

# An untold American frontier story perfect for readers of *Little House on the Prairie*.

North Dakota, 1905

After fleeing persecution, eleven-year-old Shoshana and her family, Jewish immigrants, start a new life on the prairie. Shoshana takes fierce joy in the wild beauty of the plains and the thrill of forging a new, American identity. But it's not as simple for her older sister, Libke, who misses their Ukrainian village and doesn't pick up English as quickly or make new friends as easily. Desperate to fit in, Shoshana finds herself hiding her Jewish identity in the face of prejudice, just as Libke insists they preserve it.

Shoshana must look deep inside herself to realize that her family's difference is their greatest strength. By listening to the music that's lived in her heart all along, Shoshana comes to recognize the resilience and traditions her people have brought all the way to the North Dakota prairie.

“A moving, gently kind coming-to-America story.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Meyer layers richly detailed depictions of Jewish traditions, stunning descriptions of the landscape, and a highly sympathetic narrator to convey an underreported historical arc.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A beautifully written novel that also touches on the forced removal of Native Americans.”

—*Book Riot*

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# One

**1905**

At first, they only threw tomatoes. Then it was rocks. Soon you couldn't tell what was the splatter of tomato and what was blood. Women screamed and ran, stumbling over rolling cabbages, crashing into tipped-over carts. Others frantically tried to snatch up squashes and radishes and onions before they were trampled.

"Tsivia!" Mama shouted. "Perle!" She grabbed my little sisters, pulling her shawl over their heads, as if that could protect them.

"Libke!" I ran to my older sister, who stood frozen behind our potato cart. Something struck my cheek. Tomato splattered all over me. Drunken peasants laughed.

"Come on, Libke!" I screamed. "Forget the potatoes!"

I had to yank her arm to get her to run. But then she moved fast. A rock whistled by my ear as I knelt near Mama. "Let's go! We're all here!"

“I can’t run with two babies!”

“I’ll take Pearlie! Give Tsivia to Libke!”

Mama grabbed the heavy market basket, heaped with cabbages and onions.

“Leave it!” I wanted to shout, but it was our food for next week. And we’d already lost the cart and the potatoes.

Pearlie wailed, and I pressed her curly head against my shoulder. Mama and Libke and I hurried as fast as we could while lugging toddlers and a heavy basket, trying not to slip on the smashed bits of vegetables. The attackers were behind us now. Ahead of us in the fleeing crowd, old Faivish hobbled unsteadily with a cane and a sack of last winter’s apples slung over his shoulder.

Suddenly two of the tsar’s soldiers—Cossacks with huge mustaches—were blocking the road.

“You here, with the slow ones! Are you a man or an old woman?” one of them taunted Faivish. The Cossack grabbed Faivish’s cane. The other kicked him. Faivish fell. The apples rolled away.

Faivish pushed himself up and screamed at the big soldier with the mustache. Blood came out of his mouth when he yelled, along with a bit of tooth. “Coward!”

His daughter wailed, kneeling by him.

“Jew parasites!” The soldier struck madly at the crowd. He caught the side of Mama’s leg, and she went down, striking her head on a rock.

“Mama! *Mamenyu!*” Libke and I cried out together.

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“Get the little ones to safety,” Mama whispered, as Libke wiped blood out of her eyes. “Go!”

We didn’t listen. Between us, we pulled Mama to her feet, leaving the fallen basket and our cabbages rolling in the dust.

Somehow, with Mama drooping and limping between us, we got home. With less to eat than we’d started out with.



That night I lay in bed beside Libke, not sleeping, wishing desperately for Papa and our big brother, Anshel. They’d been gone so long. When the rumors started up about young Jewish boys being forced into the tsar’s army again, Papa and Anshel had rushed to leave for America. Papa had always wanted to farm his own land. He’d heard of a family from a nearby village who had gone to America to do just that. So Papa and Anshel had headed to the same place. Now they were working hard, farming the rocky soil, Papa wrote, making a start for all of us. Papa said that it was our job, Libke’s and mine, to help Mama and to get ready for America by studying English with Hirsh, the rabbi’s nephew. I liked learning English well enough. It was fun to call my little sister Perle “Pearlie,” because one day Hirsh had told me that would be her English name. But—America?

I understood why Papa and Anshel had to leave, of course. But now it almost felt as if they had disappeared from the world. We were all alone here, me and Libke and Mama and the babies, with Papa and Anshel all the way across the ocean

in America. My belly felt hollowed out and cold, remembering how far away they were. So far away, I couldn't even imagine it.

Our cat, Ganef, snuggled between me and my sister on top of the red-and-blue crocheted blanket. Shivering, I stroked her, and she stretched her tawny foreleg out lazily.

Ganef was a peaceable sort of cat. Not the sort to fight unless she had to. Still, I ran my finger over the soft, pale-pink underside of her forepaw, feeling the tips of the claws tucked inside. Those knife-sharp edges made me feel just the tiniest bit safer.

I closed my eyes against the moonlight. The reassuring vibration of Ganef's purr rumbled against me, gradually making me feel less alone.



For the next few weeks, Malke, our kind next-door neighbor, helped us tend to Mama. She brought us mushroom barley soup and potato soup and, once, on Shabbos, a whole roast chicken. She insisted on doing part of the wash, the very worst part. Soon the twins' diapers were waving merrily in the wind every afternoon behind her cottage.

"People will say I've had a baby!" she giggled to Mama. "From their mouth to God's ears! How are you feeling today?"

Mama smiled back faintly. "Still dizzy. Can you write a letter for me?"

I was in the other room, washing dishes. Ganef rubbed against my ankles, and I handed her a bit of fish from one of the

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plates. I could have written a letter for Mama, I thought. But I guess she wanted a grown-up to do it.

“To Shmuel?”

“Yo.” Mama nodded, then winced. “I keep forgetting to hold my head still. Please tell Shmuel . . .”

She lowered her voice, but in our small cottage I still heard every word. “Tell him it is getting too dangerous here. Attacks on Jews are happening more and more often. Tell him, even if he has to borrow, he should send the tickets as soon as possible. It’s time for us to leave Liubashevka and join him and Anshel in America. In Nordakota, America.”