I.

The beginning of the 28th of November 1850 was quite overcast. It was already eight o’clock and the sun so far had not penetrated the thick fog that enveloped the port town of Galveston. In spite of the fog and raw weather, the port was still virtually overflowing with people for there was the expectation of the arrival of a big sailing ship from Hamburg with many hundreds of immigrants, which for the inhabitants, especially the businessmen, was a very important event.

In the fifties there were not that many immigrants as in recent times, and so each ship with them was welcomed with yearning, especially in Texas where entire sections of beautiful and very rich virgin soil awaited industrious and hardworking hands. Galveston businessmen as well as those from smaller towns reaching up as far as San Antonio felt rightly that the flourishing of agriculture, business and industry depended exclusively on immigration from Europe and from the settling of the extensive prairies and forests of the far West. And therefore, they behaved towards the new immigrants as kindly as possible. They did not exploit them, to the contrary, they helped with advice and concrete actions. Both sides were gaining in those interactions. A new settler having been convinced during the time that
he was being dealt with fairly gained trust towards the Galveston businessmen and did not mind the distance of the hundreds of miles. He transported his harvest, or cotton either to Galveston or Houston, and he bought there the most important supplies and foodstuffs for the whole year. After all such a journey was not only difficult and lengthy, but also very dangerous, since bands of horse thieves and other robbers often bothered the crews of settlers on their way home, knowing well that they were carrying with them an abundance of money and supplies. The settlers, however, were always going together in groups. They were also ready for such raids and being well armed they usually drove off each attack of the robbers. Such a caravan was composed sometimes of up to a hundred and fifty wagons. It stretched for miles on the road, since each of the loaded wagons had three to four pairs of oxen, or two pairs of mules. It is understandable that such an excursion could move forward only very slowly and nobody would be surprised to read that the settlers from Fayette County, Burleson, or Austin were on the road from six, seven or even up to eight weeks, since the distance of those mentioned settlements comes to almost 400 miles, and the settlers could not ride more than eighteen or twenty miles a day.

The people who were awaiting the ship in the port were divided into different groups according to whether they had a direct personal interest in the arrival of the immigrants, or whether they came only out of curiosity. The first were composed of businessmen and farmers who came to welcome their countrymen and acquaintances and help them in their further journey into the interior of the country. The second group then were workers, clerics, blacks and youths who were curious and wanted to see the new immigrants. The brokers, announcers and all kinds of extortionists that the northern port cities, mainly New York and Baltimore, were so richly populated with were not that numerous here and even those few did not have the courage to approach too brazenly, since they knew that the solid businessmen who were present, or the friends and countrymen of the immigrants would spoil their business very quickly in a manner that was not very kind.

In the groups of businessmen there was a lively discussion about the type of immigrants coming this time, whether those were rich farmers or only workers, or whether those were mostly Germans, or Czech-Moravians. They were looking mostly for the latter, because they made most of their business with them, since almost every one of them was coming with a small amount of capital sufficient for the first and most pressing needs. The one who did not have even that much, had at least some acquaintances and friends who took care of him. Hardly anyone would go to Texas on a whim.

Out of this admixture of people awaiting the arrival of the ship, and from all those groups we are most interested in a group of six men and two young women. At first glance we recognize them as Slavs, Czech-Moravians. The men in general are still young and well-built and as well as the young girls, neither of which counted more than eighteen springs. Their conversation was animated and was accompanied with lively gesticulation. One of the men said:

“I would like to know when the darn fog will lift up. One cannot see through it even a hundred steps. How then can one see a trans-oceanic ship miles away? I am on pins and needles. And if it were not the Bláha family that I am expecting to be on this ship, I would not have waited for such a long time, but what if they do not come? “

“Oh they will certainly come,” ardently insisted one of the young women, “since they wrote verbatim that they were sailing off on a big three mast ship ‘Victoria’, the arrival of which was announced already yesterday. Besides that they tell me also — “
“The faithful, inflamed little heart, says that on the ‘Victoria’ can be found a certain Josef Bláha, who three years ago stole the little key to my heart, and now is bringing it back to me,” laughed one of the young men. “Isn’t that so, Marie?”

The young girl blushed a deep red and having been brought into visible embarrassment, she answered: “Oh go away, you teaser! You don’t remember anything else than to tease people and make fun of them. If you ever wise up it will be a big miracle; it’s more likely that I will become a professor of philosophy – “

“A philosopher of love, Marie! This is what you are already now! You know what, I’ll bet everything that during your exam you would receive an outstanding mark in love. It is too bad that you do not give lessons. I would be the first one who would apply.”

“I would not take you as a pupil, because you have the squawking mouth of a goose, and a butterfly of a heart. True love put down its anchor only in a faithful, steady heart, warm and noble. Your heart, however, is like a sponge. It draws in easily, and even more easily, it gets squeezed out.”

“Excellent Marie! That really hit the mark. You could not have answered in a better way,” the others laughed, and Marie’s friend, Anežka Klimičková added mischievously: “He has deserved it for a long time, this Mr. Busybody.” He should have such a lesson from each one of the women and for sure he would then abandon his fluttering like a butterfly.”

The attacked man was ready to give a sharp answer when he was interrupted by the screams and jubilation coming out of hundreds of throats: “The immigrants! The boats are coming!”

Everybody was pushing as close as possible to the water. The blacks were jumping, dancing and screaming. Men were waving their hats and fur caps; women were waving their head scarves, all to welcome the new immigrants. A strong northwest wind blew the fog apart at least far enough that the sea was visible for about one mile. The sailing ship ‘Victoria’ was not yet visible since it was anchored further away in deeper waters. Instead of that, however, big transport boats were approaching the shore carrying immigrants and cargo. When the first two transport boats moored in the port and the first immigrants started to exit, the hubbub reached its zenith. One person was yelling over another. One was calling out the names of his acquaintances that he expected. Another one was welcoming with a load whoop and embracing and kissing the one they found, and others were whooping, screaming and yelling without any reason, only to prove that they were also glad that new immigrants had come. Somewhat aside, but close to the water were standing our Moravian acquaintances. They were examining intently each person who stepped onto the shore. Otherwise, however, they were behaving quietly. Only Josef Mucha, the youth who had such bad results in his playful jabs with the quick thinking and sharp witted Marie Lešovská, was impatiently shuffling his feet, and standing on his tip toes to better see over the heads of people standing in front of him the bridge, across which the immigrants were coming in. Marie Lešovská also was exhibiting great interest since her cheeks were blushing, her eyes were shining like two diamonds and her whole slim body was trembling in a wistful expectation. Suddenly her eyes lit up, her lips tensed and from them, came forth the sound of rejoicing, “Look, there are our people!” Immediately after the powerful voice of Josef sounded: “Hi, Bláha, Skřivánek, Světlík! Come here, come here!” –
Coming across the bridge at that moment was a man about 50 years old with a well built and strong body, shining eyes and expressive face. He was followed by about a 19-year old young girl, a beautiful, symmetrical body with large shining eyes and a very delicate and attractive face; behind her was walking a young man about 25 years old, tall as a fir tree, but strongly built and exuding an uncommon body strength. His visible resemblance to the young girl denoted that he was her brother, which he really was. With his hand he was leading another no less strong woman and the attention that he devoted to her as well as the resemblance, revealed the mother of the two of them. It was the family Bláha and following it were the other Moravians, seven families with grown up, or even small children, coming to 42 individuals.

When Bláha heard the calling he immediately turned his head in the direction, and then he told his group: “Look, our friends are waiting for us there. Stick with me, so that we can embrace them as soon as possible!” And not even waiting for an answer, with his powerful arms he was pushing his way to the place where his friends were awaiting, followed closely by his wife and children and the other Moravians.—

Josef Bláha was an affluent farmer, originally from one of the cozy little villages lying beneath the hallowed hill Radhošt in which in spite of the German-Jewish pressure and the national renegades, the pure Czech spirit was maintained, the spirit of the Hussites from the past, the yearning for freedom, personal as well as spiritual. In the Bláha family writers had been born since time immemorial, perhaps, even from the Hussite times, sons and daughters learned reading and writing and they knew how to give their ideas expression in flowing language understandable and earthy, which in those times was a very rare occurrence. Even the cruelest persecution, not even prosecution and spying by fanatic priests, could destroy the spiritual zest of the members of this purely Czech family or steal from it books which as a sanctified inheritance were passing from generation to generation. The father taught the sons and the mother taught the daughters and during the long winter evenings, or under the spreading apple tree during the summer they were talking about famous and heroic acts of our ancestors and about the beautiful and glorious times during the rule of the Přemyslids, Charles the IV and George of Poděbrady, as well as about the way of the cross that Czech nation was driven onto after the cursed day of the Battle of White Mountain. The sons and daughters of this clan were suckling this history practically along with their mother’s milk and so it is not surprising that they were so little open to the sweet but premeditated words of the fanatic Roman priests, or the threats of the “Empire and Kingdom governors” and the “German administrators from their castle.” The books and the family notes were always carefully hidden and no constable or sacrilegious thief could find a trace of them.

In spite of the systematic persecution the Bláha family enjoyed throughout all those generations the respect and esteem of the majority of their neighbors and citizens and the office of the mayor of the village almost regularly was passing from father to son. That was because the citizens knew well that the Bláha people meant well for the village and that they were eloquent enough and fearless to defend and or try in the extreme to defend the rights of the community. Like the leaders of the Psohlavci tribe in the Šumava Mountains used to be, that was the Bláha, Kalous, Skřivánek and Lešovský families in the Radhošt Region. The ruling officers did hate them, nevertheless, they could not harm them since their whole life was without any trespass.

The families, Lešovský, Mucha, Skřivánek, Klimiček, Pazdera and Šesták were faithfully associating with the Bláha family. Most of all the Lešovskýs were tied to the Bláhas by feelings more
than friendly, since, as a result of marriage in the family, they were closely related. Even the children of our immigrants, Vojtěch Lešovský and Anna Bláhová burned with a love true and pure and the parents did not interfere with these feelings being glad that it happened in this way.

The first woe in their life was experienced by the loving couple when Vojtěch was drafted into the army. Annie then had not complete sixteen years, however, she was quite intelligent for her age and mature. Her sorrow was boundless and she looked forward only to Vojtěch returning home and their belonging to each other.

Under these conditions the memorable year 1848 came. Everywhere the renaissance of people was blooming. The nations were awakening from centuries-long sleep and were stretching their limbs to shake off the chains of slavery. Even into the little villages beneath Radhošť this voice flew in, and the spirit of freedom burst into flame, proclaiming the truth according to which each person has the same right for free thinking and feeling and moving freely on the surface of this Earth.

In the Bláha and Lešovský homes the hearts soared and when their spiritual friends visited their beloved representative he said with the voice of a prophet: “Look friends, the spring of nations has come and the spirit of freedom and enlightenment will break into smithereens the obscurantism and cruel government!” These words somehow got into the public domain and were reported to the ears of the regional governor. From that point they initiated also the systematic persecution of all freedom thinkers known in the countryside. Bláha encouraged his friends to endure pointing out that the ruling officers after all would eventually tire and abandon the unjust activities. Lešovský was helping him courageously, however, he was sad that this son, being beneath the army whip might be pushed to fight against his brothers.

Then one night the son came home with torn clothes and tired to death. He said that he ran away from the army, because he did not want to spill the blood of brothers. He did not, however, want to join the rebels, either, because he did not believe in a positive result of the uprising. His yearning was to run away to the United States of America, however, he could not do that without money. It goes without saying that he was immediately provided with everything and still that same night he left. The separation of the lovers was emotional, and only the promise that Anna Bláhová would follow him as his bride, as soon as he secured existential needs, attenuated somewhat the pain of the parting.

Already the next day the constables as well as secret policemen were searching the dwellings of the friends of Lešovský and the persecution of everyone was heightened to such a degree that it became unbearable. About half a year later news came from Vojtěch and it was happy and encouraging. He wrote that he had secured a beautiful parcel of land in Washington County in Texas about 20 miles away from the little town of Brenham and that the soil is excellent and the tiny Czech settlement is thriving. The old Lešovský decided immediately together with his friends Mucha, Skřivánek, Klimiček, Pazdera and Šesták. They sold their property. They called upon Bláha as well, but he did not want to go. He did not want to believe in the repeated decline in Czech affairs, to the contrary, he was expecting great things from the rebellion. “And even if not,” he said. “Somebody from among us has to stay here on guard, has to work the ground of the nation, otherwise, our eternal enemy will plant here even more of the German prickly thistle, than so far. If things turn out well for you and if I reach a conviction that my strivings here are in vain, I will join you.” And that is how it went.
However, two years later he was of a different opinion. He realized that after the departure of his friends, he was standing there almost alone, and that in vain he would sacrifice, while on the other side reaching out to him was freedom and affluence.

He decided to emigrate and he wrote to his friend to find and secure a good piece of land close to his own. -- --

“Well, here I am, friends,” said Bláha and having seized the extended hands of his friend Lešovský he squeezed them with fervent emotion. It was apparent that a powerful emotion was shaking him since his whole powerful body was trembling and the lines of his face twitched as if he was having a hard time to suppress his sobs. He extended his hand to each one of them one after another, and having had a look into the sincere faces and faithful eyes of those whom after his family he loved the most, he said warmly: “It makes me happy, friends, this makes me happy when a person after a long time can look into a truthful face and sincerely press a faithful hand. I yearned for you. I yearned and I am glad that I am among you. Now we will be happy as we have not been for a long time. Isn't it so, mom?”

After those words he turned to his spouse, who, surrounded by young men and holding in her embrace Marie Lešovská and Anežka Klimičková wept quietly with happiness. Then, when she overheard the words of her beloved husband, she raised towards him her teary face and answered with a blissful smile: “You are right, Josef. I could not even wait for this moment to happen.” Then getting out softly from the embrace of the young girls, she told Marie: “My, my, what a beautiful young girl you have grown into. Judging by you I have to believe that the American climate is healthy and it makes things grow faster. You are like a budding rose. --- But where is Vojtěch? Isn't he even going to welcome us?”

Vojtěch? – He stood somewhat to the side and was embracing his Anna, who in happy ecstasy, returned over and over his warm kisses.

Bláha perceived the loving couple immediately and having turned his head towards that side he said, whimsically: “Have a look over here, mom, and you will get persuaded that so far, Vojtěch has not forgotten us.”

“Of course he didn’t,” seized the floor old Lešovský, “he thought about you almost more than anything in the world, that is to say through the day and through the night. Now, however, let’s abandon long speeches and all those welcomings here – since we are already attracting the attention of the curious ones – and let’s go to the inn where everything has been prepared for us already. After such a long voyage, you must be certainly exhausted and surely you yearn for rest. Our innkeeper Kaiser will take care of your suitcases and everything that you have on the ship. He might be a German, but he is honest from head to toe. We are all indebted to him, whether it is for good advice or even for a lot of help.

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The third day after the landing of the ship ‘Victoria’ our friends were already on their way home. The old experienced Lešovský meanwhile took care of everything that was necessary for the very beginning, especially foodstuff and also boards needed to build a dwelling, so that Bláha and the other families that came with him would not have any concerns about it; they would not unnecessarily lose time and they would not waste money.
The weather was very beautiful and the newly arrived could not express enough of their admiration that even in this late winter time the open prairies were covered with luxurious greenery and that the soft wind was so pleasurable and warm like in Bohemia during the spring. The fur coat, several days ago so welcoming, had to be taken off because one could not stand it because of the heat.

During animated conversation and making plans for the future the road was going quite fast. On the way also there was no lack of amusement, since at different places, whether at noon or during the night, often they would meet their compatriots, or settlers from other counties, who were taking their harvest to the market place and at that moment they would exchange news, warnings about horse thieves, and such. It was especially the evenings that everybody looked forward to, since around the joyfully crackling fire there was joke and merry stories from life telling, and the singing of folk songs.

It is self-evident that Vojtěch Lešovský and Anna Bláhová were able to find occasions for sweet talks. How many sweet wishes and yearning were expressed? How many hopes and fears? How many kisses and touching of the hands, they did not even know themselves. Lovers do not count them, they are living only in the present time. And it is good this way, since in the coming years, when the sorrows and sufferings of life arrive, those which no one can escape, they can find some consolation in lovely memories.

On the 18th of December our friends arrived in the little town of Brenham and on the 19th in the evening the Bláha family was already standing on their own land. It was a beautiful parcel measuring 160 acres, which Lešovský found for his friend. The old and experienced farmer recognized immediately the value of this soil as well as all of its advantages. Everything was in place, everything that a farmer wishes for most, such as: a forest grove, streaming water, and enough prairie.

“Truly, I could not be more grateful to you, for this choice.” he said to his friend. “And now with gusto let's start to build, so that once again I could be beneath my own roof. Before Christmas Eve some kind of a temporary hovel should stand here, since from time immemorial in our family the eve has not been celebrated anywhere else, but on our own ground and beneath our own roof. This is what I want this year also.

“What are you thinking about, my friend,” retorted Lešovský. “At our place we have enough space, and we will decorate the tree together.”

“Leave me with my willful wish. You know me, and you know that I act on my decisions, and with good forethought. I am not a dreamer, however, I would not like to spend the day and evening anyplace else, but in my own home. Call it quirkiness, or piety towards old traditions, you cannot, however, talk me into something else. The heating stove, as well as the kitchen stove, and the table and chairs we will easily transport from your place, and we will take them the next day back to you. And Vojtěch, then, can already stay here.”

“And what if the north wind comes?” Lešovský was afraid.

“What north wind?”

“An ice storm, driven by a northern blizzard, at a speed of 40 miles an hour. Dear brother, you do not even understand what an evil visitor it is, and how it can surprise us and blow through us. When
it arrives, the thermometer can go from 65 degrees in a short time far below the freezing point and woe to a person or a farm animal, if it catches him in the open prairie.”

“Bah, bah” said Bláha, expressing his opinion without concern. “We will build a temporary, however, sturdy cabin here between the trees, and with our stove we will warm it up so that your blizzard will be glad that it does not melt here. Hopefully, it will not turn over our cabin.”

“That would not be for the first time,” replied with concern Lešovský. “And then you will be here so alone.”

“Ha, ha,” laughed Bláha. “The Bláhas have never been alone at home on Christmas Eve. Every time there have been several guests, for whom there was always prepared a special and loving surprise. This year it will be similar.”

“First of all, the Černý family will be here. They came with us, and they are staying for the current time at the Skřivánek. After supper then will come the neighbors Klimiček, Mucha and Šesták and then you with your own people. Isn’t it so?”

“That all sounds good, and the surprise?”

“And I will tell you this, if you can keep your mouth shut. I want to celebrate the Christmas Eve festivities together with the engagement of our children. Your Vojtěch asked me for it and I already promised, knowing that for my beloved Anna this will be the most appreciated present for Christmas.”

“Just take a look at the young guy!” fulminated Lešovský. “But I agree with it. The children love each other. Let them belong then to each other.” –

The Day of Christmas Eve arrived. Standing on the Bláha section was a voluminous, but also sturdy cabin between strong trees, in which Mrs. Bláhová together with her daughter, and with the help of Marie Lešovská were cooking from early morning. They were boiling, baking and frying to the point that the aroma of the food was wafting into the distant prairie. Vojtěch was a true omnipresent fellow. He was bringing water. He was chopping and bringing wood. He helped in the kitchen and also outside. -- Mostly, however, he found work in the space where his fiancée Anna was. It was visible on him that he felt unspeakably happy, since from his face there exuded a whole sea of happiness. He knew that he was close to the ardently expected joy. He knew that in several days Anna would be completely his.

And Anna too was happy, since she became convinced that the two year-long separation did not diminish the ardent intensity of her first and affectionate love. To the contrary, it had built it up into a powerful flame and in her own happiness she did not see anything unusual in the behavior of her beloved. “He loves me and he is happy whenever I am close to him and if he can help me,” she thought.

Around nine o’clock old Lešovský came bringing the last load of furniture and pine branches for the decoration of the temporary supper place and he did not forget to bring with him also a nice Christmas tree.

“Probably we will have bad weather tonight,” he said.

“Oh I wouldn’t think that,” opined Bláha. “After all the skies are blue and clear and it as warm here as our country in May.”
“Well, exactly because of that,” advised the experienced settler, “because it is so hot and so stifling, we can expect an early change. I would not be surprised at all, if within six hours we would be overcome by a strong northern wind. It is good that we made the cabin quite sturdy.” He turned then to Mrs. Bláhová and to the girls and he added: “Hm, and what about you house ladies, how far have you gotten with your culinary arts? Hurry up, and get done soon, since you will have to help us decorate and beautify our dining room and prepare the tree. I am truly curious what the little Anna will give me for Christmas!”

The young girl gave him a merry answer and during the general amusement, jokes and laughter, which did not slow down the work, the noon came.

The weather, meanwhile changed somewhat. Even though the skies were still clear, the air was quite hot and heavy as lead, so that a person was sweating doing nothing. After the third hour there appeared on the north horizon a black dot that was approaching and growing with an unbelievable speed. At the same time there was rustling, and a roaring sound from the north, as if it were the noise of thousands of mighty wings that increased in intensity and grew with every second. Suddenly a freezing wind started to blow, the skies turned black and like a swarm of demons, blew in a fierce, wild storm and it overturned or chased in front of itself everything that was in its way. The thermometer immediately dropped below the freezing point. The storm was so fierce that it bent enormous trees as if they were reeds, and was shaking the structure like sugar cane. The beginning soft rain like dew immediately turned into ice and the grass, and the herbs and the trees offered a fascinating view. It seemed that every blade of grass had shining pearls and the leaves of grass as well as the small twigs and branches of the trees looked as if they were encased in crystal wrapping.

The intensity of the storm and the unexpectedly severe cold that got into the bones, and the roar of the storm and the horrible rustling of the wind, and the sudden impenetrable darkness frightened somewhat Bláha and his family who had not been expecting anything like it. When, however, the first blow was over, that is when the storm stopped in its insane flight, to take respite, and when in the following daylight, for a moment, they perceived around them the shining intensity of the icy pearls and diamonds on the blades of grass and saw the trees in their crystal wrapping, they could not otherwise than to admire the magnificence of nature which is the most magnificent, precisely in its strange exceptions.

“I wouldn’t have believed it if I had not seen it right now, and if I would not have experienced it,” said Bláha. “And what about now, will it be once again warm and pleasant, like it was this morning?”

“Oh no,” Lešovský laughed. “In a moment we will get the second edition, which will be somewhat rougher than the first one. Now it is only that the windy lady has taken a rest, so that she would not choke.”

“And will it last long?”

“Usually for about three days and three nights, and then we have acceptable weather for a longer period of time.”

The forecast of Lešovský was fulfilled, since in a short time the storm roared up again with renewed speed, which, nevertheless, did not stop our friends in their preparations for the day’s Holy Eve, and did not stand in the way of their merry conversation.
After five o’clock in spite of the blizzard the family Černý showed up, led by father Skřivánek, who knew every inch of this ground, so that he could walk on it with his eyes closed. –

It was now that the true merriment started since Kačenka and Jiřík Černý had energetic and merry spirits and did not have far to go for a joke or a funny retort.

The preparations were continuing successfully and before six o’clock the table was overloaded with the weight of the food and the drinks. This was because during those times hunting was quite substantial, since there was a multitude of stags and does, rabbits, quail, wild ducks and geese, woodcocks, wild pigeons, partridge, and especially the delicate wild prairie chickens. The rivers and the creeks at that time offered an abundance of pike, eels, white fish, catfish and other excellent kinds of fish. If we add to it the domestic animals, then we recognize that there was no paucity of different dishes. A good farmer and a hunter then had better cuisine in Texas than many rich people in Europe. And both Lešovský, Klimiček, as well as Mucha were good hunters so there was no lack of wild animals and fish in their households. Nevertheless, Bláha was not completely happy, since he was missing two things, and those were a glass of good beer and then a true Czech carp. Christmas without a carp! What kind of a Christmas, what kind of a Christmas Eve? And this without a beer. The usual Texas whiskey did not go with such an eve, and home wine on the other hand, is a little too strong. The old Lešovský during this exulted talk was smiling mischievously, and always he would significantly wink at his son Vojtěch as if he was very pleased by it. – Before supper the candles on the tree were lit. There was no hiding with the tree, since there were no small children. Nevertheless, the tree was full of nuts and cookies and figs and oranges, apples and almonds, and there was a small present for the memory of each one. After that everyone sat at the table. The fish soup, even though not from the Czech carps, tasted wonderfully. The same for the pickled black fish with dumplings, and the fried ones. Now, the venison and other game were supposed to be served all together, however, at that point, old Lešovský stood up and asked for a little pause, since he wanted to surprise his friends with something. He got up from the table and accompanied by his son, Vojtěch seriously he walked to the corner where there were barrels with flour and different objects. Having pushed away the flour he bent over and he rolled out two beer kegs, and he immediately tapped one of them.

The clamor of the present people cannot be described and even Bláha was so surprised that he could not find words for his admiration. This was because the beer was a great rarity in the settlements, since it had to be brought in either from Houston, or San Antonio, which was quite a difficult task. Lešovský, however, learned by chance that several weeks before one enterprising German, Louis Krenschel, had started brewing beer in Bluff, in Fayette County, and so without hesitation he asked two neighbors to bring him two small kegs. He did not want to ask Vojtěch to bring it in, so that the surprise would be that much bigger. –

The old Bláha was glowing with happiness. Holding in his hand a foaming chalice, he got up and he started to talk: “Friends, today’s day will remain unforgettable for me. Even though I am in a foreign country far away from the land of my birth, nevertheless, I am among old friends on my own land, and under my own roof. Outside around us a wild blizzard is raging, and its freezing death is destroying the life of everything that it can reach. However, it does not have power over us, since our hearts are warm, and the emotion of true friendship binds us together. This touches not only us, the old ones, but also our own young ones. Myself, I know at least two people, who are nearly dying with yearning for each other. I love both of them and in spite of that I have not given them so far any present for the Christmas
Eve because I was awaiting this moment. It is you my Anna and you Vojtěch, the son of my best friend. I know what would be probably the dearest present for you, and therefore, dear Anna, I give Vojtěch to you and, Vojtěch I am giving you my dearest jewel, my only daughter. Take good care of her! She deserves it. Here, Vojtěch is the permission for marriage brought from Brenham and Justice of the Peace Williams will come probably at any moment.”

Jubilation and embraces followed. The judge also came about an hour later and the young lovers became happy spouses. –

Outside the blizzard was raging. Inside of the Texas [temporary] [LP1] cabin, however, there were several happy people having a good time.

II.

It was once again Christmas Eve, however, thirteen years later in the year 1863.

The place where thirteen years ago was standing the old cabin and which gathered several families for a merry celebration, looked nowadays completely different. The forest around disappeared since it had to make a place for a well-tended garden and in the place of the cabin stood a statuesque farmhouse. Behind it then were horse and cow sheds, log cabins and other farm buildings. Everything that the eyes could see exuded affluence, wellbeing and scrupulous husbandry. Even the rooster that was patrolling the barnyard like a household steward thought that he was better than the neighboring roosters, since he lived with Bláhas. Even the extent of the farm was much bigger since young Bláha having married Kathy Černá took over the farm and several years later he bought an additional 140 acres from the neighbor.

Their marriage was happy and was blessed with five children; three boys and two girls. The oldest, the twelve year old Vojtěch, was skillful enough in farming to be able to help with many tasks.

Neighboring the Bláha farm on the north was the no-less extensive farm of Vojtěch Lešovský. Anna as wife and mother had not lost anything in her attractiveness. To the contrary, she seemed to be more tender and affectionate than before. This family also was very successful and it was a pleasure to watch how she dealt with children and how they were interacting around her.

Two years before, however, they got a cruel blow, since in January, the old Lešovský died and in June he was followed by his faithful companion. The young spouses took this loss hard. The same as it was for the old Bláha, who from that time on was walking somewhat in silence and seldom smiled. Instead he would often go to the neighboring farm of his son-in-law, and he would help with advice and deeds.

The farm in its entirety was also spotless and it expressed everywhere the same well-being as at the Bláhas and nevertheless in both places, today a graveyard silence reigned. The children were walking sadly along the yard and garden, and mother sitting by the bed of the sick one was crying quietly. It was because her beloved husband was brought home half-dead by the distant countrymen and bleeding from two serious shots.

And at the Bláhas also there reigned sadness and sorrow, since the young farmer was not there, the one who so ardently and exemplarily was taking care of everything that was part of the family and farm.
It was like in thousands of other families, since in the troubled times all the young and military able men were torn from the bosoms of their families; either by force, or by choice they went away from their homes and hid in caves and forests, daring to come home only during dark nights and even that with the utmost care.

“We were chased like foxes or rabbits,” I was told by the old settlers, “and our possessions were left to the ravages of chance and depended only on the good will of the rebels. The only good thing was that the inborn nobility of each Southerner did not allow them to hurt women; to the contrary everywhere the farms that were managed by lonely women were spared and woe to the person who would hurt a woman.”

Later in the years 1864-1865 it turned out differently, since as a consequence of the steps by the Union Armies and the excursions of units and the navy to Texas, the Texans were enraged towards anything that seemed to harbor sympathy towards for the United States. Whoever was not with them, they perceived as their enemy, and since the immigrants in the majority expressed little sympathy for the lost cause of the secessionists, the latter perceived them as enemies or as the case may be as snitches.

The special military action started in Texas only after the fall of Vicksburg and Ft. Hudson. If it were not for the treasonous and premeditated politics of Emperor Napoleon III, who forever was behaving with enmity towards the United States of America, the Texas state could have been spared a lot of evil. When on the 10th of June, the French Army invaded the capital of Mexico, United States General Banks received an order to strike into Texas and to seize power over all the strategically important places, especially the capital city of Houston, which was at the same time a railroad center. The lack of means of transportation held back, however, this campaign to a great degree and only on the 5th of September, the 1st Division in the number of a thousand men under the command of Major-General Franklin departed by sea from New Orleans. It was accompanied and supported by the warships, The Clifton; The Sachem, The Arizona, and The Granite City. General Banks, however, did not have good fortune in war, since already his first attack against Sabine Pass ended unsuccessfully. The expedition lost during the attack its best gunships, “The Clifton”, and the “The Sachem” and numerous men and did not achieve anything. The rebels were rejoicing, however, the government of the United States was not idle, but to the contrary it strengthened General Banks and its campaign on the Red River. On the day of the 2nd of November this expedition landed on Brazos Island and on the day of the 6th of November it occupied the town and fort of Brownsville without any opposition, and on the 16th the town of Corpus Christi, and on the 30th it overwhelmed the strong fort, Fort Esperanza. Even though it was a success, it did not have any meaning at all, as long as the United States did not seize the main cities, Houston and Galveston. That, however, was difficult, since at that moment the Texans were stronger on the water, as well as on the land. Their gunships, Tennessee, Gaines, Morgan, and Selma were sturdy and were well armed and both ports, in addition, were defended by a thick and impenetrable mine field. The Texans were strengthening themselves, wherever, and in whichever way they could, and every man able to bear arms, who did not freely join their ranks, was ceased by force. This happened even to numerous Moravians. Old Bláha seeing that there was no escape and being too proud of his son than to let him be chased like a wild animal through ravines and forests, impressed upon him to enter freely the ranks of the Texans. He also gained through this quite a bit of favor from influential persons. He advised, however, his son-in-law to hide during the day at his farm, and go home only during the night. He said that he would oversee his farm himself, and Anna would be helped by her
mother and her sister-in-law. “It is enough that one in the family sacrifices himself for an unjust and lost cause,” he said.

Josef Bláha was enlisted into the Brenham Volunteers with whom he was sent to defend the town of Galveston. He was sending frequent news. He wrote that he was placed on the gunship Tennessee, and that he had comparatively good conditions. He did not live through any battles, so far, because the ships of the United States, at that time did not have the courage to approach the mouth of the Brazos River that was quite strongly fortified, not to mention Galveston. So far, therefore, everything was in order. In the surroundings of the Bláha and Lešovský farms units of Texas Calvary seldom came since Bláha, as well as Lešovský were liked by the local offices and especially the country sheriff was well inclined.

This is why they were lulled into carelessness, and young Lešovský ceased to be wary and was going to hunt and often he would go far away into the surroundings in spite of the pleading of his wife and the warning voice of his father-in-law and mother-in-law.

It was on the 23rd of December when Job news reached the farm of Bláha. It was a long letter from young Klimička who was serving along with Bláha in the army in one of the companies. The part which impacted the Bláha family is the following:

“We were cruising on our gunship, the Tennessee between Sabine Pass and Galveston, and we were of quite merry dispositions, since the ships of the United States were running away from us like a rabbit in front of a forester. On the 13th, however, we did meet unexpectedly with the mighty cruiser, “Black Hawk”, which went on the attack and began to shoot at us. My friend Bláha and I were standing on the deck, closely side by side, and we were laughing at the balls that were flying over our heads. Then suddenly something swished through the air and Bláha and three comrades were rolling over the deck, their bodies shattered. The poor souls were killed instantly and were frightfully disfigured. Then a cruiser, Morgan, came to our aid, and the “Black Hawk” having torn away from me my most faithful friend took flight like a real bird of prey. Do support the Bláha family as much as you can. “

This was a cruel blow, nevertheless it did not bend the neck of the old Bláha. He tried to stay as positive as he could. He was giving strength to his wife, and to the widow, to the sister, and to the son-in-law, even though it was a miracle his own heart did not break from sorrow. He himself brought the Christmas tree from the forest and he himself with the older grandchildren decorated it with cookies and fruit. His son-in-law, Vojtěch had enough to do at home, since his wife who loved her brother fervently, took the loss too much within her heart and was walking around the house spiritless.

On Christmas Day, already early in the morning, Vojtěch left home to hunt in spite of the pleading of his wife, who with a sinister premonition was trying to dissuade him. “We have enough poultry,” she said “And Klmičeks sent us fish, two wild ducks and half a dozen partridges.”

“I am not going to go far, and I will be back around noon,” retorted Vojtěch.

“And what if the Texans come? You can run directly into their hands and then I will lose you too.”
“Don’t be worried, dear. Today is Christmas Day, and at that time even a soldier spends it gladly among his four walls. Be assured that I will return soon, and I will bring an abundance of killed game.”

Having kissed his wife and children he went to meet his fate.

It was noon, then one o’clock and her husband did not return. Anna would go outside every five minutes and with worry she was looking towards the prairie to see if he was not coming. Her heart was squeezed by painful foreboding and it was a wonder that she did not start to weep aloud.

Towards two o’clock in the afternoon she saw out on the prairie a group of men carrying a load. Now she was already sure that her husband had met with misfortune. With a mad speed she ran to meet the men and shortly after she was kneeling besides the seriously wounded Vojtěch.

Her premonition was correct. While hunting, Vojtěch had encountered the recruiters and while fleeing he was shot in his back and into his right leg. They took him to the closest farm and from there he was carried home. Anna was almost in despair, and her father and mother themselves half out of their minds, because of the loss of their beloved son, had to invest themselves in their eloquence together with their paternal and maternal love in order to calm her down a little bit, and they were successful only when the doctor said that the wounds were not necessarily mortal and there was hope for recovery, if he would be well nursed. Be nursed! If the recovery of a beloved one depended only on that, oh for sure he would not die, since she was going to nurse him through day and night. She was going to deny herself rest and sleep and she was going to be constantly by his bed and follow each one of his breaths and motions so that she could immediately fulfill his wishes. --

In spite of the commotion that was reigning on both farms the Christmas tree was shining in the rays of its lights and the small children were jumping around it happily, not noticing even that on the faces of their parents there were tears of boundless pain and their hearts were overflowing with bitterness over the underserved fate.

Outside it was beautiful blue skies, shining in the reflection of the clear light the little stars, the air was warm and perfumed. Everywhere there was peace and divine silence. Only at the Bláha and Lešovský homes uninvited guests sat down: sorrow and pain.

III.

How quickly time passes! Before you know it, in the blinking of an eye, ten years go by, and it is once again Christmas time. At the Bláha’s home everyone is merry and lively. Aneška is now already nineteen years old and together with the sixteen-year-old Anna they are helping their mother in the kitchen and they are moving around the stove like on a spindle, singing and poking fun at each other. Only the mother is sad and often she wipes her teary face with her apron. This is because the poor woman is thinking about her husband who was torn out of her embrace so early and died such a horrible death. Sitting by the table in the kitchen there is an old man who has hair white like silver, a wrinkled face, which is nevertheless full and exuding health and beside him is his faithful companion, quite a bit gray and bent over from age, as well as from worries and pain. Both of them are gilding nuts and attaching threads to apples, and cookies, destined for the tree. Every once in a while they look at each other. They smile with pleasure and significantly they turn their heads to the industrious girls. Often, however, also their faces get wet, since they too remember painfully their son, who ten years ago
fell as a victim to human intolerance. Suddenly they hear the thunder of several galloping steeds. The girls run to the windows and there they are happily screaming: “Our folks are already here!” –

In front of the farm five riders have stopped and each one of them has a heavy bag tied to their saddle. Those are Bláha’s sons and old Lešovský and his son. First of all they untie the bags and carry them into the kitchen. After they unsaddled their horses and let them outside the corral, while the Lešovský’s horses remained saddled.

“Here we are,” said Josef Bláha, a youth about twenty-two years old, grown like a fir tree, beautiful and manly like Mars, “But I will tell you that it was quite a piece of work to get out of Brenham. There were many friends over there and everybody wanted us to have an additional glass with them. Beer, just now brought from St. Louis will be brought in by Václav. We will enjoy it, won’t we grandpa?”

Old Bláha only nodded his head and got up to welcome his son-in-law and his son, and then answered: “That’s right, we are going to enjoy it. The St. Louis beer is after all quite a different drink than Krenschel’s potion, and we can let it stand now in a more relaxed way. And what about you, will all of yours come after supper?”

“Of course that is evident that we will since today I want to be merrier than ten years ago when through my carelessness I caused you and my dear Anna, such an amount of worry and pain.”

“Leave it alone, let it be,” Bláha chastised his son-in-law. “Why do you remind us every year? It is good that it ended at least in this way and you regained your health. Today ten years ago it is true that I would not have bet even a penny on your life.”

“Yes, and it was thanks to you and my dear Anna, who sacrificed herself for my sake. It was a miracle she did not collapse under the weight of work and worries; if not for that, for sure I would not be among you today. This is also why I have to remind myself often of the day where the power of true and unselfish love was proven. I would have been happy and satisfied to await my last hour, only if I saw my son, side by side with such a faithful and kind wife as my Anna is.”

“Hey, hey! Who at your age would already be thinking about his death? Take a look at me I am already in my seventies, and still I want to visit my old country to enjoy the view of my beloved Radhošt Mountain, and then to spend among you several more quiet and happy years.”

“This is the most ardent wish of all of us. However, now I would like to ask you to accompany me to our place. I would not like Anna to wait for things brought from Brenham and yet I would like to talk to you still before supper.” –

“Well, well,” smiled Bláha. “I sense what you have on your heart; a few moments ago we talked about it, did we not my old lady.”

“I don’t know what Vojtěch thinks about,” said the old lady merrily, “If it is, however, something similar than let it be so.” Bláha put on his coat. He lit his pipe and accompanied his son in law.

Young Lešovský meanwhile approached the young girls and was poking fun at them as much as possible, especially Anna, on whose heels he was all the time, so much so that her mother would threaten him often with her wooden spoon. It was curious that Anna over and over again had
something to do outside. – Once she had to go to fetch eggs in the chicken coop; then she had to fetch sweet cream in a faraway cellar, and similar things and then each time, Vojtěch also disappeared with her, like mercury. When then Anna returned she was red like a rose and her little sister was smiling like a little devil. Mother and grandmother, however, pretended not to see and not to hear. They remembered their own young years and knowing that Anna and Vojtěch loved each other they were not standing in their way. After all soon they will belong to one another, so let them enjoy their happiness.

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At the stroke of six o’clock the Christmas tree once again shone in the shining lights and surrounding it were old and young in happy excitement. Namely, old Bláha was beaming and frequently he would approach little Anna, who in dream like thoughts was holding in her hand a ring that was her grandfather’s present and on which was depicted love in the form of two kissing doves. He said, jokingly: “Well girl, aren’t you yearning for such a dove also?”

The girl, turning a deep red, tried to escape, which gave Bláha great pleasure. After supper the Lešovskys, Klimiček, and Skřivánek came. When the St. Louis beer was opened then like twenty-three years ago, old Bláha rose and offering a toast, he said:

“Friends, dear and beloved! As you all know, today makes twenty-three years since for the first time I stood on my own land and welcomed you under my own roof. In spite of the fact that a wild blizzard raged around us, we were all happy and blessed, not suspecting that a time of bitter trials, woe, and suffering was awaiting us. I have lived long enough to experience three memorable Christmas Eves in this country. You know them as well as I do, since the last two ones did not remain without any influence upon you, and so I hope that even the one today will not remain without any. That was a sad Christmas, the one ten years ago. Our loss was enormous and bitter. There are many, however, who are crying over bigger losses, more painful ones. Time, the greatest comforter and reconciler, has straightened out and reconciled things through time for many people. Time, with the growing of the new buds, replaced what it tore away from our trees, as twenty-three years ago, the happiness of two people truly in love blossomed in this place and so also today we are going to bless the union of two children who are so beloved by us. Anna, the young Lešovský asked me for your hand. Your mother happily agrees and so I am asking you now, if you are happy with it.”

And she was. The light of happiness was shining from her eyes and with a beaming smile she exchanged engagement rings with Vojtěch.

No one has lived through such merriment up to now on this farm.

This was the last Christmas that the spouses Bláha spent among their own and on this Earth. However, before departing, they were given still another great joy, and that was that they were able to enjoy the view of their beloved native village, and the glorious and most memorable hill Radhošť. They returned from Europe in August and in October, Mrs. Bláhová died. This cut also the root of the life of the good grandfather and he followed his companion in the beginning of December.