and Uncle Knud bring Mor, Bestemor, Aunt Martha, and Baby Kristi safely on deck. It wasn't a minute too soon, either, for all of a sudden there was more hollering and shouting and whooping than before.

"Giddap! Giddap! Get on there, you ornery critters! Giddap!"

There was a sudden jolt, and the boat started to move. Mikkel and Per crowded to the railing to see what was going on. Of all things! Horses pulling a boat! *Horses!* Mikkel and Per laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. These crazy Americans. They thought of everything.

It turned out to be true that the boat *had* carried cattle during its trip east on the Erie Canal and that it hadn't been scrubbed any too clean before the Drammen folk were, shall we say, herded in. And on top of that there were no chairs, tables, or beds. Far pushed some chests together, covered them

with bedclothes, and made beds for the women, Karen, and Baby Kristi. He and Uncle Knud and Mikkel stayed on deck all night and slept under the stars. Mikkel thought that far better than sleeping below, for it was fearfully hot down there—and smelly.



For the older people, twelve days and three hundred and sixty miles may have crept along as slowly as the horses, but not for Per and Mikkel. After they discovered they were allowed to go on shore when the team was changed, that they might run along the bank ahead of the horses and jump into the boat when they came to a bridge—well, after *that* the time did not drag at all.

Then, too, there were the locks—eighty-three of them—to go through. Sometimes there was a race with another boat to get to the locks first—a mad race full of cracking whips, straining, sweating horses, and shouting, cursing men.

Riot and rumpus. Mikkel and Per loved it.

The journey on the Great Lakes was not nearly so much fun. The boat just sailed—and sailed—and sailed, and there wasn't much to see except trees, trees, trees—and more trees.

“Why didn't we take a steamboat the way Søren Bache and Herr Clausen did and get there faster?” Mikkel asked one day when it just seemed he couldn't stand his prickly underwear and the dry old cheese and flatbread one day more.

“For the same reason we took the canal boat and not the train, as they did,” answered Far. “We haven't the money. On the sailboat it costs us grown-ups only two dollars each from Buffalo to Milwaukee, and they take our baggage free. We can't afford steamboats and trains.”

Mikkel sighed and wondered. Maybe America wasn't so rich after all. He hadn't seen any marble palaces and bright gas lamps for days now. America seemed to have become a great huge forest of scrubby pines. What kind of country were they going to, anyway?

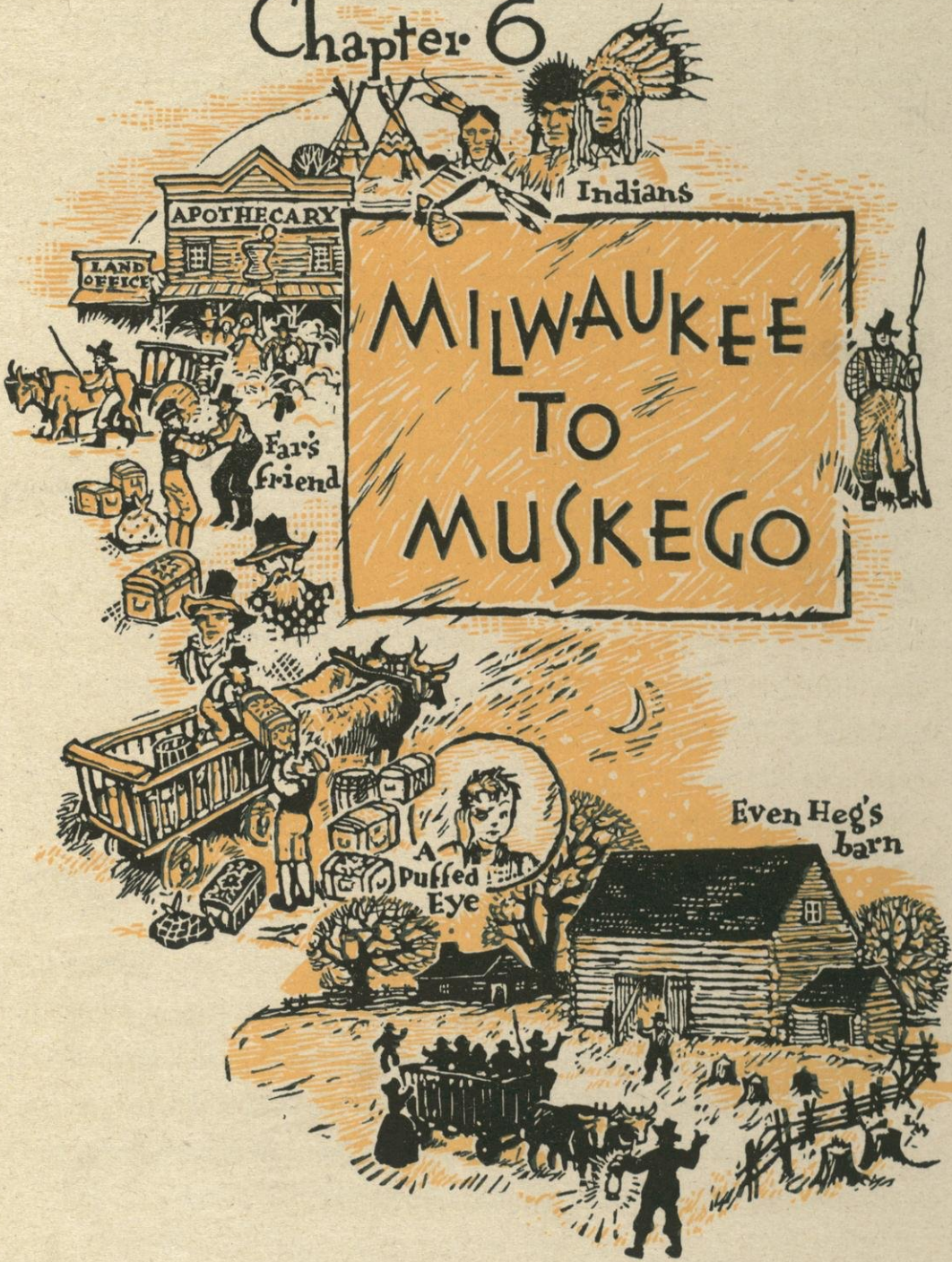
A scream from Per broke into Mikkel's gloom.

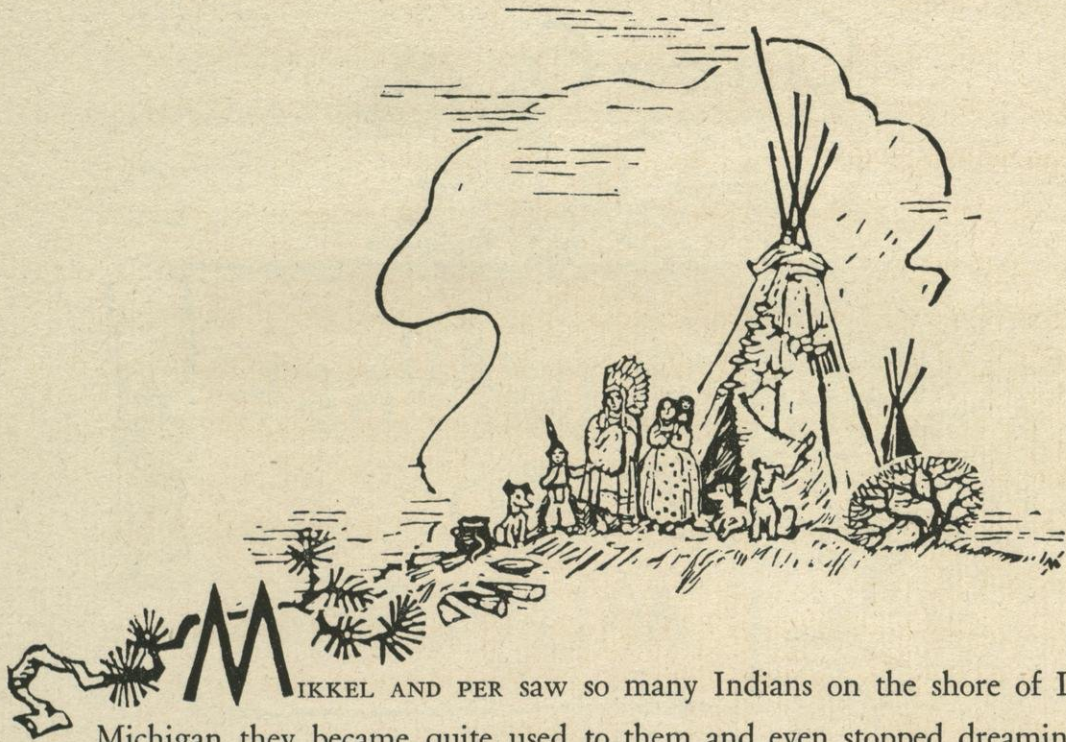
“Mikkel! Mikkel! Come here quick! Hurry!”

Mikkel rushed to the railing and followed Per's pointed finger with his eyes. The boat was passing through a narrow strait and close to a village of tents. Standing on the shore silently watching the boat pass by were—Indians! Real Indians—buckskin, blankets, moccasins, and all!

What kind of country were they coming to, anyway?

Chapter 6





MIKKEL AND PER saw so many Indians on the shore of Lake Michigan they became quite used to them and even stopped dreaming at night of gory tomahawks and bloody scalps. When the sailboat finally poked into the Milwaukee harbor and they met their first Indian face to face, they weren't one bit scared.

"Pytt!" boasted Per. "They don't look very dangerous!"

"Maybe not here in town," said Mikkel, honestly, "but I don't know about meeting one in a deep forest *alone!*"

Others in the curious crowd that met their boat were some Norwegians who had left Drammen the year before. They pounced on the newcomers and asked them a million questions about things "back home." Mikkel and Per became a little bored with all the talk of the old folks and asked permission to walk around the town. After all, wasn't it three months since they had stood on solid ground for any considerable time?

"I don't know," Far hesitated. "You may get lost—."

"Ho! Ho!" laughed one of the men who had met them at the boat. "Not much of a chance to do that here in Milwaukee. You can see Lake Michigan from anywhere in the town. You just run along, boys."

"How flat it is!" said Bestemor. "Is it all like this? Is there no place to hide or find shelter?"

"Now you aren't wanting to hide, are you?" chuckled Far's old friend. "Just you wait until you see Muskego, where you folks are going. It's flatter than the pancakes these Americans make. You'll have to forget about the mountains, Bestemor."

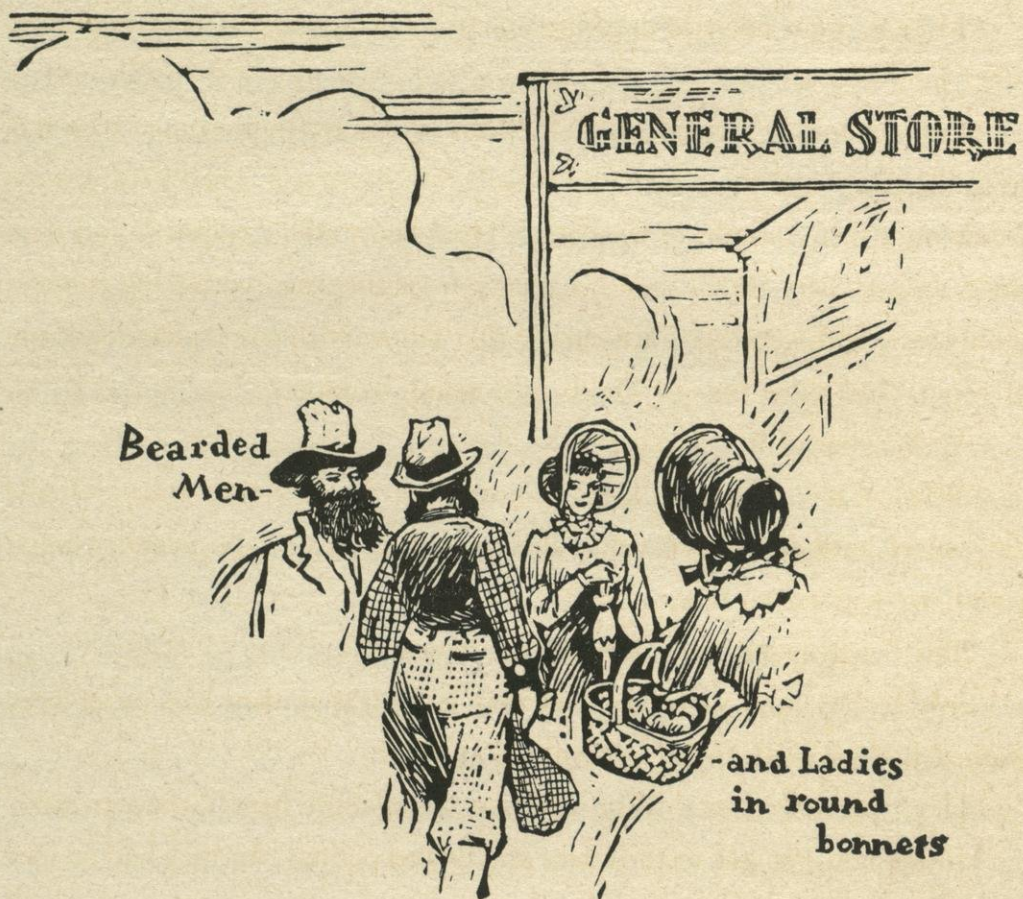
Bestemor shivered, though the August sun was broiling hot, and drew her shawl closer.

"You just run along, boys," Far's friend repeated. "The farmers from Muskego won't be in until afternoon. You'll have plenty of time to see the town and get back to catch a ride with them."

Mikkel and Per wandered about the dusty streets, looking curiously at the bearded men in rough jeans and the ladies in large round bonnets and drab gingham. They stopped to look at the oxen, stupid with the heat, tied to the hitching posts before the stores. The queer wagons with wheels made of sawed-off logs made them stare, almost speechless in amazement. They found their tongues again, however, when they discovered the river. But it didn't take much discussion for them to make a decision—they did just what any boy would do who hadn't had a bath or had his clothes washed for three months. They took off their clothes behind a bush and jumped in.

But it wasn't until they were dressed again and lay on the river bank that their tongues really loosened up—that is, Per's did.

"This is a funny river," said Per. "It's so lazy and slow."



Mikkel said nothing but thought of the lively brook that spurted down the mountain-side at home.

"Did you ever think it could be so peskily hot?" asked Per after a long silence. "I'm all sweaty again, and we haven't been out of the water five minutes."

Mikkel said nothing.

"It makes me feel dizzy," sighed Per. "And all that dust back on the streets. Inches of it! It makes my nose dry and itchy."

“Mikkel, what are you thinking about?” Per demanded at last after another long silence.

“I’m a chump,” groaned Mikkel. “Per, did you see those people who met us at the pier—and those men and women on the street? They look worse’n we do after three months of traveling! Their boots aren’t polished, and their shirts and trousers are all mended. Did you see that man with a big patch of gunny-sack on his knees? Did you see that fellow with suspenders made out of rope? And those big grown-up boys going barefoot?”

“Well, what of it?” asked Per.

“What of it?” roared Mikkel. “It just means I told Karen a pack of silly lies—silver buttons and red velvet dresses and carriages with golden wheels! I wish we had stayed home, I do!”

“Shh!” whispered Per, “here comes someone.”

Two grubby boys with bare feet that looked as if they had never been washed had sneaked up behind Mikkel and Per.

“Hey, you newcomers! Who said you could come here?” they growled.

Mikkel and Per got to their feet and bowed politely, for they had no idea what the American boys said.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Look at ’em bow to us! Let’s make them rub their noses in the dirt!”

Although Mikkel and Per did not know what the boys were laughing at, they thought it was only polite to laugh with them—and so they did.

“What’s your name?” demanded the larger of the two.

Mikkel and Per looked at each other. They knew just one American word, and they decided now was the time to use it.

“Yes,” they answered together.

The American boys danced up and down and shouted with laughter.

“So your name is Yes, huh? Hello, Yes, *Yes*, *YES!* How are you, *Yes?*”

Per’s face became very red and his fists doubled up.

“Oho, *Yes* wants to fight, does he?” jeered the boys. “Come on, then! *Come on, Yes!* We’ll send you lickety-split back to where you came from. Come on!”

Mikkel and Per “came on”!

And it wasn’t long before two grubby, barefoot boys did the running lickety-split back to where they came from.

“Shall we chase them?” asked Per.

“No,” grunted Mikkel, wiping his bloody nose on his sleeve.

“I wish I knew what we said to make them laugh,” puzzled Mikkel as they trudged back to the pier.

At the pier Far and Uncle Knud were busy loading the chests on a wagon and did not notice Mikkel’s mussed hair and puffy eye.

“Come on, Mikkel. Help swing up some of these lighter things. Our good friend from Muskego will be back in a minute, and he’ll expect us to be ready. We have to go twenty miles or so, and oxen don’t have wings on their feet.”

Wings on their feet—I guess not! Mikkel, swinging his legs on top of the pile of chests, had to laugh at the oxen lumbering along the dusty, deeply-rutted road that dodged stumps and skirted the banks of swamps southwest of Milwaukee. Wouldn’t Lars snicker if he saw him now! Good thing he hadn’t told *him* about that chariot with golden wheels! Mikkel looked at Karen. He wondered what she was thinking.

But Karen slept. And Baby Kristi slept. Mor and Aunt Martha’s heads nodded and wagged with each jolt of the wagon. Bestemor sat huddled up and stared at nothing. The three men walking alongside the oxen talked in

low voices. Mikkel thought he perhaps ought to be walking with them, but up on the pile of chests he felt alone and far away from everybody. It was a good place to think.



The sun sank low on the flat horizon and the dark night swooped down and covered the earth. Mikkel felt a tight fear in his throat. Back home the summer nights were never this dark! There was the light of the midnight sun. The evenings were long back home.

Back home—? He would have to stop thinking of home as being the little house on the shoulder of the mountain. *This* was home now—this great, wild country with its smothering dark nights.

Once Mikkel had played a game where he had been blindfolded and told to walk straight ahead without stretching out his hands to feel his way. That was the way he felt now. He had believed in a magic America—a country where hands reached out eagerly from all sides and filled one pocket with gold and the other with rock candy. But the only hands America had reached out so far had given him an aching nose, a puffed-up eye, and sore muscles. And here he was bouncing along on a wilderness road in the pitch dark—and where, only the oxen knew!

Things didn't seem much better when the oxen finally stopped and all the family climbed down from the wagon and stumbled stiffly after the farmer into the dark hulk of a building.

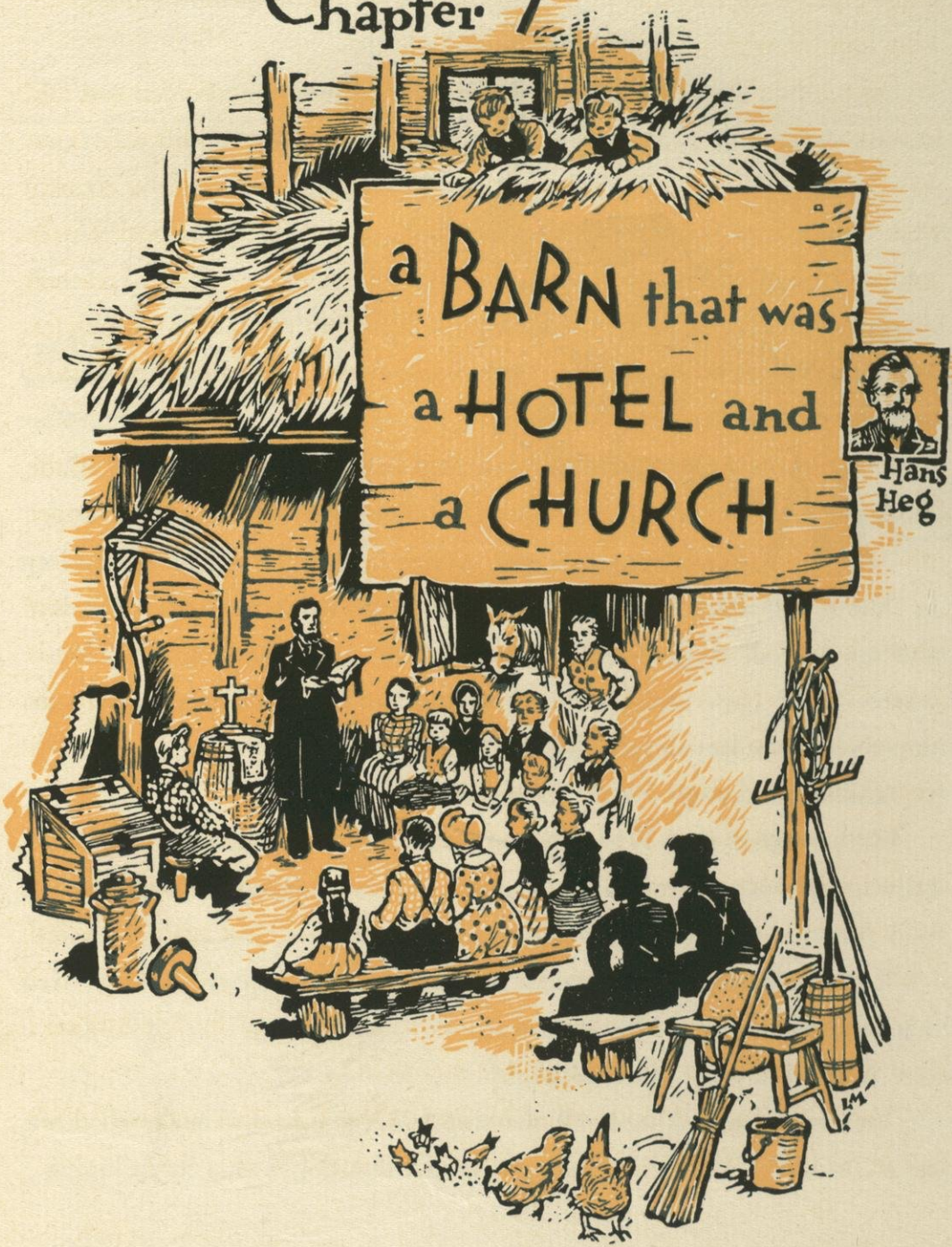
"I'm sorry I can't keep you at my cabin," the farmer apologized, "but my sister's family came from Norway last week and our house is full. This is Even Heg's barn. Around here we call his place a hotel because so many newcomers sleep in it before they get settled. You just crawl in the hay anywhere. Heg won't care—he's a good fellow!"

The soft new-mown hay cushioned Mikkel's aching muscles, but it could not help the hurt inside. When Far had unloaded all their belongings from the farmer's wagon and found his way back to the barn loft again, he heard queer, muffled noises in the hay.

"Is that you, Mikkel?" he whispered, fumbling until he felt Mikkel's rigid body. "What is the matter? Are you sick?"

"Far! Oh, Far!" Mikkel flung his arms about his father and buried his face in his neck. "Far! Far! Why did we ever come!"

Chapter 7



Hans
Heg



*"Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word
We are gathered all to hear Thee;
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
Now to seek and love and fear
Thee."*

MIKKEL OPENED his eyes. At first he thought he had fallen asleep in church, but when he looked around to see if Far was frowning at him and saw—of all things—*hay*, he knew better. But that singing! What—where—who? How could he be sitting in a hay loft and hearing at the same time so many voices singing "Blessed Jesus"?

"Mikkel, wake up. It's the middle of the morning."

Mikkel stared. Per! Where did *he* come from? Hadn't he left him in—Milwaukee? Milwaukee? Why, to be sure, he was in America—in a hay loft—in America—in a hay loft. *Whose* hay loft?

"Mikkel, wake up!" laughed Per. "You look as stupid as the farmer's oxen that brought me from Milwaukee."

"Where are we?" asked Mikkel.

"In Heg's barn. Almost all the ship folk came here. They're all down below. Mikkel, you are shaking your head like a dog with a fly in his ear."

"I keep hearing 'Blessed Jesus' all the time!"

"Of course you do. They're singing it."

"Who?"

"Oh, you stupid! Your father and mother and my father and mother and the folks who live around here. It's Sunday morning, and they're having church. Your father sent me to wake you up."

Mikkel's face began to burn as his mind awoke and he reviewed what had happened the night before. Did Per know what a baby he had been?

"Come on, Mikkel," cried Per impatiently. "Church will be all over—."

It really was church they were having down below. The minute Mikkel stepped inside and saw all the faces he began to feel ashamed of his dirty, wrinkled clothes. He sat down between Mor and Far on one of the rough planks being used for benches and began to pick off the hay seeds clinging to his clothes.

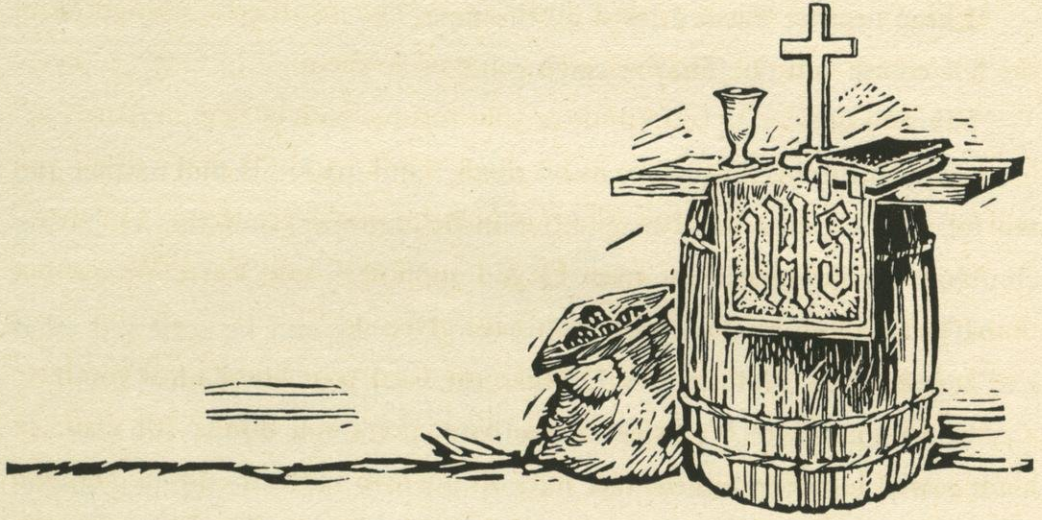
"No, Mikkel," whispered Mor in his left ear.

"Not now, Mikkel," whispered Far in his right ear. Mikkel stuck his hands in his pockets and looked about him.

It was easy to tell the newcomers from those who had been in America a year or so. Karen was pink, white and plump, while the little girl on the next bench was almost as dark as an Indian. Per's face was fair and milk-white, but all the other boys were either cinnamon brown or as red as the cap he had lost in the ocean. Why, one boy was positively—.

"Mikkel, are you listening to Herr Clausen?" whispered Far.

Mikkel gave a guilty start. Far must have seen his eyes wandering all over. What was it Far had said—had he said "Herr Clausen"? Why, so it was! The tall man in the long black frock coat who was reading from a sermon book up near the horse's stall was none other than the schoolmaster who



had been on the ship. So he was here, too. Hurrah! Mikkel stole a glance at Bestemor. She ought to be most happy, for this was certainly more than she had expected—to hear God’s Word on the very first Sunday that they were here!

A stranger teetering on a one-legged milk stool got up and read the closing prayer. Almost before he had said “Amen” Mikkel leaned across Mor’s lap, tugged at Bestemor’s sleeve and said, “You see, Bestemor! What did I tell you! We aren’t going to be heathen after all!”

“Herr Clausen is a godly man,” answered Bestemor, “but he is no minister. He cannot baptize or confirm or marry or give the Lord’s Supper. And who ever heard of worshiping the Lord in a barn!”

“You must not give the boy wrong notions,” said Mor in a low voice. “Our Savior was born in a stable, and He is not too proud to hear prayers from a barn.”

“Ah,” sighed Bestemor. “That is true, but I long for the church bells and the altar and to see the minister in his black gown and white collar.”

Mikkel's spirits began to skid down again, but just then a stranger with the friendliest smile he had ever seen came up to them.

"So! You decided to come and try your fortune with us here in America," he boomed in a big jolly voice as he shook Far's hand. "I don't think you will be sorry. With a fine boy like this to help, you'll get along, I'm sure."

"You are our kind host, Even Heg, I suppose?" said Far. "We cannot thank you enough for the shelter you have given us."

"It is nothing. Nothing at all! Make my barn your home until you have a cabin of your own. It's rather a fine barn, don't you think? It's made of home-sawed lumber from the oak trees on my own farm. It's a rich land you have come to! Trees for the taking and land almost for the asking. Tomorrow we will go around and pick out a place for you to live."

"May I go, too?" begged Mikkel.

"Why not?" laughed Heg. "A young lad who is going to help his father as much as you are ought to have a hand in choosing the farm, don't you think?"

Mikkel could hardly wait to tell Per that he was going to help pick out the farm, and when Per heard the news he slapped his knee and looked very cunning.

"I tell you what, Mikkel," he exclaimed. "You and I will go out this very afternoon and pick out a farm for each of us. We ought to live side by side, two such good friends as we are. We'll show our fathers the land tomorrow. Won't they be surprised?"

Although it was the first fresh food they had gotten since they left Norway, the two boys hardly touched the new potatoes and fish the kind Hags gave the newcomers for dinner. Long before the others had eaten their fill they streaked across the prairie on their search for suitable farms.

"There's a lake, Mikkel. How would you like to live there?" shouted Per. Mikkel's eyes sparkled when he saw the beautiful, clear water.

"See the ducks out in the middle? And look at all the fish jumping! We can fish and hunt all day long if we live here," said Per.

"I don't know," answered Mikkel slowly. "When Baby Kristi gets to walking she may fall in and drown. I think we had better look somewhere else."

As they raced around the southern shore of the lake something happened that nearly frightened the boys out of their wits. Two birds flew up right under their noses with a loud whirr that sent them tumbling backward into the long grass.

"What was that?" gasped Per. "Do you think it was a troll?"

"It looked more like a bird," answered Mikkel, getting to his feet. "I think it ought to be called the thunder bird."

The boys went on, but now they looked carefully at the ground as they walked. All of a sudden Per shied quickly.

"Look out! A snake!"

"Pooh! I've seen five already!"

"And you didn't say anything?" admired Per.

"*Pytt!* No!"

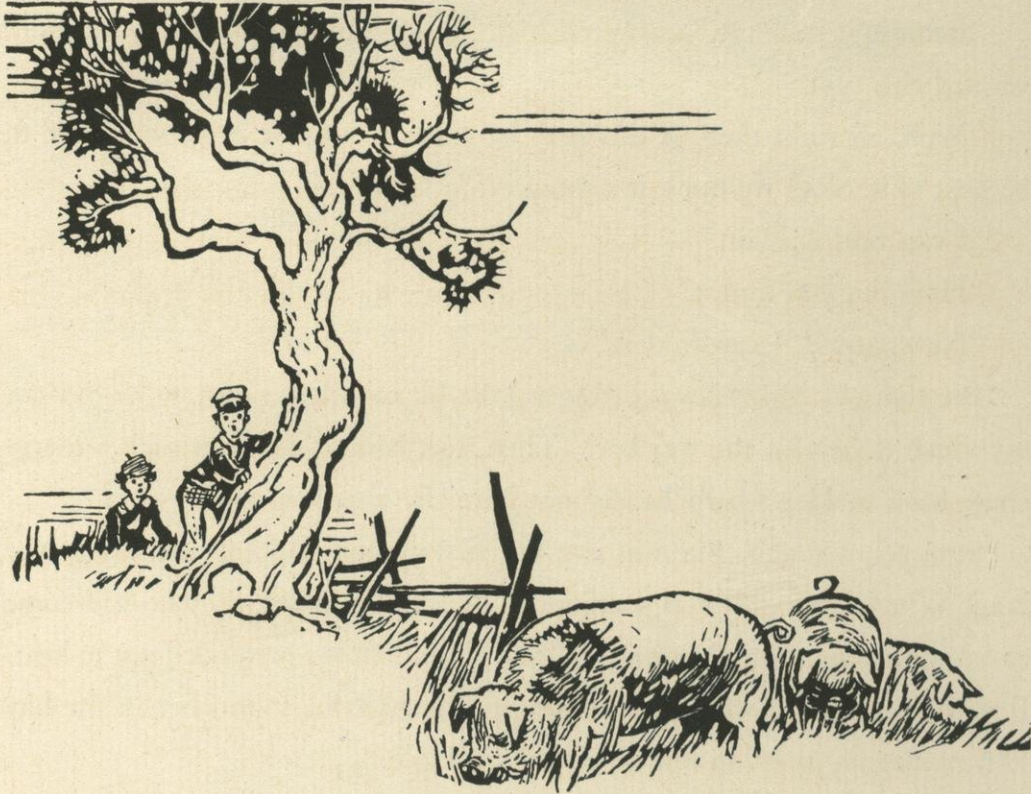
"Did you ever see a snake in Norway? I never did. I guess that's why I jumped," said Per.

"I saw one up in the summer pasture once."

The boys rambled into a little island of white oaks on the great green plain.

"The woods around here are certainly different from the evergreen forests in Norway, aren't they?" remarked Per.

Mikkel opened his mouth to answer, but he shut it again very quickly and scurried to a tree. Per jumped, too, but he stopped to look before he climbed.



“Ho! Ho!” he laughed loudly. “It’s only some settler’s pigs. They’re looking for acorns, not you.”

Mikkel slid down the tree trunk.

“Come on, we have to find our land,” he growled.

On and on they rambled. At last they stopped on the bank of a brook which flowed out of the lake and wound through the tall grass and in and out of the forest clumps.

"Here is my farm," announced Mikkel, planting his feet firmly on the ground.

"Why do you want this land and not some other we have seen?" asked Per, who had wanted to decide and turn back long ago.

"Because it suits me," answered Mikkel, not wishing to tell why he really wanted this spot.

"Well, all right then. If this is to be yours, I suppose mine will have to be next to it. Shall we mark it some way?"

"I can find it again."

"How can you find it?"

"Never mind, I can find it."

Per thought Mikkel was acting a little bit too mysterious; so he did not say much to him on the way back. Then, too, Mikkel led him such a merry chase back to Heg's barn he did not have the breath to talk.

Strangely enough, Far was not the first person Mikkel told about the land. When Far, who was surrounded by a group of settlers who had come to ask questions about Norway, called to him, Mikkel pretended not to hear. It was Bestemor he wanted, and after a long hunt he found her in the hay loft, reading a psalm in her silver-clasped Bible.

"Bestemor, I have found a place for us to live!" The words tumbled out of Mikkel's mouth. "It is on a brook that I think will not go dry, and Bestemor—there is a birch tree—a beautiful white one just like the birch trees in Norway. A brook and a birch tree, Bestemor! Now are you happy?" His eyes were anxious.

Bestemor patted Mikkel's flushed cheek with her thin, horny hand.

"Mikkel," she whispered, "you are a good boy. You will not forget! No, Mikkel will not forget!"

Chapter 8



A HOME ON THE PRAIRIE

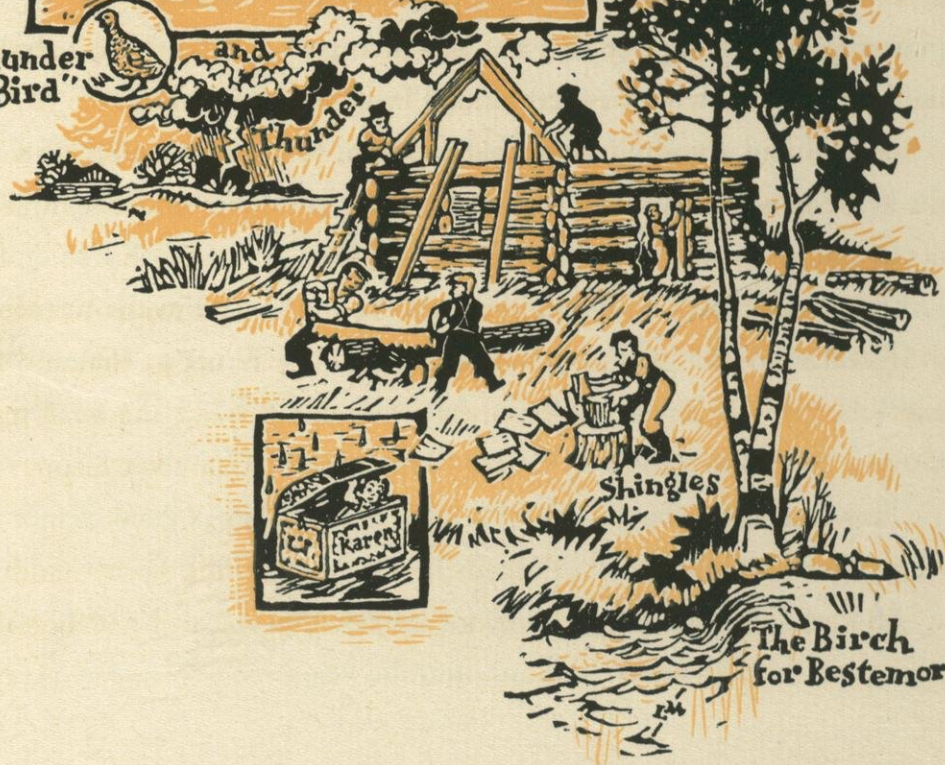


"Thunder Bird"



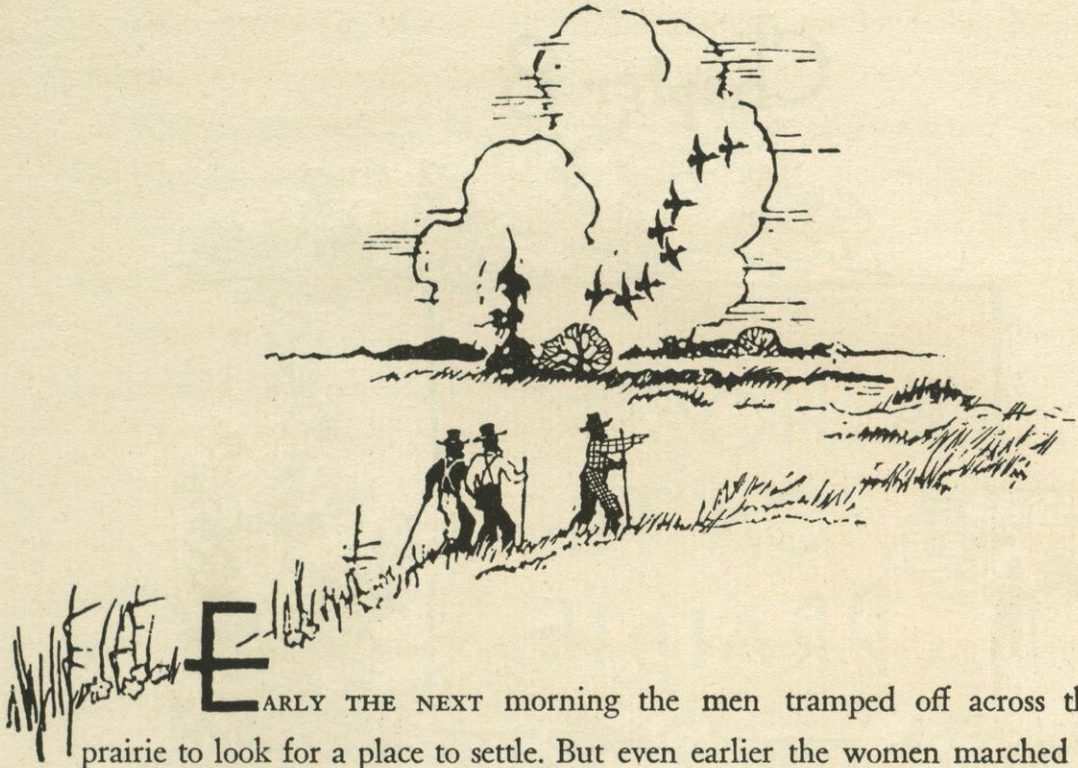
and

Thunder



Shingles

The Birch for Bestemor



EARLY THE NEXT morning the men tramped off across the prairie to look for a place to settle. But even earlier the women marched to the lake shore with all the dirty clothes from the long voyage.

Mikkel had a guilty feeling that he ought to stay and tend the fire under the kettle in which Mor was heating water, or poke the clothes up and down in the hot soapy water in the wooden keg, or at least keep Karen and Baby Kristi amused while Mor and Aunt Martha worked. But the women were so lighthearted and glad to be working and Baby Kristi so contented to lie and kick and gurgle on the grass that Mikkel felt he wasn't needed at all. Besides, he had to show Far the land he had picked for their farm.

However, before he ran after the men, he gave Mor a good chance to ask him to stay and help.

"It certainly was nice of Fru Heg to give you soap," he said, watching Mor pour the soft yellow mixture into the keg.

"God could not have brought us to kinder people!" exclaimed Mor.

"Do you suppose they make soap the way we did in Norway?" asked Mikkel, keeping an eye on the men who were following the lake shore.

"Fru Heg said they soak wood ashes in water. The lye water that drains off they boil with fat. It's just the same as in Norway."

Mikkel waited a few minutes. Mor began to plunge the clothes up and down in the keg.

"Well, I guess I'll go now," said Mikkel at last.

"Oh, are you still here?" asked Mor in surprise. "If you don't hurry Far will be out of sight."

Mikkel ran off like a deer.

Believe it or not, Far and Uncle Knud *did* decide to buy the land east of the brook, and they even agreed the house should be near the birch tree. When Per's father decided to get the land joining Far's the boys were ready to burst with pride.

"It's too bad the boys won't be here to enjoy the good fishing and hunting. I'm afraid they will miss their families for a while, but then they will probably get used to being with strangers," said Uncle Knud soberly.

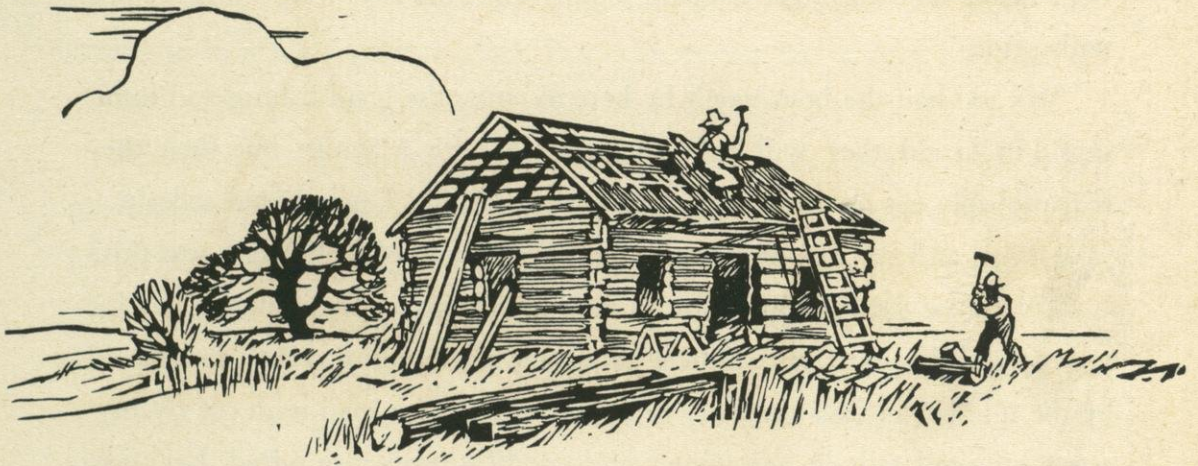
Mikkel and Per looked at each other. What kind of foolish talk was this?

"Of course you two will have to go out and earn some money to pay for your farms. They say rail splitters get six dollars a month if they aren't paid by the number of rails they cut. Heg was telling of a man who cut twenty-seven hundred rails in one winter and got fifty cents a hundred. Let's see, that would be thirteen and a half dollars for one winter's work. The land costs one dollar and a quarter an acre. If we get forty acres each, the boys will have to earn a hundred dollars. I'm afraid we won't see much of them for a few years," sighed Far.

“You don’t mean we have to hire out and work?” sputtered Per and Mikkel in the same breath, but then they saw the men wink at each other and knew better.

Things certainly went fast here in America! Far and Uncle Knud walked to the land office in Milwaukee and bought the land in one day. The next day they and Per’s father and two kind settlers cut logs for the house and dragged them together, and the third day they moved in. In two more days Per and his family were in their new house. All that in one week!

Of course, the houses weren’t much to look at—a little log cabin with one room, twelve by fourteen, and an attic. Of course Far and Uncle had not had time to split logs and lay a floor yet, and of course the space between the walls wasn’t chinked with mud. There was no door and there were no window panes—no beds—no table—no chairs—no stove.



The fact that there wasn’t any furniture did not seem very important the third day when they were in the new house. Cooking over a bonfire outside, using the two largest chests for a table, and sleeping on the dirt floor were small matters indeed!

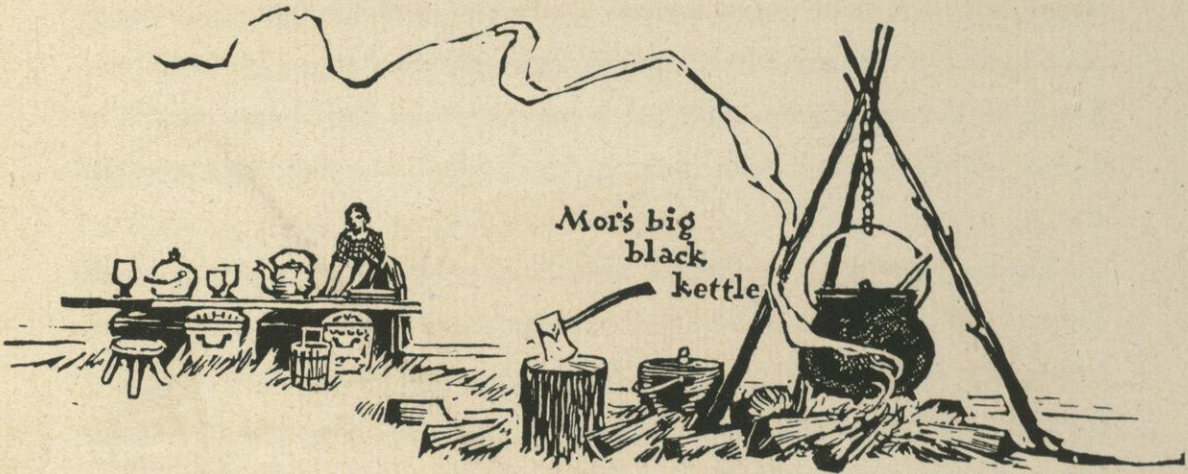
The day began hot and muggy. Per and Mikkel, who were cutting wild prairie hay to provide the mattresses for their beds, did not dare take off their shirts again today, for their backs were sore and blistered from yesterday's burning sun.

"Your shirt is sopping wet," said Mikkel, squinting at Per through red, puffy eyelids.

"No worse than yours," grunted Per, cutting a big swath of grass with his scythe.

"Do you really believe people die of the heat here in America?" Per asked after a little pause.

"I feel as if I were dead and cooking in Mor's big black kettle this very minute," replied Mikkel.



Later in the afternoon the boys went out to see if they had trapped any prairie hens. One of the Heg boys had told them the "thunder birds" that had frightened them on Sunday were called prairie chickens and that they were good to eat. He had also showed them how to make a box with a swinging door to trap the birds.

"Of course the prairie hen won't come in unless you put corn in the box," the Heg boy told them.

"Corn? What's that?" asked Mikkel.

"You don't know what corn is? That's right, I guess we didn't have it in Norway. The Indians were raising it when the white men first came to America. Everybody raises it now. Just you wait! You will be so tired of corn bread in a year you'll wish you had never heard the word!"

Evidently the wild chickens of the prairie had enough to eat without poking their heads into strange boxes, for the trap was empty.

Mikkel and Per turned back. It was then they noticed the western sky. The sun that had looked so hot and angry all day had turned pale. Good reason it had, too, for low on the flat horizon inky clouds were massing to swoop down on it. The sun became a pale rim, and the muttering clouds piled higher in the west. Mikkel and Per were unable to move. Never in their lives had they seen such a sight. At home the storms had always brewed in secrecy behind the mountains. Here on this flat plain one could see the whole fearful drama.

The air grew thick and heavy, and the shadow of the onrushing clouds swept across the prairie. Mikkel and Per watched the rolling black mass swallow up the sun. It wasn't until a cold breath of wind bent the grass tops that the spell which held them stock-still was broken. They looked at each other, terror in their eyes. Without a word they began to run.

And then the sky exploded! A dark curtain seemed to be ripped apart with a tremendous crash, and streams of fire poured out on the earth. At the same time the tumult of thunder and wind and the roar of the rain rushing across the prairie broke on the boys' ears.

"Wait for me, Mikkel!" shrieked Per, but the wind whipped his words

away. An earth-shaking blast of thunder made him throw himself to the ground and cover his ears. Mikkel jerked him back to his feet.

"We can't stop now!" he yelled in his ear. "The world is coming to an end."

The words gave Per a new fear, and the new fear scared new speed into his feet. From then on he led Mikkel—until in the blinding rain he rushed headlong into the brook and sprawled in the water. Once again Mikkel pulled him to his feet, and together they sped down the bank of the stream until a flash of lightning showed them the log cabin under the birch tree. But Per would not stop. If the world was coming to an end, he wanted to be with *his* mother and father.

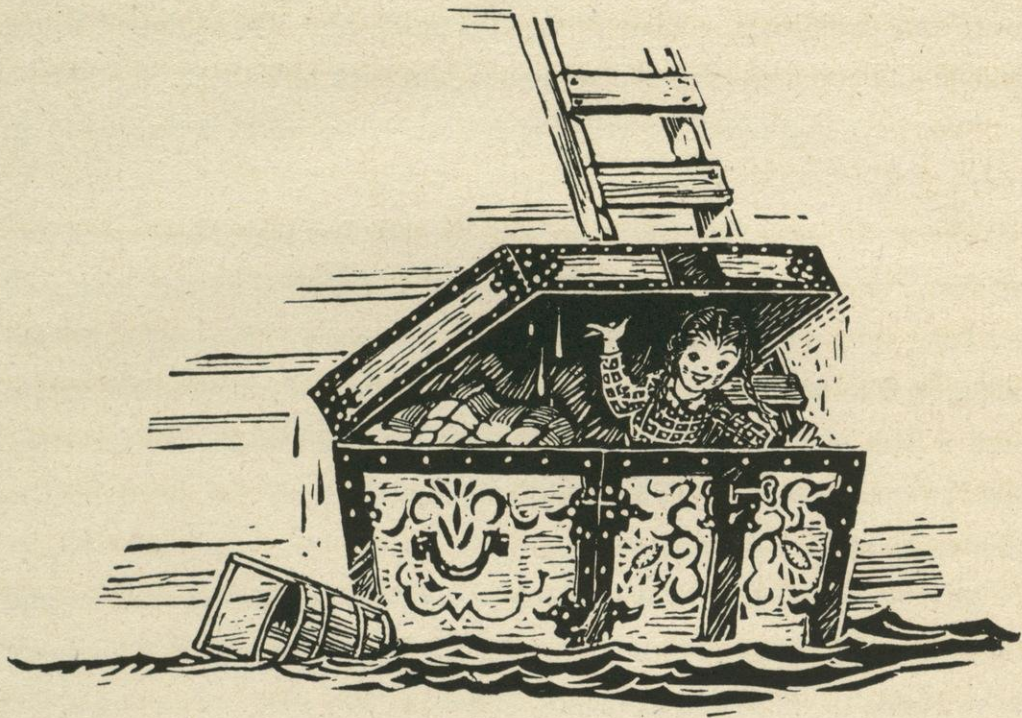
Mikkel stumbled into the log cabin. In a flash of light he saw Far and Uncle Knud kneeling beside a chest in the corner. Mikkel flung himself down beside them, folded his hands, and closed his eyes.

"Fader vor, du, som er i Himlene! Helliget vorde dit Navn; komme dit Rige; ske din Vilje, som i Himmelen, saa og paa Jorden; giv os idag vort daglige Brød, og forlad os vor Skyld, som vi og forlade vore Skyldnere; og led os ikke ind i Fristelse, men fri os fra det Onde! Thi dit er Riget og Magten og Æren i Evighed. Amen."

Mikkel never knew how many times he prayed "Our Father" before the claps of thunder became faint rumbles and the sharp stabs of lightning became a faint flickering in the distance.

When he finally dared open his eyes and look around he saw a wooden bucket floating around on the floor. He scrambled to his feet and stared in astonishment to see that the water was up to his shoe tops. Of course! There was no roof yet! What could you expect from a house which had no roof?

Far waded through the water to the doorway and looked out. Mikkel



was about to follow when he saw something that made him rub his eyes twice before he could believe them. The cover of one of the great chests they were using for a table was slowly rising—all by itself!

“Far! Look!” screamed Mikkel.

Far lifted the cover back, and there stood Karen, her curls dry and sunny.

“Far,” she said, stretching out her arms. “I want to get out now. It’s too hot in here!”

Far just stood and stared. Mikkel and Uncle Knud came and stood beside him, and all they could do was stare, too. There on the bottom of the chest, with their knees up under their chins, crouched Bestemor and Aunt Martha.

Just then the cover of the other chest began to rise, and up popped Mor, holding Baby Kristi in her arms.

“So *there* you are!” exclaimed Far. All of a sudden he began to shout with laughter. Mor stood up and shook out her skirts. Her eyes began to flash angrily.

“I don’t see much to laugh at! What else would you expect us to do but dump out the bedclothes and crawl into the only dry place in this miserable country? Even the storms are wild and uncivilized here!”

Far sobered up quickly. “I’m laughing more for the joy of finding you safe than for anything else. You can’t imagine my fears when I rushed home to find everyone gone and the storm so violent I could not see to follow you. I think we ought to thank God for bringing us safely through this storm.”

Bestemor, Mor, Aunt Martha, and Karen, dry and snug in the chests—Far, Uncle Knud, and Mikkel, dripping wet in the mud and water of the cabin floor—all knelt and humbly prayed.

The sun came out again, of course, and the mud dried hard on the floor of the log cabin. Naturally, the very first thing Far and Uncle did was split shingles for the roof. When that was done, they made a floor, a heavy door, a table, and two beds. Mikkel was proud of those beds, for over the rope lattice work stretched across the bedsteads Mor laid the ticks of prairie hay which he had filled. He was proud of the chairs, too, for he helped Far saw the smooth chunks off a great oak log. And as might be expected, he nearly burst with pride over the chinking between the logs, for he did that all himself—that is, as far as he could reach!

Two weeks from the Saturday they had come to Heg’s farm near Wind Lake, Mikkel watched Far nail the last rung for a ladder to the loft.

“Far,” said Mikkel solemnly, “our house isn’t as nice as the one we left in Norway, but I like it anyway. Do you know why?”

“No, why?”

"We made this ourselves and we can do with it as we please. When we have worked for a while we can make it better. Maybe some day we may even build as fine a barn as Heg's barn!"

"There is a chance we may," replied Far. "That is why we came to America—not because it gives us golden chariots and big, fat cigars, as you thought, Mikkel, but because it gives us a chance."

Mikkel was wonderfully lighthearted when they walked to one of the larger houses of the settlement to sing hymns and hear Herr Clausen read a sermon the next day. If he was lighthearted when he went, he was light-footed when he returned; for he had the best news in the world for Bestemor—poor, tired Bestemor who couldn't walk very far any more. When they came in sight of the cabin he streaked ahead of the others. He found Bestemor in the doorway, holding her silver-clasped Bible and looking across the prairie to Indian Hill, the only rising ground her eyes could find, the hill where long ago Indians had buried their dead and heaped high the dirt over their graves.

"Bestemor," said Mikkel as soon as he got his breath, "you can't guess what happened today! Seventy men of the settlement signed a letter to Pastor Krause, a German pastor who lives about forty miles away. The letter asks Pastor Krause to make Herr Clausen our minister—a real minister, Bestemor—one that can confirm Karen and me. How do you like that?"

Bestemor looked out across the prairie to the hill.

"God has answered my prayers sooner than I had hoped," she said. "Perhaps there will be a church on that hill sooner than we think, too. Yes, so it goes when one trusts and has faith!"

"Mikkel," Bestemor whispered after a long silence, "Mikkel, you are a good boy!"

Chapter 9

wind
Lake

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE



the
American
lady



Gold?

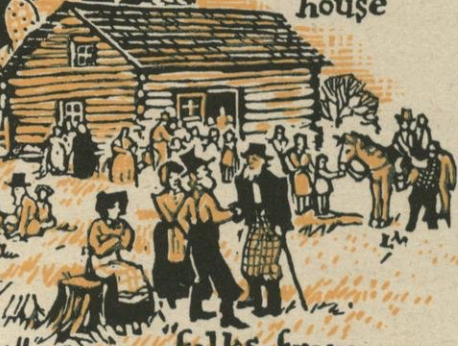


"Pete"
and
Mike

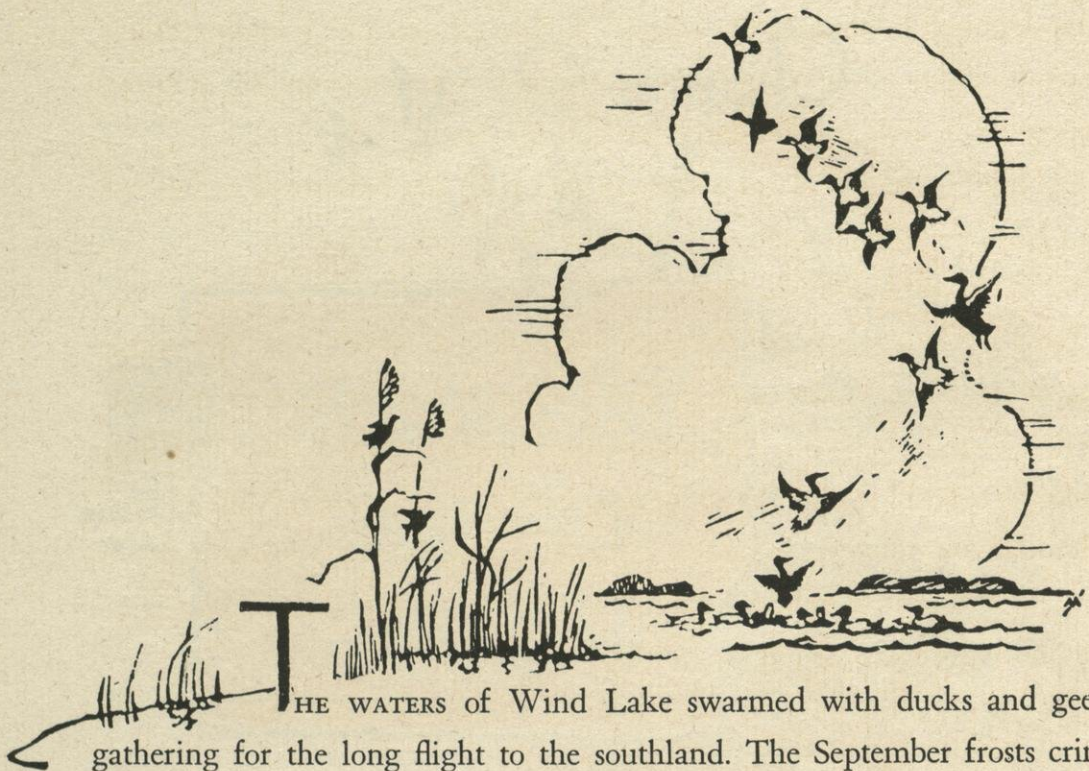


mush

Søren
Bache's
house



"folks from
miles around"



THE WATERS of Wind Lake swarmed with ducks and geese gathering for the long flight to the southland. The September frosts crimsoned the oak leaves and mellowed the wild crabs and grapes. The squirrels made no secret of the fact that the hazel and hickory nuts were ready to be harvested.

“Enough for all! Enough for all!” they prattled as they raced to and from their storehouse in some hollow tree.

It was the high time of the year for eleven-year old boys—that is, for all except one. After Far took Mikkel aside and talked to him one day late in September, there was no more jumping for thorn apples that puckered one’s mouth, no more chasing scolding squirrels to the tops of the oak trees or trying to tame woodchucks that had no wish to be tamed. After that talk life became serious business for Mikkel.

It happened the day Far went to Milwaukee with a neighbor’s oxen and

kubberulle and brought home a barrel of flour, a barrel of molasses, and a round sheet-iron stove. When he had come back from returning the oxen and *kubberulle* he took Mikkel for a walk to the brook.

"Mikkel," said Far when a bend in the brook and a clump of bushes hid them from the cabin, "Mikkel, I spent our last penny today."

"Is that bad?" asked Mikkel.

"Bad!" Far laughed, but the next minute he was sober again. "You don't know much about money, do you? Yes, it is bad to have spent one's last cent, but it is even worse when the money belonged to somebody else. You see, Mikkel, it took all the dollars Uncle Knud and I had to come to America. We had to borrow some money to buy the land and supplies I brought home today. With no oxen to break the sod for spring seeding and nothing with which to buy either oxen or seed, it looks as if—"

"Far! I'll go out to work this winter! I could split rails. Once you said that I might be able to earn enough to—"

"No, no, son! I was only joking that time. You are too young for that work, I'm afraid. But I wonder if you could take care of the women folk while Uncle and I are gone?"

"You—gone, Far?"

"Yes. I hired out today to work in the pine woods up north this winter. Uncle Knud is going to work, too. We shall leave as soon as we can and do odd jobs until the timber season really begins."

"You mean that I—that I—you think that I can take care of the house and the women?"

Mikkel's voice trembled, and he hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

"I think so. You are almost a man now."

Mikkel's eyes shone. "I am, Far! I am a man!"

Far shook Mikkel's hand solemnly. "From now on you are the man of the house."

Far gave Mikkel all sorts of advice before they went back to the cabin again, but Mikkel heard only snatches of it. Five words spun around in his head.

"The man of the house! The man of the house! Far says I'm to be the man of the house!"

Men do not cry; so Mikkel did not shed a tear when Far and Uncle Knud left for the north woods two days later.

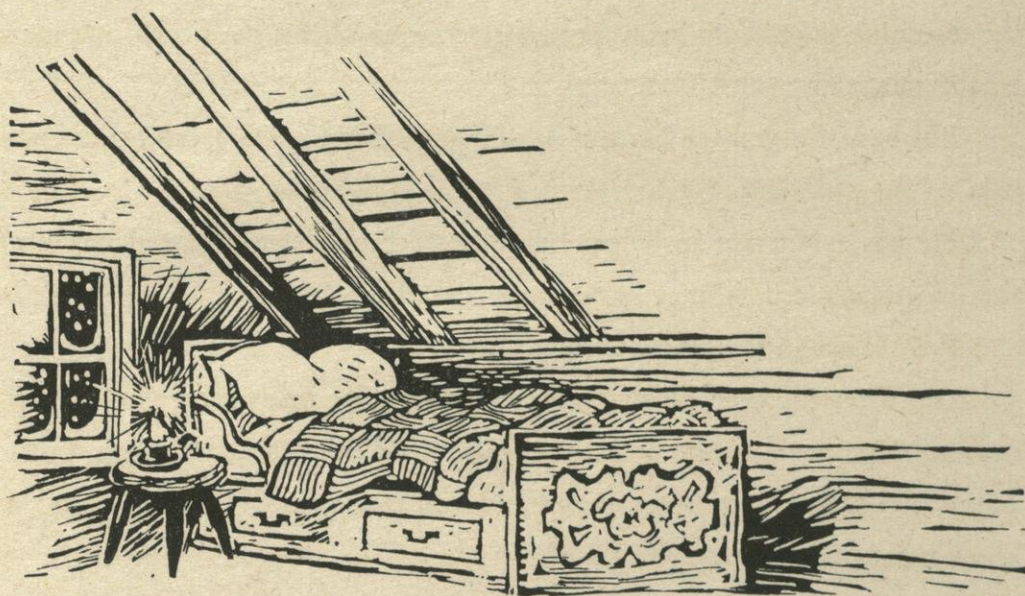
When Bestemor clasped Far's hand and quavered, "You may never see me again on this earth," Mikkel frowned just the way Far did when he was impatient with the women folk and said, "Now, Bestemor! We can't have such talk!"

That night Mor and Mikkel stayed up long after the others were asleep. Mor lit the rag wick which hung over the edge of a dish of lard, and Mikkel made a fire in the new stove to take the chill out of the air. The stove heated quickly and well, and it wasn't long before they had to move back the blocks of wood on which they were sitting.

"I guess we won't have to worry about keeping warm this winter," said Mikkel.

"It isn't that I am thinking of," sighed Mor. "What are we going to eat? We can't live on molasses and flour all winter. If only we had old Gullsi here to give us milk! Somehow I would not feel so poor if I knew I could have milk, butter, and cheese. What do people eat who don't have cows, I wonder!"

Mikkel listened to Mor's fears and worries without saying much. Before he climbed up the ladder to the loft he put his arms around her neck and whispered, "Don't you worry about anything, Mor! I'm the man of the



house.” But before he crawled under the quilt he knelt on the pole floor and prayed. “I believe you will have to help me out, God,” he said.

The next day Mikkel was gone a long time. When he finally came home he threw a small sack of corn on the floor.

“Is it gold, Mikkel?” squealed Karen, holding up a yellow ear.

“No, silly, it’s something for us to eat. The Americans say it makes good porridge. In American they say *mush*. I’ll grind some in the hand mill and we’ll have some for supper. The American lady said to drop it in boiling water and cook it until it’s thick, and then—”

“What American lady are you talking about? Where have you been all day?” asked Mor, who had begun to fear the Indians had captured Mikkel.

“There is an American family living two miles east of us. I went over this morning and asked if I could work for something I could take home to eat. The man had me scoop up the grain after the oxen had trodden it out on

the threshing floor. Tomorrow he will give me another sack of corn, and maybe the next day a sack of turnips."

"But how did you understand him?" gasped Mor. "You can't talk English."

"He has a Norwegian helper who knows English and he told me what the Americans said. Mor, I wish you could make *pai*."

"*Pai*? What in the world is that?"

"Oh, Mor, it's even better than cream porridge with butter and cinnamon. It is made of apples or berries and a kind of crust on top and underneath. It is baked in an oven, and oh, Mor, it is wonderful! And, oh, do you know what my name is in English?"

"Why, Mikkel, I suppose."

"No. It's Mike! Doesn't that sound nice? Mike! And do you know Per's name in English? It's Pete. Pete and Mike! Mor, will you call us Pete and Mike from now on?"

Before Mor could open her mouth to answer, Bestemor set Baby Kristi down so hard she began to cry.

"We won't have any Mikes in this house!" she snapped. "Mikkel is a beautiful old country name. Mike! Mike, Mike, Mike! It's an ugly, heathen name! I won't have it!"

"But Bestemor," cried Mikkel indignantly, "we are in America now! Can't I have an American name?"

"Mikkel is good enough!"

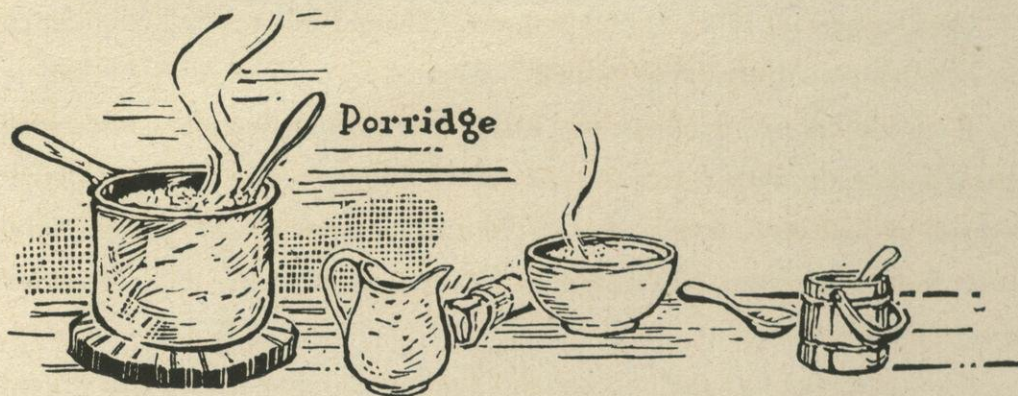
Mikkel was going to answer, but a look from Mor made him close his lips tightly. Bestemor was so funny about some things!

Nobody said very much until they sat around the great chest before bowls of corn meal porridge swimming in molasses.

“Um-m-m!” squealed Karen. “It’s good!”

Baby Kristi, her face smeared with molasses, pounded her wooden spoon on the chest and crowed with delight.

Mikkel beamed proudly. “I knew you would all like it,” he boasted. “Do you like it, Bestemor?”



“It is very good, Mikkel,” answered Bestemor gently. “You have done very well on your first day as the man of the house.”

Before Mikkel was through working for the American he had earned three bushels of turnips, which he buried in a hole near the house. From another settler he earned two bushels of wheat. When the threshing work was done, he waded along the shore of Wind Lake and gathered wild rice. After he had laid in a good supply he began to pick wild cranberries in the marshy lowlands. Bestemor would like them—they were something like the *tyttebær* they had picked back in Norway.

By the middle of October Mikkel and the squirrels had quite a supply of food stored away for the winter.

“If I catch squirrels for squirrel soup every once in a while and get fish through the ice in the lake, do you think we can get along, Mor?” asked Mikkel one night after he had worked very late.

"Mikkel! Mikkel!" exclaimed Mor, tears coming to her eyes, "you are too young to carry a man's burden!"

"What do you mean? Haven't I done well?"

Mor put her arms around Mikkel and squeezed him tight.

"Nobody could have done better!" she whispered.

On October 18, Mor, Aunt Martha, Karen, and Mikkel walked to Søren Bache's house and saw Herr Clausen ordained as a minister. They had to stand outside, because the house was full to overflowing. Some one whispered that it was just as well, for the service was in German. The whole service of ordination had been translated into German, because Pastor Krause, who came from a German community in Washington County, did not understand Norwegian.

Even if he could see nothing and could not understand a word that drifted through the open door, Mikkel wished that Bestemor could have come.

"It was something to see, Bestemor," he reported when they were home again. "There were people there from miles around, and you should have seen how happy they looked when Herr—I mean Pastor—he is Pastor Clausen now, isn't he? You should have seen people shake his hand! Some of them even cried, Bestemor. Why—Bestemor, *you* are crying? Why, Bestemor?"

"I have been so afraid that here in America we would lose those good things we had at home," said Bestemor. "Most of all I was afraid we would forget God and His Church. Now God has made it plain to me that the Church will grow here, too. Yes, now I can go in peace. God has answered my prayers and sent a Shepherd for His sheep!"

"Where are you going, Bestemor?" asked Mikkel in surprise.

"Where are the sheep, Bestemor?" asked Karen.

"Hush, children!" whispered Mor.

Chapter 10

RAINS, FEVERS and NEW GRAVES



Mikkel

"Bestemor
has
gone"



IN NOVEMBER the rains came. The marshes shone like lakes, and the grass became green again. The branches of the birch tree, stripped of its leaves, dripped all day long.

“You must not go out in this weather,” Mor repeated every morning. “Bring in enough wood from your pile and enough drinking water for the day and then stay in for once. Even Per’s father doesn’t go out and work in the cold rain.”

“I would much rather cut wood for winter now than go out and cut it in six feet of snow. Per’s father will be sorry he sits in the house these days. He’ll be sorry he didn’t go with Far and earn some money to buy oxen and seed in the spring.”

“Mikkel, be still! Little boys should not criticize their elders,” rebuked Mor.

Out in the woods Mikkel soon forgot about Per’s lazy father. He just

could not let himself think about all the people who were snug and dry in their houses, for when he did his saw would stick in the middle of a log or his axe would hit way below or above the cut he had made in a tree. When he stumbled home at night, wet and chilled to the bone, tired and a little bit cross, he would stop at the door and think of Far.

"Far said I am to be the man of the house," he whispered, and all his peevish thoughts went away.

Inside they did not treat him like a man, much as he protested. Karen peeled off his wet, torn mittens and put them near the stove to dry. Mor pulled off his heavy sweater, and Aunt Martha took off his shoes and stockings. Bestemor rubbed his stiff, red hands and clucked her tongue in pity.

"Poor little Mikkel—he has to work so hard!" she said every night, and every night Mikkel denied it was so. Deep down in his heart, of course, he liked to hear Bestemor say that he worked too hard, and he liked all the fuss the women made over him. To tell the truth, he looked forward all day to it!

The night Bestemor did not come to rub his cold hands and say, "Poor little Mikkel!" he knew something was wrong. His eyes darted to the bed.

"Is Bestemor sick?"

"After you left this morning she began to complain about being cold. I put all the quilts we have over her, but still she shivered and shook. This afternoon she had a terrible fever and was out of her head a bit. She talked about Drammen and Bestefar all the time. Just before you came in the fever broke and she was in a sweat. I think she is asleep now."

Mikkel tiptoed to the bed. Bestemor's cheek was so tight and yellow! All of a sudden Mikkel wished he were not the man of the house. If only Far would come! Bestemor was very sick. Anybody could see that! What should they do?

The next night Mor had the same story to tell—chills, fever, and sweat. And the next night. And the next.

Per came over one night and said that there was sickness all over the settlement. In nearly every house someone had the fever. Some people said it came because the woods were being cut down and so much plant life was rotting and making the air bad. Others said it was the American diet—the Norwegian stomachs could not stand the change from milk, butter, and cheese.

The next day Mikkel walked three miles to a settler who had a cow and offered to split wood for a quart of milk.

“It isn’t cream,” he said when he handed it to Mor, “but maybe it will help Bestemor.”

When Mor had cooked the milk, thickened it with flour, and sprinkled it with some precious cinnamon she had brought from Norway, it looked like the very best cream porridge. Eagerly Mikkel brought it to Bestemor’s bedside.

“Bestemor, would you like some cream porridge?”

Bestemor did not stir.

“Bestemor,” said Mikkel a little louder, “would you like some cream porridge?”

Bestemor did not open her eyes, but her lips moved in a whisper.

“No cream porridge.”

“It has cinnamon, Bestemor.”

“No cream porridge,” whispered Bestemor again. “Thank you, Mikkel.”

Mikkel handed the bowl to Mor and sat down in the farthest corner. The lids of his eyes were hot with tears. One big round drop trickled to the end of his nose and dropped on his hand. Mikkel rubbed the back of his hand slowly on the patch Mor had put on his knee. It was no use! No use! The

settler who had sold him the milk said Pastor Clausen had buried eight people yesterday. Eight in one day!

If only Far would come!

That night when Mikkel was about to climb the ladder to the loft, Bestemor called to him. Mikkel's heart gave a jump. Was it a sign that she was getting better?

"Mikkel," whispered Bestemor. "Tomorrow you must get the Pastor for me."

Mikkel threw himself down beside the bed. "No, no!" he cried. "No, Bestemor, no!"

"Shh! You will wake Kristi and Karen," said Aunt Martha, but the tears were streaming down her face, too.

Bestemor stroked Mikkel's tousled hair until he was quiet.

"Mikkel," she murmured, "I am so tired. I want to go to our Father in heaven. I am happy to go. You must not cry. I am happy to go."

"But Far—Far and Uncle are not here," sobbed Mikkel.

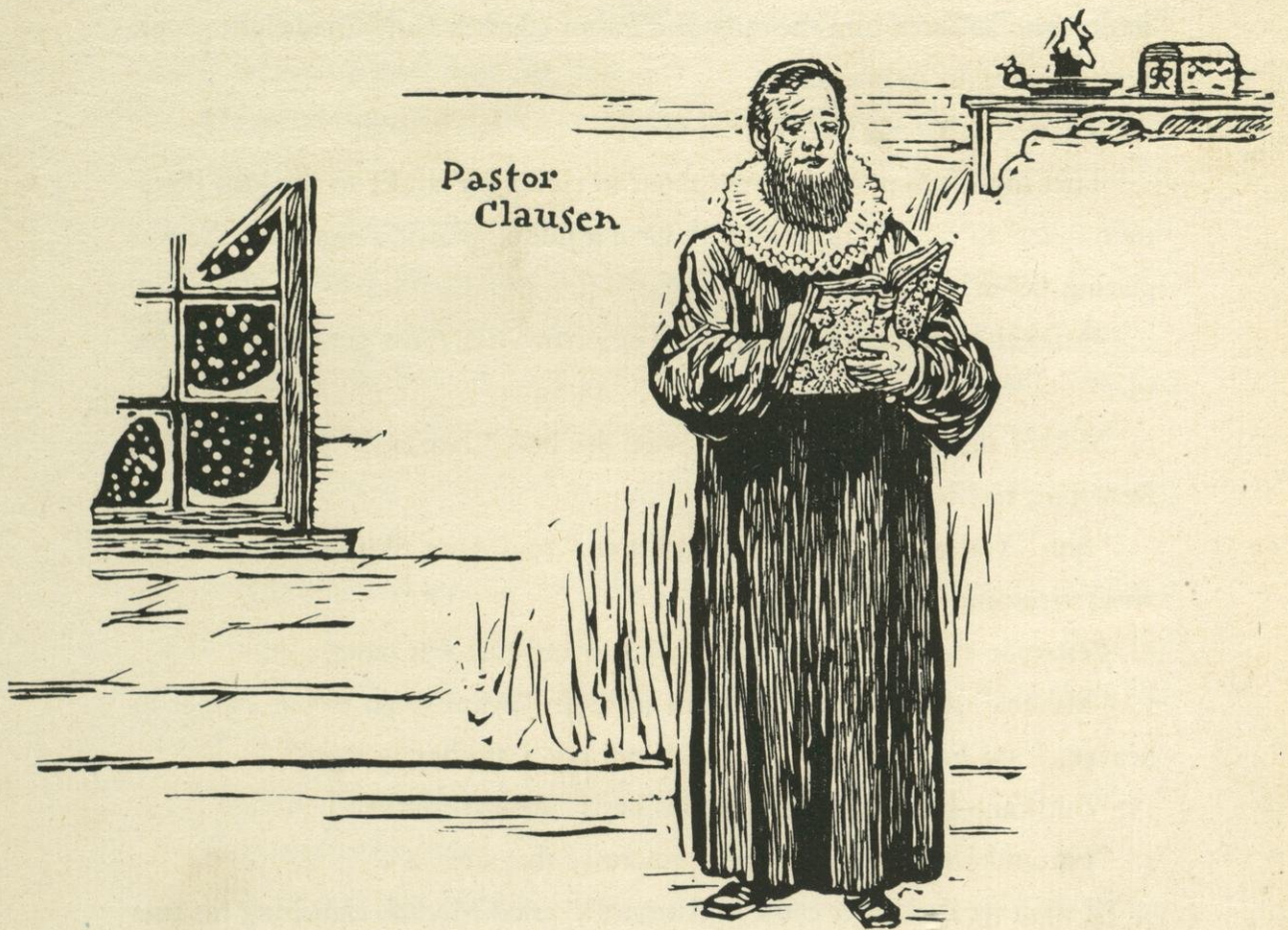
"Far and Uncle will be happy, wherever they are."

"I wish we had never come to America!" cried Mikkel, clenching his fists in anger. "You would be all right, Bestemor. I *know* you would!"

A little smile flitted over Bestemor's face. "I am an old, old woman, Mikkel. It would be the same for me back in Norway. I am glad I came to America, for now I know God is with us here, too. He has given us a pastor, and He will give us a church, too. You will see, Mikkel. You will see."

Bestemor's voice trailed off in a tired whisper. When Mikkel saw she was asleep, he climbed the ladder to the loft and lay staring into the darkness.

Early the next morning he ran to Søren Bache's house, where Pastor Clausen and his wife were staying. Quickly he told them about Bestemor.



“And please—” he added when he had explained everything, “please, will you wear the long black dress and white collar you wear on Sundays? Bestemor would like it so much.”

When Bestemor saw the tall, slim Pastor in his long black gown and high fluted collar come through the door her face lit up wonderfully. And when she saw gentle Martha Clausen beside him, she held out her hand weakly.

“God bless you—you came, too!” she whispered.



Mikkel stood in a corner and listened while Pastor Clausen read from Bestemor's Bible and prayed. He knelt on the floor beside Mor and Aunt Martha while Bestemor received the sacrament.

"There is just one thing more," whispered Bestemor. "You will teach our Mikkel, Karen, and Kristi so they won't forget God?"

Martha Clausen took her two hands in her own. "I will teach them myself," she said.

"And I am starting a confirmation class soon," said Pastor Clausen.

"And will there be a church?"

"This very month we organized the congregation. We are already talking of building the church."

"It must be on the hill—on the Indian mound—where all can see it," whispered Bestemor, her eyes closing like a tired child's.

"You are very tired. We must go now," said Pastor Clausen.

"First—sing—the—hymn—you—you wrote, Fru," whispered Bestemor.

Mikkel wondered if Bestemor knew what she was saying. Pretty Fru Clausen did not write songs! Or had she, perhaps?

"I wrote this when we left Denmark for our new home," said Fru Clausen, "but it can be a farewell song for one who is going to the heavenly home, too."

Her clear, sweet voice filled the little room.



1 And now we must bid one an - oth - er fare - well; The
2 O help us, dear Fa - ther, and Christ, Thou the Son, That



peace of our God keep you ev - er! God's peace in our
glad - ly our course we may fin - ish! And Thou, Ho - ly



bos - om, and all will be well, Or wheth - er we meet or we
Spir - it, Thou com - fort - ing One, Thy love in our hearts so re -



sev - er. May Christ, our dear Lord, Be our sure re -
plen - ish, That we by Thy might May fight the good



ward When we from this world pass for - ev - er!
fight, Till won is the crown ev - er - last - ing

When the song was finished the pastor and his wife quietly put on their coats and left, thinking that Bestemor was asleep. Mikkel thought so, too, until he leaned over and heard her whisper, ever so faintly,

“The peace of our God keep you ever.”

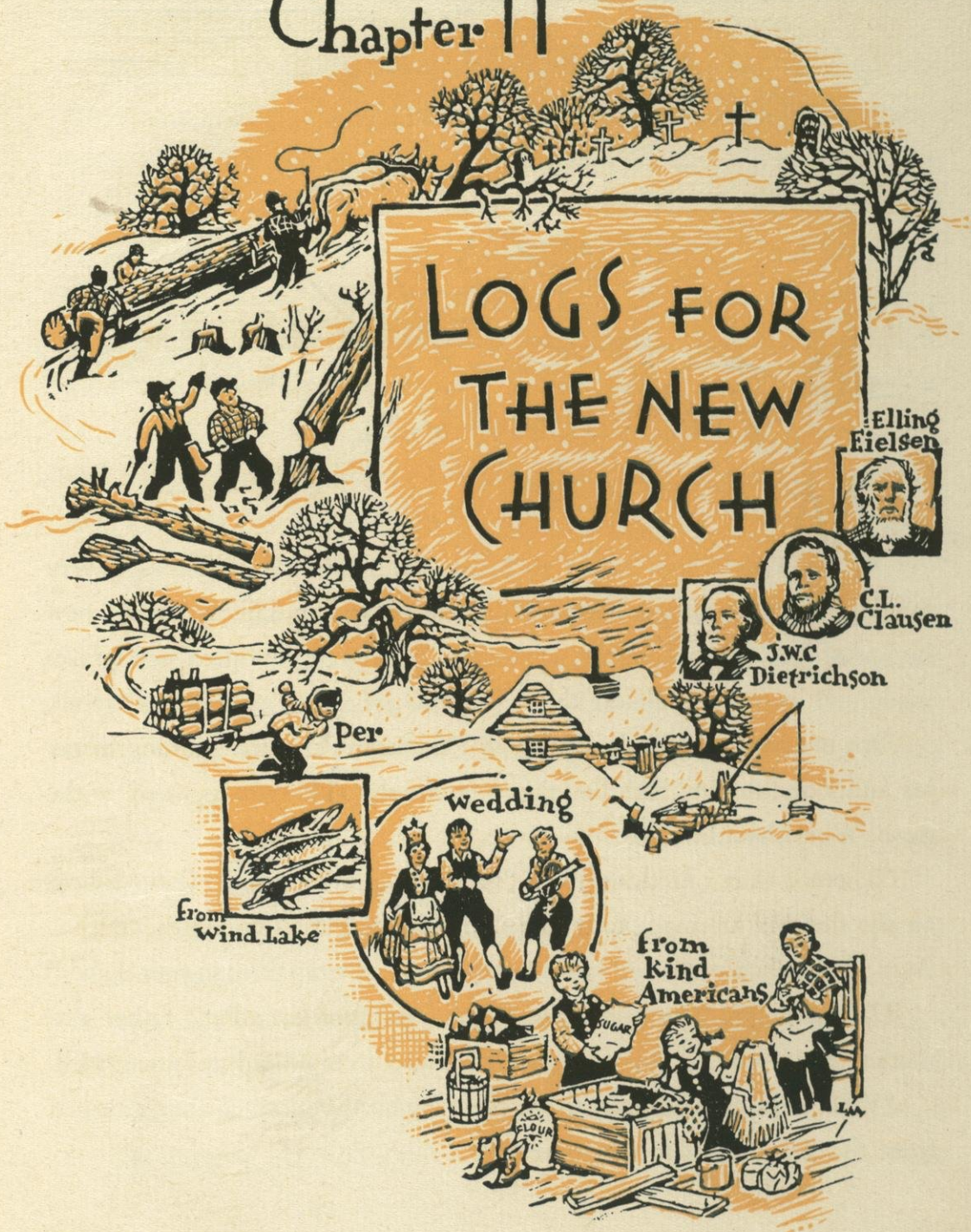
Early the next morning, very early it was, Mikkel awakened at the touch of Mor's arms about him.

“Mikkel, Mikkel,” she whispered softly, “Bestemor has gone.”

Strangely enough, Mikkel did not say a word. In the quiet of the dark loft he thought he heard Bestemor whisper,

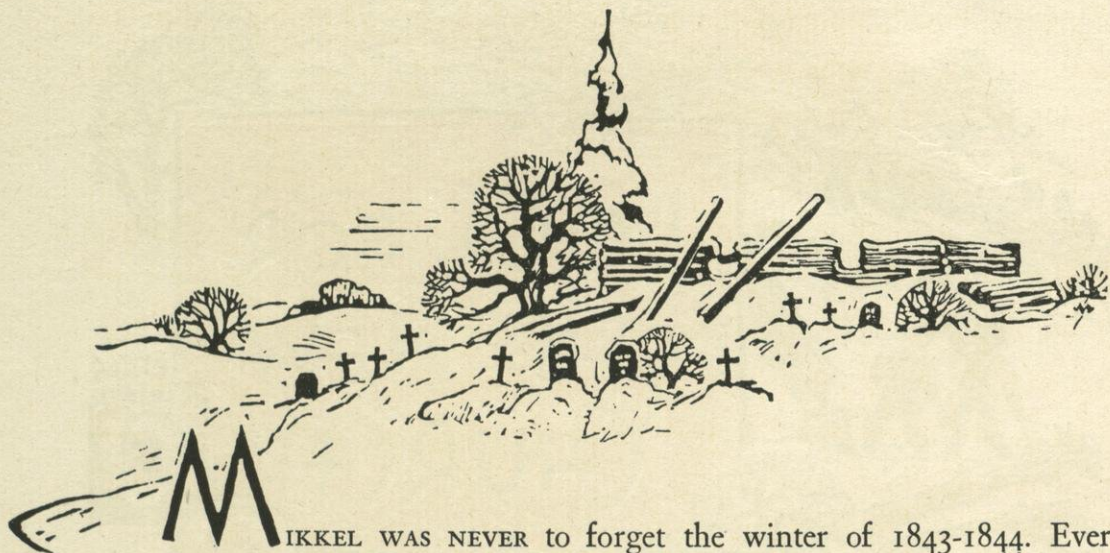
“The peace of our God keep you ever!”

Chapter II



LOGS FOR
THE NEW
CHURCH





MIKKEL WAS NEVER to forget the winter of 1843-1844. Every Sunday when he visited Bestemor's grave on Indian Hill he found new humps of fresh earth. The first of January there were seventeen new graves made—all in one day. Before the winter was gone there were seventy in all.

One morning early in the middle of December Per came running to say his father and mother both had the fever and that there was no wood for the stove. What should he do?

"There is only one thing to do," said Mor. "We must bring them here on the sled Mikkell made to fetch wood. Mikkell, get all the quilts we have. Aunt Martha, warm the bed stones on the stove and wrap them in your shawl."

Day and night Mor and Aunt Martha watched over Per's father and mother, but it was no use—they, too, died and were buried at Indian Hill.

"What is going to happen to me now?" sobbed Per, when they returned from the sad journey to the graveyard.

“Why, there is no question about that!” said Mor. “You will live with us and be Mikkel’s brother.”

Mikkel sometimes wondered what he would have done without Per. When Mor and Aunt Martha both became sick and somebody had to stay home, it was Per who went to the woods with the sled and brought home wood. When Baby Kristi became fretful and sick and Mor said she could not live without milk, it was Per who went three miles to see a settler with a cow and persuaded him to let them get a quart each day—and it was Per who walked the six miles every day to get it. When the icy blasts of the north wind blew out the chinking between the logs, it was Per who helped Mikkel stuff the holes with prairie hay from their bed in the loft. It was he, too, who caught three large fish in Wind Lake so they had fresh fish to go with their wild rice on Christmas Eve.

* * *

The winter had its laughter as well as its tears, its joys as well as its sorrows. There were weddings and baptisms in the settlement as well as funerals.

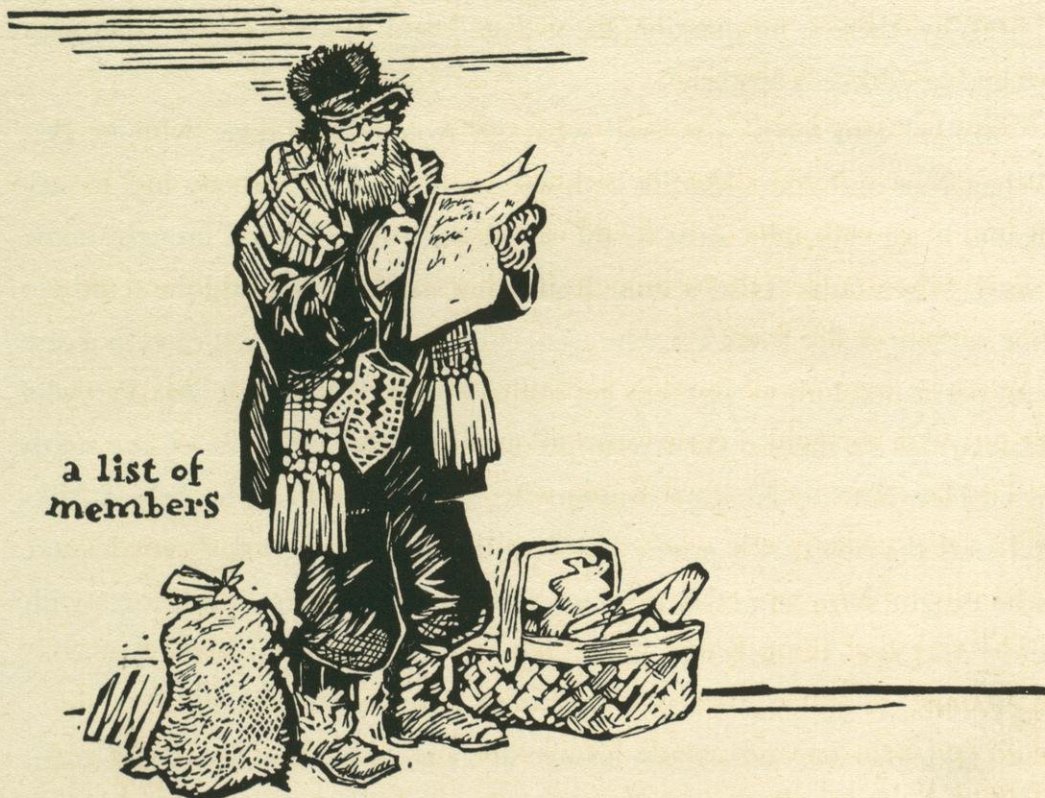
There was the happy day when a list of all the members of the new Muskego congregation—two hundred and seventy in all, counting the women and children—came around.

“What are we supposed to do with it?” Mikkel asked the settler who brought it to the door.

“The farmers are putting down what they will give to help with Pastor Clausen’s salary.”

“Far has gone to the north woods, and we—we haven’t any money,” said Mikkel in a low voice.

“Most of us Muskego folk don’t have any more than you, but the farmers are promising to pay with corn, wheat, oats, meat, potatoes, and things like



that. We thought maybe you people would like to give us an idea of what you can do, anyway.”

“We—we haven’t any—that is, we’ve hardly enough—” stammered Mikkel.

“Mikkel,” called Mor from the bed, “why don’t you and Per pick wild rice every fall for Pastor Clausen? I’m sure he could use that. Next summer, when Far comes home, we may have some money for the pastor’s salary, but right now we can sign up for wild rice.”

“Why, of course!” exclaimed the settler.

Mikkel proudly wrote his own and Per’s name under Far’s, and after their names—two bushels of wild rice, to be paid next October.

And then there was the happy day in January when Pastor Clausen brought a stranger to the cabin.

"This is Artist Lund," he said to Mor and Aunt Martha. "Some kind Americans have heard about the sickness here in the settlement and have sent him to us with gifts of food and clothing."

Before the stranger left, he brought in a big box from his sleigh and set it in the middle of the floor.

When he went out of the door he smiled at Karen and said, "Maybe the little girl with the golden curls wants to open the box."

"Did he mean me?" asked Karen when he had gone.

"Is there anybody else who's a little girl with golden curls?" cried Per impatiently. "Hurry up, Karen!"

The very first thing Karen pulled out was an American dress of calico and a bonnet to match. Although they must have been meant for Mor, she had to try them on and parade before Mor and Aunt Martha. It was Per and Mikkel who finally looted the box and called out the names of things as they dumped them on the floor.

"A shawl for Mor!"

"A pair of shoes for Aunt Martha!"

"Oh, they will never fit me!" laughed Aunt Martha, weak and ill though she was. "They are much too narrow. They must have belonged to some rich lady."

"A pair of jeans—two pairs of jeans—one for Mikkel, one for me," shouted Per.

"A bag of sugar! Mor! Mor! Look, it's real sugar!" cried Mikkel.

"Just when I am so tired of molasses I can't stand the sight of it, too," laughed Mor.

"Flour, salt, lard—hurrah! Now we will have some lard on our corn bread again! Maybe it will slide down easier," chuckled Per.

"I haven't noticed any sticking in your throat, Per!" teased Mikkel. "It seems to find its way down all right."

On winter days when Mor felt well enough to be up—that is, if there was a squirrel or a fish frozen in the snow bank for the next day and the wood pile was up to their chins—on those days Mikkel and Per took time off to watch the men cutting logs for the new church. They held their breaths when a great oak began to creak and sway; then they ran off to a safe distance and the mighty tree crashed to the ground.

They were startled one afternoon to discover Pastor Clausen at one end of a saw.

"Do you see what I see?" gasped Per.

"That just shows you!" exclaimed Mikkel, his face aglow with admiration.

"Shows what, Mikkel?"

"It just shows what a wonderful country this is! Can you imagine a minister back in Norway sawing logs together with a common farmer? No, sir! I wish Lars could see this!"

"He wouldn't believe his eyes," chuckled Per.

"He wouldn't believe it, either, if he saw hired men eating at the same table with their masters, or drivers eating with their passengers in restaurants, the way Even Heg says they do. He says, too, that he saw the sheriff in Milwaukee mending his own chimney. Yes, sir, Per, this is a wonderful country all right!"

Sometimes Mikkel wished he had time to go to school and learn more about America. Since it was impossible to be the man of the house and a



school boy, too, he had to content himself with learning English by comparing the English Catechism which Pastor Clausen gave to him with his old, worn Norwegian Catechism.

Per was scornful when Mikkel recited the first commandment to him in stumbling English.

“Why do you want to learn the Catechism in English? The Bible was written in Norwegian, wasn’t it? Then why have the Catechism in English?”

When Mikkel told him that Elling Eielsen, a young pastor who had visited Muskego many times and preached to the settlers, had walked—*walked, mind you!*—all the way to New York just to get the Catechism printed in English, Per was a little more respectful and decided he would try learning it, too.

Mikkel learned much, too, by keeping his ears open and by asking questions. One afternoon in the woods he heard Pastor Clausen talking about Wisconsin Territory.

“Where is Wisconsin Territory?” asked Mikkel.

The tall young minister leaned on his axe and smiled. “You are standing on Wisconsin Territory right now.”

"Isn't this America?"

"Do you remember what I told you about the stars in the flag and the states of the United States? Well, Wisconsin isn't a state yet—it does not have enough people. But at the rate people are pouring in to settle here, it won't be long before we are a state and get a star in the flag."

Mikkel thought a while before he spoke again.

"I shouldn't be saying I live in America then, should I? I really live in Wisconsin Territory, in the United States, don't I?"

"That is right! You are a smart boy, Mikkel. Are you going to be at the head of your confirmation class?"

"I'm going to try," answered Mikkel, blushing to the roots of his fair hair.

"There's no doubt that he will," said a farmer, as he drove off with his oxen to bring a twenty foot log for the church on Indian Hill. "It's a good report we'll be giving his father when he comes home from the north woods this spring."

Mikkel did not wait to watch the next giant tree fall. Without even saying good-bye he turned his face homeward and trudged through the deep snow.

"A good report," the man had said. A good report! What was there to report? Bestemor had died. Per's father and mother had died. Mor and Aunt Martha had been sick in bed since Christmas. The pretty color was all gone from Karen's cheeks. Baby Kristi did not laugh and crow all day long as she once had done. The food was almost all gone—in fact, it probably would not last until Far and Uncle Knud came home.

A good report! Yes, a fine report it would be!

Mikkel wiped his eyes with his rough, ragged sleeve and broke into a run.

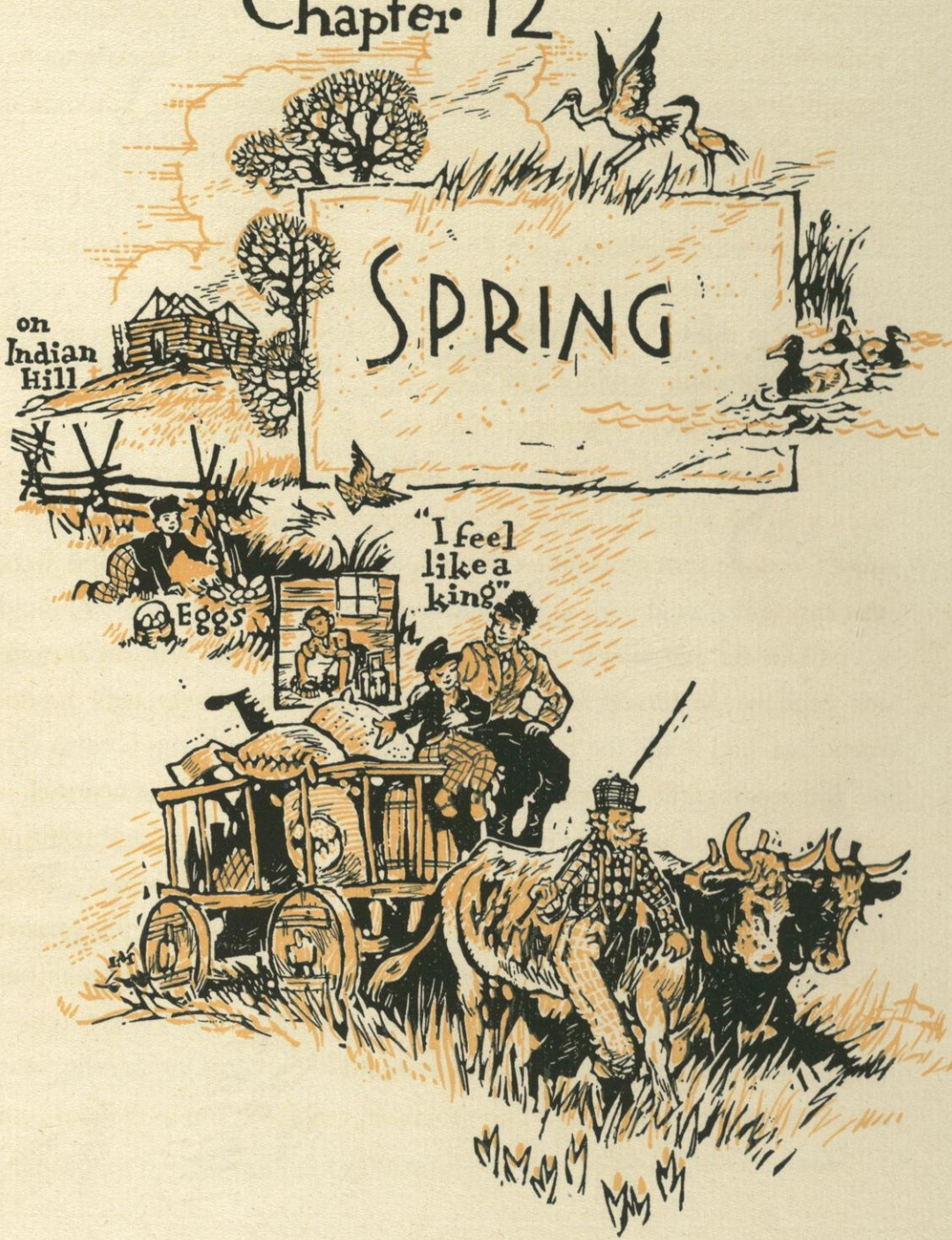
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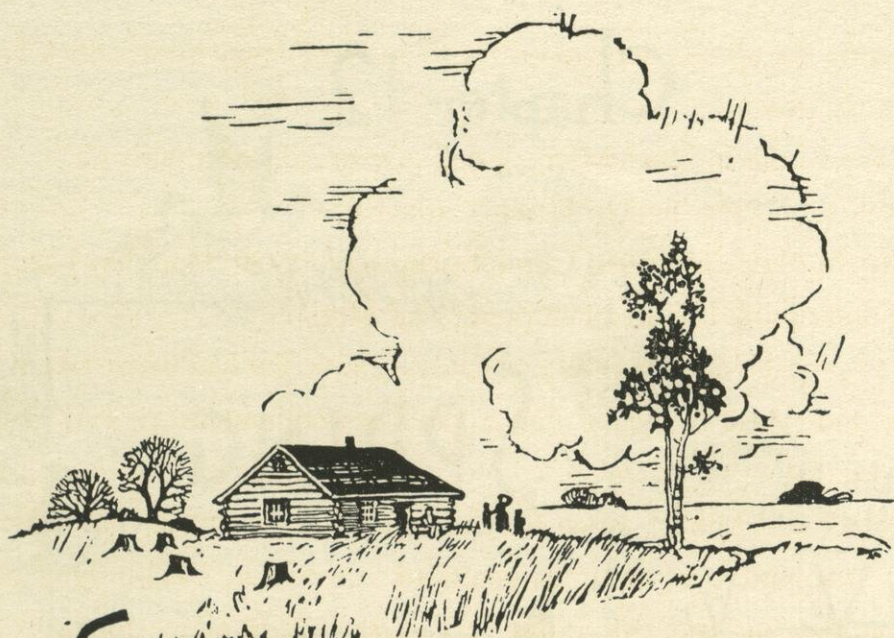
on
Indian
Hill

SPRING

"I feel
like a
king"

Eggs





SPRING CAME like a miracle. One week the ice in Wind Lake was black and soaked with water; the next week most of the lake lay limpid and blue under a blue sky. Almost over night the herons and ducks were back, and the prairie chickens were filling the sunset hours with sound. Warm rain had made the prairie green again. The dried, wind-beaten cat-tails and reeds of the swamps began to look drab and dull in comparison.

Spring worked another miracle in driving away the fevers and colds of winter. Some of the sallowness left Mor's and Aunt Martha's cheeks. Soon they were able to be up and around, scrubbing the cabin in a way Mikkell and Per never could. Kristi's wobbly first steps became strong and sure out under the sun. Karen went wild with delight over the surprises of spring and brought home armfuls of buttercups to brighten the house. One day she came running with curls flying.

"Mor! Mikkell! Look! Look! See my pretty baby chicken!"

Gently she opened her cupped hands and let a fuzzy brown chick tumble out on the ground.

"May I keep it, Mor? Maybe it will give us eggs next winter."

"Where did you find it, Karen?" asked Per.

"By the buttercup patch. I almost stepped on it. Oh, Mor, may I keep it?"

"I don't think it is a real chicken," said Mor.

"It's probably a baby prairie chicken. I think you had better take it back where you found it, Karen, for it can't live without its mother," advised Aunt Martha.

"Mor," said Mikkel, when Karen had tearfully taken her "baby chicken" back to the buttercup patch, "do you think it would be cruel to hunt prairie chicken nests and take two or three eggs—*just two or three*—for us to eat?"

Mor's face brightened suddenly. "Not when all we have eaten for one month is boiled wheat and molasses—with rabbit or fish now and then. Eggs! Oh, Mikkel! But be sure they are not old eggs, and don't take any more than three, will you?"

It was not easy to find eggs. A whole day's search sometimes brought only enough for supper.

One night after Per and Mikkel had come home from such a search, Karen wrinkled her button nose and sniffed.

"Mor, I smell onion."

"That's funny! I do, too, but I thought it was because for weeks I have been wishing for onions to put in our fish soup."

Mikkel and Per looked at each other.

"Shall we tell?" whispered Per.

Mikkel cleared his throat.

"We found wild onion today. We —we ate some."

"Are you *sure* it was wild onion? Are you sure it wasn't something poisonous?" cried Mor in alarm.

"We aren't dead yet, but we—we did worry," confessed Per. "But it must be wild onion. It tastes like onion, and it smells like onion, doesn't it?"

"Indeed it does!" laughed Aunt Martha. "If it *is* onion, we will certainly try it. There is nothing like it to perk up spring appetites."

Mikkel was not indifferent to the wonder of new pale-green leaves and the songs of birds he had never before heard. If he did not sit up in bed and listen to the whippoorwills, it was not because he was asleep and did not hear them. It was because his mind was filled with one fearful thought night and day. That the same fear haunted Mor and Aunt Martha he knew very well, for he heard them toss about and whisper far into the night. Many were the times he caught Mor shading her eyes and looking anxiously over the prairie.

When Mor found Mikkel staring at the horizon this way, he always made some cheerful remark about the new church going up on Indian Hill, as if it were the church he had been looking at.

"The church is going up fast, Mor. They say we shall be using it this fall," he would say.

Or—"Isn't it wonderful that we can see our church from so far away?"

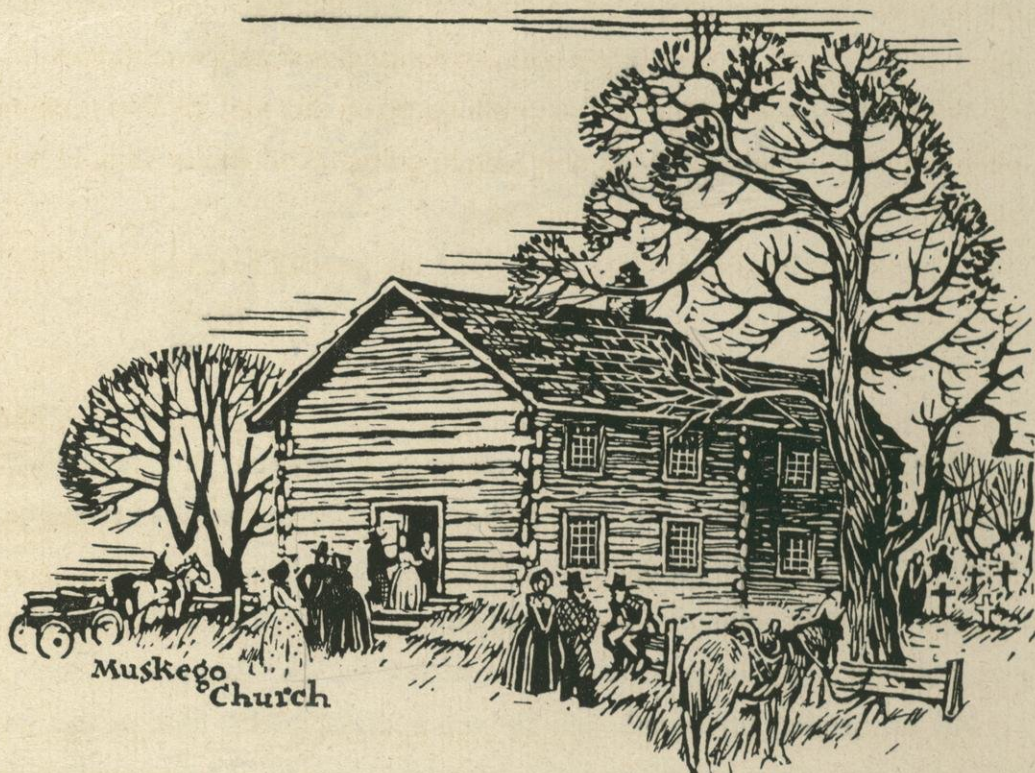
Or—"I like to see the new church going up beside Bestemor's grave. She wanted a church for us more than anything, didn't she?"

But he wasn't fooling Mor, and Mor did not fool him either. What they really wanted to say was, "Where are Far and Uncle Knud? Will Far never come? They said they would be back in the spring. Could something have happened to them?"

One late afternoon, when Mikkel was just about to turn back from a hunt for eggs, he saw a speck in the distance. Ever since Easter Mikkel had

hopefully watched specks in the distance, hoping they would turn into two walking men, and the men would be Far and Uncle Knud. Always he had been disappointed, and apparently he was mistaken again, for this speck turned into a *kubberulle* drawn by two oxen.

Mikkell picked up a clod of dirt and threw it angrily at a gopher, but a minute later he let a green-striped snake slide away without even looking twice at it. The frogs in a nearby swamp sang madly with the joy of being alive, but Mikkell did not hear them. Suddenly the strain of the long winter and the dull misery of his longing for Far's return were too much for the little boy in him. He stiffened his body against the sobs that seemed to rise from the deep pit of his stomach, but they would not be governed.





How long he stood on the prairie, shaken by desperate crying, he did not know. Not until he heard his name spoken did he move, and then it was to whirl in the shame of being discovered.

"It *is* you then, Mikkel," said an old familiar voice—and there stood Far gaunt of body and shaggy of hair and beard, but Far just the same.

Mikkel opened his mouth, but no words came. In the first second he wanted to throw himself at Far and hug and kiss him wildly, the way Karen

would do when she saw him; but something held him back. When Far held out his hand, Mikkel gripped it hard.

"How are things at home?" asked Far quietly.

Mikkel opened his mouth again. A look of misery swept away the joy in his face. His eyes fled across the prairie to Indian Hill.

"Yes, I know," said Far, following Mikkel's eyes. "We met Pastor Clausen a mile or so back, and he told us about Bestemor."

Mikkel's eyes dropped to the ground.

"Pastor Clausen told me everything, Mikkel, and now before we go home I want to thank you for taking care of Mor and Aunt Martha and the girls the way you did."

"*Thank me, Far?*" cried Mikkel.

"Yes, thank you, my son."

Mikkel looked into Far's eyes—a long look that brought color into his cheeks and a sparkle into his eyes.

Far meant it! Far was proud of him! Far was thanking him!

"It was hard to hear about Bestemor," said Far, "but when I saw the church on Indian Hill, I knew that her wish had come true."

"You did notice it then, Far? It's going to be ready to use this fall." Mikkel's eyes glowed. "Far, do you remember what the minister said on the boat the night before we left Drammen? 'Do not forget your fathers' God.' We haven't, have we? And we won't either!"

Far took Mikkel's hand and squeezed it again. "No, son."

Suddenly Mikkel remembered something. "Uncle Knud? Where—?" And then he saw the oxen and the *kubberulle*.

"Far! Are they *ours*?"

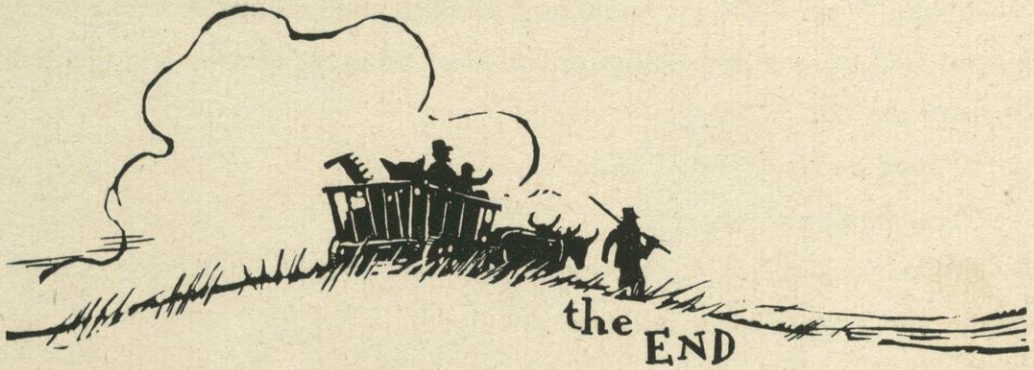
"I should hope so! Uncle Knud and I paid our precious winter's savings

for them. It's a precious load we have, too—seed for the spring planting, a barrel of flour, a sack of sugar, a—”

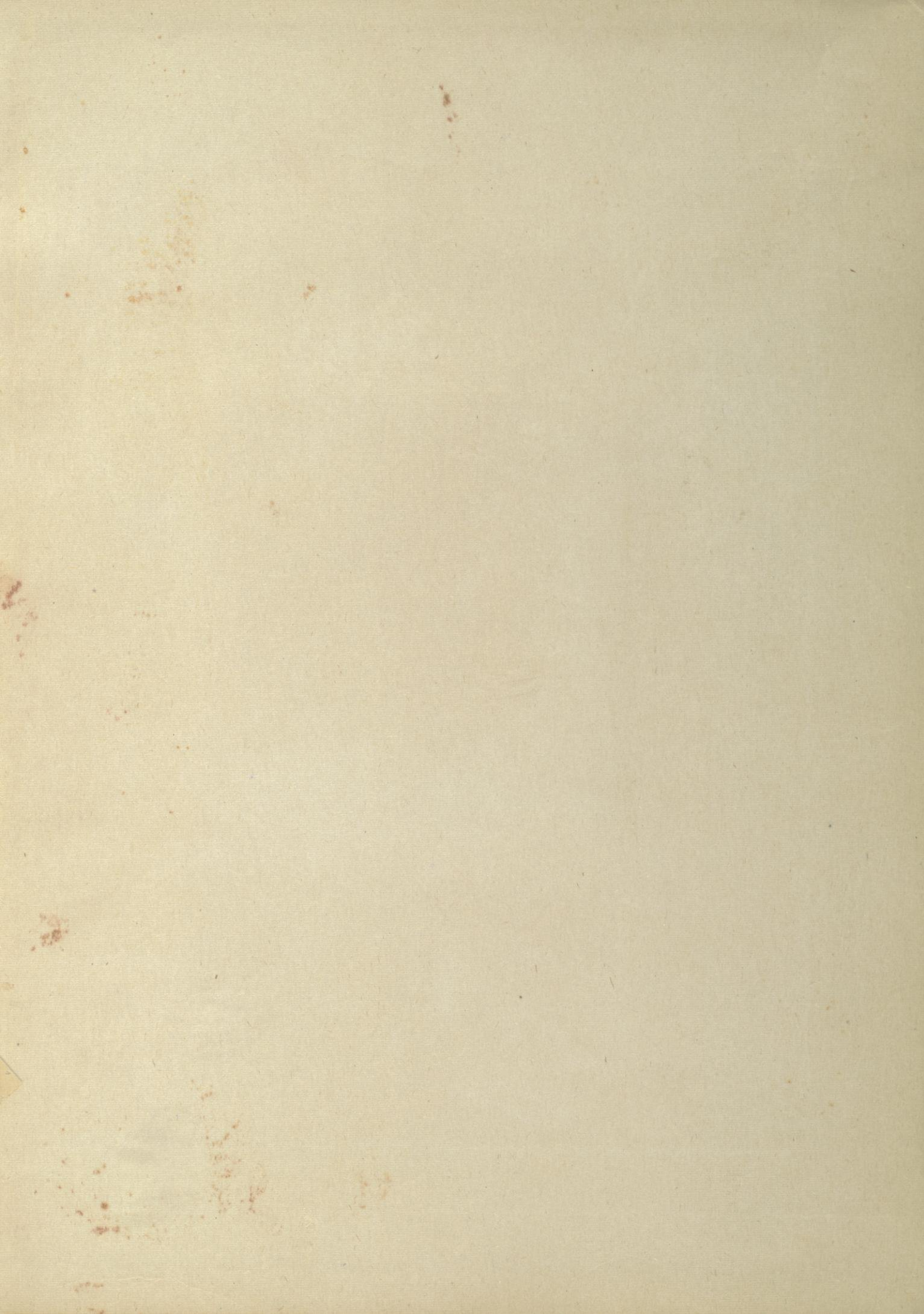
But Mikkel was not listening. He leaped into the seat beside Uncle Knud and shook hands politely, but he could not take his eyes from the oxen. For a long time after the *kubberulle* creaked into motion he did not say a word. Slowly they jogged across the prairie, bouncing in and out of the hollows.

“Well?” asked Far, smiling at Mikkel's absorption.

“Oh, Far!” he said, “Far, I feel like a king!”









WISCONSIN
TERRITORY

LAKE MICHIGAN

Erie Canal

Muskego
Church
1843

Milwaukee

Chicago

Beaver
Creek

HONG, EDNA AND HOWARD		
AUTHOR		
MUSKEGO BOY		
TITLE		
DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

Bring
Mar 14

Muskego Boy

HONG, Edna and
HONG

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