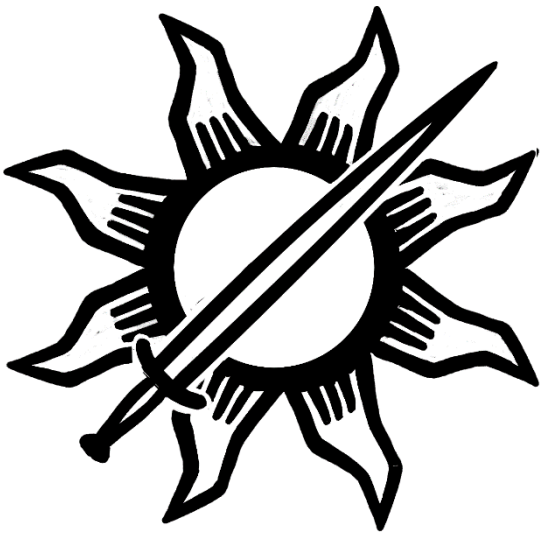

The Latlander

Vol. I

G.M. Roze

Dedicated to my Father, Mother, and sisters.
Also dedicated to my uncle, V. A. Purins

In Memorian of Arvids Grinbergs

When I first started writing this book, I expected to publish it to my friend and "adopted" grandfather, Arvids Grinbergs, and being true to the surprise, I intended to only show him this work in his birthday, two weeks before the expected publication, in May. Unfortunately, he passed away in July. His fathers' experience as a soldier in the First World War and the following War of Latvian Independence was chief among the many stories and tales that inspired this book. I was told these stories as a child and they never left my mind, even in adulthood, writing this book was a laborious and long task as I could not accept anything less than the magic I felt when I first imagined them.

In a certain sense, I knew the long time to research, refine and compose this book meant it could only be published in Arvids' final years. I remember reading once in a Christmas card of an old latvian-brazilian writer, who in the same situation as me, wrote:

Dear Grandpa,
In the days of yore, when I was reluctant to sleep, you'd sit by my bedside, and read me stories of old.
Now we're older, and by the time I finish writing my stories, you may be too old to read them,
But don't worry, it will be my turn to sit by your bedside and read them for you.

The tale I set out to write was one of friendship found in dark times, and of bravery in face of tough battles, most of which we lose. I started to write in his honor and now will finish in his memory. His and the many others whose memory I hope to cherish:

M. Purvics ✝, F. Grinbergs, A. Apse, J. Purins, A. Purins (Deported), J. A. Freijss (Deported), J. Inkis (Deported), F. Kronlin ✝, J. Jankovski ✝, A. Leijasmeijer ✝, A. Lidak ✝, E. Lidak, Planats ✝, and all others.[1]

- GMR

[1] Thanks to Emils and Julijs Andermans, J. Tervits, Yolanda Krievin, V. A. Purins these documents and testimonies could be handed down to me.

Prologue

Chapter 1: The Promise
(or: the Disappearance of Kristofer Keidann[2])

Late Autumn 1915

The day dawned clear and serene. The amber rays of morning cut through the dense oak forest, and the top of the trees swayed with the sound of the distant German artillery. So, it had been in the past years in Latvia. This time, however, *it felt closer*.

If not for this occasional drumming of the artillery – positioned some dozen miles south - the woods would be silent. Enjoying the last days of sun and warmth before the winter. An inattentive wanderer would barely spot the soldiers – dressed in their Russian Imperial brownish uniform – face-down in the floor, still as statues. No order of silence had been given, and yet no man dared to break that silence. Only near the edge of the forest did some soldiers still tried to dig deeper.

The 2nd Riflemen, formed that very autumn, was composed the local factory workers of Riga – the capital of the province of Latvia. They had spent that fine morning filling sandbags, loading cartridges and, of course, digging foxholes. The little time they had to do so, however, meant their trenches were no more than a few, half-meter deep, holes in the ground, which the soldier had to lay with their entire body in the dirt if they wanted the tiniest inch of protection. That was because the 9th German Army had advanced, always with the sinister speed their armies often moved since the start of the war, crossing the frontier between the provinces of Lithuania and Latvia and besieged the city of Jelgava. The men in that forest had watched the city burn and scream for months.

Since the start of the war they had pushed the Czar and his army further and further from the borders of the empire, occupying the western lands and threatening the Russian heartland. After Jelgava, they would invade Riga, and after Riga,

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[2] This book will inconsistently disobey the 1908 modern Latvian orthographic reform, since it was only passed in law in 1920 and adopted in the late 1920's. Therefore, Latvian names will be written as they would in the pre-war era.

it was an open door to St. Petersburg[3] and Moscow – and Jelgava was close to falling.

That very morning indeed the 9th German Army was like a beast, swallowing entire units in the south. Every man in that forest knew the 2nd Latvian Riflemen were hearing fall on the head of some poor bastard would advance north – and fall in their heads, in that calm and serene forest.

Tum. The firing of the German cannons in the distance was rhythmic. The workers of the 2nd were used to the sound of hammers hitting anvil, but this was different. When Germans waged war, it was war of steel and metal and industry, like the region had never seen. Their war worked like clockwork and gave no signs of fatigue. An all-consuming machine. A Leviathan.

The workers often wondered what kind of men those were they would face. Veterans from France and Poland who stood tall in their dark-grey uniforms, and their picked helmets who cast a shadow on their scars and malicious smiles. Those were the men who burned thousands of their compatriots in Prussia and Augustow. Not men, but cogs in a machine of hatred and destruction. Most of the workers had never travelled far from the city they were born, and the idea that someone would leave their homeland to conquer others was infuriating.

Holding the line against them was a mean task no men truly wanted, but each and every one would fulfil. They were no more than workers, farmhands, craftsmen – some too young to have beards, some too old to have hair – but they would have to do. Most never had touched a gun before, but still held their chest bravely and fashioned themselves as soldiers, warriors of their land – the same land and dirt they had now smeared in their faces as they lied face-down in the trenches.

Each of those men used their silence differently. There, lying behind those small mounds of earth they had dug, some prayed, some checked and rechecked their weapons and ammunition, and others gazed far and wide through the trunks of trees, looking for the incoming Germans. No man dared to break the silence. Well, no man indeed, but a young lad – running between trenches and trees carrying two boxes of ammunition. He brought from

[3] Also referred at that time as Petrograd (1914-1924), due to anti-German sentiments in the Russian Empire.

headquarters the last supplies the 2nd would receive. “Last one”, he said.

“God bless ye, Kris”, said the sergeant with a shovel on his hand. Only him and another factory worker named Karl were still trying to dig deeper. They were the closest to the border of the forest – and when the enemy arrived, would be the first to fight. “An’ if that’s the last they’ll send, they know it’s near.”, he said walking back and thrusting his shovel in the ground. Karl got his rifle from his shoulder and stood a little bit, scanning the forest and chewing his tobacco, before laying down on the foxhole and positioning his rifle. “ya don’ need to stay, kid. It ain’ gonna be pretty”, said the sergeant, doing the same.

“I’d rather stay, sir. I dislike the tension of waiting in the rearlines”, said Kris. For the last weeks they had waited and waited, waiting for when the Germans crossed the Lielupe River in Jelgava. And now they waited even more in that morning. Like prisoners awaiting their hanging. By this point, most of them preferred to get over it sooner rather than later.

“Keep ya’ head down, then”, said the sergeant – repeating the rule every soldier learned when they entered the Latvian Riflemen. Kris laid down and tried to point his rifle towards, but he was too awkwardly compressed between the two, larger, men - so he resorted to just look the way back, and he could see many other holes, each with their own soldiers, scattered across the forest. “Soon we’ll see if the tension of the rearlines is worse than the one of battle”.

Tum. The artillery roared above like a thunder and made a few leaves and breeches fall from the trees. Kris found it uncanny, he felt safe in the forest. *A calm before the storm*, his father would say. In his childhood summers, Kris would hide below the trees near his house from the rain. This rain, however, would be different, it would be of metal and fire.

He didn’t linger on the thought much. Kris liked feeling safe there face down in the mud, like a child. The breeze between the woods and the smell of pine were familiar to him. It felt impossible that the Germans could ever destroy a forest like that. He knew it. His father worked in the forests. He would bring trees down with his axe, but not before passing his callous hands in its trunk. He knew by touch the age of each tree, and each he bought down

he planted anew. But they said the Germans had machines that could burn entire forests. Uproot grown trees from their ground.

"I often wonder if this is what our ancestors felt", Kriss observed the edge of the forest, "when they were defending our land from the German crusaders in the 13th century. Or when they defended Russia from the troops of Napoleon."

"I'll let 'ye know if I spot any frenchman", laughed the sargeant, while he opened the wooden crates of ammunition Kris had brought. The three men each gathered a handful of bullets and filled their pockets best they could. "that's what they taught ya in university?"

"I studied music, sir. But that I that read in a book."

"You haven't got any thing for easy reading, do ya?"

"Sorry, sir, only got a small book of some hymns. But it is quite easy and simple. If like.", he said, taking the book out of his belt. He often carried around to learn music whenever there was free time. It had been a faithful companion since the start of the war.

Tum. Interrupted the sound of artillery. "Any idea who's getting the beatin'?", Karl asked as he light a cigarette. He had little space to put extra bullets in his pockets due to his packs of cigarettes, many of those he had won gambling on the trenches. He was a factory worker – a union leader whose face seemed permanently greyed by industrial smoke. Kris found it funny that a man who worked around so many chimneys would smoke like one. He sounded unconcerned or disinterested, as though he preferred the Germans unleashed the "beating" on allied units, rather than his'.

"Mus' be 3rd Regiment or the blokes from Jelgava", answered the sergeant. He was a big but surprisingly tender man, at least to Kris. His face was fat and rounded and often seemed struggling with the collar of his uniform. He had big arms from carrying crates in the docks, and his thick accent Kris laugh a little, although never in front of him. He always gave the orders but followed by some good advice. A person who gave orders but no advice was the stern commander of the Riflemen, Auzans. He had transformed these country farmers into soldiers through hard, unforgiving training. "And don't let Auzans catch ya smokin' on duty", he chuckled, "or you will be getting a beatin' of yer own".

"Aye", repeated the soldier, in a monotone, slightly mocking fashion, "To be fair, I daresay the bastards in the 3rd getting shelled are having an easier time than us with Auzans… bloody git he is", he put the cigarette in his mouth again. "Know anyone from the 3rd, Sarge?"

Tum, said the artillery. "Nay, don't think so. Do you, Kris?", but the young lad didn't want to be dragged in the conversation. He felt eerily uncomfortable of speaking of his comrades in arms that way. *Every man wants to look tough*, his father often said, and he knew everyone was a little bit scared, just as him.

Yes, he wanted to answer, *I do know a poor bastard getting shelled at the 3rd Regiment.* It was his brother. But what was the point? Collecting pity from the other two man in the trench? Who probably had their own brothers to worry? No. Kris felt that the fact he had a brother in the 3rd Regiment changed little the fact they were getting smashed by the Germans. *Why bother.* He repeated with the monotone voice of the smoking soldier in his head.

But he had something else to say. He had to say it felt like a queer day for war. Not that he had experience in war, but when he pictured a day of it, it did not feel like this. It did not feel like morning breeze, and it did not smell like pine. He had ignored the conversation of his colleagues to observe the treetops. The majestic green conifers of the forest - Riga pines, aptly named after the capital of the province of Latvia - framed the blue sky above them, and they danced and shook with every tum of the German artillery. It seemed too calm and beautiful, too serene for war. *No.* He wanted to say. *It is not a day for war, it is a day for picnic.*

He remembered the Saturdays of his childhood, when his mother woke early to bake bread and his father left to cut trees, and he would spend the day running and playing in the meadows. His father, smelling of pine and wood, would come home with his axe and sit at the small wooden table to lunch. Yes, he could picture them all around the table. Him, mother, father, and his brother. *Yes*, his brother. *He would be there running and playing in the meadows with me.* His brother was older than him and sometimes didn't have the patience to engage in his brother's childness, but when he did, it made his day. After lunch his father slept and mother took the bread out of the oven, and they played

in the mud, they often came dirty, but their mother cleaned their faces with a small towel. They would pack their homemade bread and homemade jelly in a small white red checkered blanket and head off into the meadow. They would find a small and comfortable spot of grass and spent the afternoon together…

Tum, his memories interrupted by that damn noise. He wondered if the man loading the canons were satisfied. Meanwhile, his trench colleagues seemed to continue the discussion of whether they knew or not anyone from the 3rd, and the many candidates included some cousin's colleague, or neighbour's in-law. "I recall now I used to play cards with one of 'em officers.", the smoker said to the sergeant, "pretty sure the git played marked cards"

The sergeant extended his hand and captured the cigarette out of the soldier's mouth, who answered with a complaint. For a second it seemed like the sergeant would throw it out and or berate him for insulting an officer, but instead took a long smoke. "Cheaters never prosper", the sergeant chuckled and handed the cigarette back. "Know anyone, Kris?".

"I…", Kris said after moments of silence. He stared at the sky and for fleeting seconds, he imagined himself like a child again. It was all there: the forest, the pines, the brownish dirt, his brother. After some minutes, he had his answer directed not to any of his hole colleagues: "How queer life has changed…"

Tum, agreed the artillery. That hideous bass seemed ever so close. Some place south of that forest, some poor bastard of the 3rd had his arms and legs blown off – and yet the day looked awfully fitting for a picnic. What had happened to the world? Or better, what happened to those days of childhood? It wasn't long ago, *right?* It couldn't be. He was 17 years old that autumn, barely the age to be a soldier, much less to be *old*. He tried to believe he still had plenty of time. Time to go home, time to spend with his father, with his mother, with his *brother. 17 years old*, Kris thought, and yet he felt like the cold fingers of the reaper stood on his shoulder. He was still young… *wasn't he?*

It was not a German shell that answered him this time, but the rapid trotting of hooves in the mud echoed in the woods. Kris tried to lift his body to see but his sergeant held him down. "Horse", he murmured. "No movement to the right", Karl

murmured, struggling to keep the cigarette in his mouth, while checking the surroundings slowly with his rifle, "ours or theirs?"

Tum, and the horse continued. "Ours or theirs?", He asked again. "How would I know?" uttered the sergeant. After a few seconds the sound stopped, and from the indistinguishable and seemingly endless corridors of trees emerged the figure. The rider stopped a few meters from their hole and had the same brownish Russian imperial uniform as the men, and he gasped for some air. He and his horse seemed exhausted. "What brings you, rider?", asked the sergeant, rosing from the foxhole.

Tum. "It is bad tidings that I bring,", said the Rider, "and orders! The frontline has collapsed, and they have crossed Jelgava. The trenches were crossed, and man fights man in the chaos of battle. From the forest may come friend or foe alike. And to add to our ill-luck, our communication lines were cut. And of the orders, I myself know not what they contain." He held the letter with his hand up high, "but they are destined to our comrades at the 3rd Regiment, if you could direct me to them.". "Sorry lad, this is Riga's 2nd", the sergeant left his rifle hanging in his back from the bandolier in his shoulder and slowly approached the rider to his water canteen. *"Sarge…"*, murmured Karl. He seemed uneasy. His voiced was muffled by…

Tum. "Who's your officer?" the rider asked. "Ol' Milgrave." The sergeant moved his arm to point south with his canteen. "you can find the 3rd heading this…". "SARGE!". The soldier by Kris' side screamed, dropping the cigarette from his mouth, but it was too late. A bullet ripped through the air.

Tum muffled the sound. The shot came from deep into the woods, and it hit the sergeant on his bowels. The chubby man tried to step back clumsily to a nearby tree, but a second bullet came, and he fell into the ground. It was fast. The rider seemed equally dumbfounded, and he didn't move until another bulled hit him too.

Tum. Kris could barely see the flashes from the rifles, let alone the shadows moving in the woods. The soldier by his side was firing in the treeline, trying to hit the invisible enemy. By instinct, Kris tried to look for the sergeant. He always told them what to do… dig here, run there, shot, stop… but there stood him, laid on the ground like a sack of potatoes. His chubby, rounded

face now in the mud. He barely knew the sergeant – and they had exchanged few words, outside the given orders – and yet Kris felt a gut punch. He would never hear that big tender man again, never hear his advice or his thick accent. Never see his chubby face fighting against the collar of his uniform. Dead, gone, with his arm stretched by his side, still holding the canteen he was trying to offer to the rider. Kris thought he saw it moving…

Tum. "HE'S DEAD, KID!". Kris didn't even realize it, but he tried to jump out of his trench, but the soldier by his side held him. It was then that Kris saw the whip of red blood that had gushed out of the sergeant had painted the leaves red, and his body was now in a pool of blood. It was then when he felt the warmth of the drops of blood that he had on his face. He froze for a moment and looked at the other man: the rider. He was still strapped on top of his horse, his head down and his arm still held the piece of paper he had shown. A bullet hole was right in the middle of his brownish Russian uniform. And it was slowly being coloured red. For a moment, the rider seemed petrified like a statue, until he slowly slid to the side and hit the ground.

Tum. At this point, the Russian imperial machine guns in the rear lines realized what was happening, and the hellfire started, as the entire forest lit up with flashes of light. The horse probably understood the situation before Kris, as he panicked and started to run in the direction of their trench. The horse neighed and reared as he almost stomped Kris and the soldier. Both held their heads down and for a moment. Kris looked at the sky again: it was still blue and beautiful – the day for a picnic. The tender smell of fresh leaves and oak filled up the air, as the machine guns chipped parts of trees, and it all slowly fell into the ground. For that small, improbable moment, the entire forest seemed suspended by these particles.

Tum, interrupted the artillery, as it had done before. But this time Kris had a horrible, horrible realization: *it was closer now.* He had not realized until then, but there, lying on their hole, he felt the entire ground was shaking. *They said the Germans had machines that could burn entire forests. Uproot grown trees from their ground.* No, they can't do that. *It felt impossible that the Germans could ever destroy a forest like that.* He felt uneasily exposed. For a second everything he thought that morning came to him like a flash: the trees, the

soldiers digging, the conversation, the beating, Wilks, Riga's 2nd, some poor bastard a few miles in the south having his legs blown off – then the flash ended. *The calm before the storm*, his father said. *Now the storm came*, he thought.

What he heard next as inhuman. In that still, quiet morning, he heard the loudest sound he ever heard in his life. And everything else felt silent. It was so loud it appeared that even the soldiers firing had stopped for a second. A shell had hit the rear lines, and dirt and splinters flew miles across the forest. It probably had hit one Russian machine gun, because when they started to shoot again, it felt quieter. In fact, everything felt quieter, it was as his ear was underwater. And he felt a trail of blood slip from his eardrums. The ground beneath him continued to shake. It was like a hole would appear and drag the entire forest to the centre of the earth. He tucked his head out of the hole, stunned. He didn't know what to do, but he surely didn't want to die that day.

It was then when he saw the rider was still moving. He had his face down in the dirt and his back up, as he crawled on his fours in towards him. The soldier by Kris' side, the smoker, the factory worker with his permanently greyed face, the one who said it was better the bastards at the 3rd than him, saw the rider too. If he said anything, Kris couldn't tell, nor could he hear. What he heard, was the deep breath of the rider. He murmured, and stumbled, and crawled, and gasped for air. Kris and the smoker looked at each other, and with no words but a nod, both jumped forward. Each held the rider by his arms and dragged him through the few meters in the forest, leaving a trail on the dirt of the forest. His head was down and bobbed as they walked, but he still held the paper in his hand. "You've got to…", he murmured.

Another big explosion shocked the earth when they had almost reached their hole. Splinters from the trees flew like bullets. Both men fell in their hole and dragged the rider inside with their hands. "The order…", the rider coughed and held his arm high, he grasped the paper with so much strength it almost ripped apart, "I've got to give it to the 3rd regiment…". The smoker tried to press his chest, trying to hold the blood coming out of the rider's chest. Another big explosion. Earth and dirt fell over their heads. "… completely surrounded" , he tried to finish.

Kris and the Smoker exchanged another stare, "Go", he said, "I'll hold the line", and he started firing his rifle into the treeline again. Kris froze… *but where and how...* He looked back at the rear lines, and he could see the silhouette of the horse, lit by the glow of the morning sun, standing before the trees. The aptly named Riga Pines. And looking forward he could see the flashes and shadows of the enemies moving through. And *just there, right there* at the end of the forest, he could still see the smoke coming from the direction of Jelgava. *The men in that forest had watched the city burn and scream for months, and now he would run right into it.* Why? For the rider, who crawled on all fours through the dirt. For his sergeant who often called him "kid", and his chubby face down in the dirt. For the bastards 3rd regiment, about to be surrounded. And finally, for his brother, wherever he was. *Yes, his brother. He would be there running and playing in the meadows with me in my childhood.* And now he would run through the meadows.

"GO!", the soldier screamed again, as they heard the zip of artillery through the skies. Kris grabbed the paper with the orders in the rider's hand and ran. Through the rear lines, through the soldiers, through the machine guns. And mounted on the horse, he would run through the forest and through the enemy. He would run to try to reach the 3rd battalion before the enemy did - and give them whatever orders were on that paper. Two men had already died for it, and many more would die without it.

In that fateful day, a day for picnics and not war, Kris Keidann and his horse disappeared into the smoke of the battlefield.

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A few weeks later, not far from there, another trail of smoke crossed the forests. Markus Keidann rode the train in the opposite direction. Most trains went to the frontline full of soldiers – like cattle to the slaughter. And came back empty.

He spied through the small metal bars of his window – if he could call it that – in the makeshift wagon he was in. Before the war it carried animals or crates. Now it carried men. His window was not very big - some army engineer had cut an irregular square in the side and clenched some vertical wooden bars – so the interior of the train was mostly dark, except for the rays of light illuminating the dusty interior.

The train bulged and shook irregularly through the forests of Latvia, and Markus often felt the golden rays of sun in his cheeks, then the darkness again. He watched as the mud and dirt of the frontlines become the green and yellow fields of inner Latvia. It was a prize very few of the soldiers in the Russian Imperial Army could afford. Yet, it was by no means a luxurious voyage: his train carried crates and wounded soldiers back into the countryside. The army logistics called them *reusables*, because they were to be sent back with new supplies - they only bought those deemed still worthy after a few repairs, those too damaged were left in the frontlines to rot – be their wounded or crates.

Markus fell observed; maybe it was the strange fact he was not wounded (except for a scar in his cheek, but that was older than the war), nor was he a crate. The entire trip he stared at the window to avoid crossing gazes with any of the wounded. He inflated his chest to look more serious, but he did not believe it was truly working. *Every man wants to look tough*, his father often said, and he knew everyone was a little bit scared, just as him. And yet, he still felt observed, maybe it could be his dirty uniform, partially ripped from bullets, or maybe it was the flowers he carried on his lap – some for his dead father, some for his dying mother.

The train made a quick stop in a small platform north of Wenden[4], where stood a single construction made of dark-irregular bricks. On one side of the tracks, a forest, on the other side, an empty field. Markus jumped with his bag strapped on his shoulder. He looked around and saw a few soldiers loaded or unloaded crates before the train parted again after a few minutes, heading further north away from the war. When the smoke from the train cleared, Markus found himself almost alone in the station.

In the end of the platform was a father receiving his one-legged son back home, on one shoulder he carried his sons' bag, on the other, his son placed his hand and used as a support. The son hopped to the rhythm of his father's slow steps, and both disappeared in the dusty road.

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[4] A city in northern Latvia. Pronounced "Venden", also called Cesis.

An older woman set in the only bench in the station, with her head down low, miserable. In her pocket, there was a small flower, almost rotten. Markus figured she was a mother waiting every day for her son to come home. And the day never came. Markus thought she deserved a better flower and gave one of his to her. She thanked profusely before starting the long way back home. And so, Markus stood alone in the platform. The only other soul around was the elderly telegraph operator, inside his cabin. He gave Keidann a smile, with a look of pity, before lowering his head again to click his machine.

In fact, since the start of the war the Army Command had given orders for the civil government to remove every sign from every train station, "to confuse the hostile german invaders" – they said. So, it was not uncommon for soldiers to leave in the wrong stations. Many joked that the order harmed logistics more than the german attacks ever did.

And so, a few hours passed. "No one for you, son?", eventually the telegraph operator asked, in a small pause around 3 o'clock, which he used to stretch his legs around the platform. "They were not expecting me to come, sir", he answered, "and quite frankly, I was not, as well", he added. It was 5 days earlier when he received the letter he could visit his home home – It was unexpected but pleasant – the reason was equally unexpected, but truly unpleasant: his brother's disappearance. Even worse, the big brains of the Russian General Staff forgot his home was in the half of Latvia occupied by Germany – the half the Russian army forgot (or was too incompetent) to defend. He had to resort to sending a letter to his uncle, who he hadn't seen in almost a decade. The elderly operator gave him a small pat in the back and went back to his cabin. Perhaps he had someone in the war as well, and waited every day for the small dots and dashes of his telegraph to bring news.

It was strange to hear silence again – especially considering the frontlines were no more than 70 miles away. But silence was good. Markus stood in the station, bag on his shoulder, and looked around. Blue sky, yellow pastures, and green pines. He tried to keep his head up the best they could, thought his neck pained him a little. When you first arrive in the trenches, you're told by the veterans the first rule of the Latvian Rifleman: "boy, get your head

down!". And so they did, day after day, trench after trench. These rules were often told in order of importance, the second was "Your rifle is your life" – and he was supposed to be always at your side. He closed his eyes to feel the wind and the sun on his face. No keeping your head down. Peace, however short it would be.

He didn't even realize how long he stood there with his eyes closed, but when he opened, he saw a wooden wagon slowly strolling in the dirt road. It carried lots of wooden boards and some other construction material. It was far but he knew: the first familiar face in years. It stopped right in front of him, and his uncle jumped down. Both men stood in silence for a second. Maybe it was disbelief, or maybe his uncle was still trying to recognize his face, or even trying to know what to do. The last time he saw Markuss, he was just a kid.

"General Keidann", his uncle saluted him with a laugh and a big smile, and then hugged Markus before he could even react. It was such a strong hug Markus had little air to say hi, so he smiled.

"It's good to see you, kid. *Although…*", his uncle said, tapping him near a big tear on his shirt, "we may need to change you before your mother sees you". "Not general yet, sir", Markus corrected his uncle's joke with a smile "They said they are promoting me to officer, so future lieutenant, for now. And don't worry, I brought clean clothes with me", he said, throwing his bag from his shoulder into the wagon. He instinctively looked for his rifle in his shoulder and looked around as if he had lost it – only to remember here, he didn't need it. Damn the 2nd rule. "How many clean clothers?" asked his uncle. "The only other pair I've got", laughed Keidan, and both men climbed the wagon to make the journey to his uncle's home.

"Lieutenant, heh?" said Uncle, "your father would be proud of you" – that was true - "and the beard fits you well"- that was not. Markus sat by his side, stooped, looking at the horizon. He was too young to have a full beard, so his' was faulty and somewhat unkempt, but, in contrast to his dirty rags he called clothes, it looked good. Soldiers in the trenches had the privilege to skip routine inspections – which required them to shave – because Russian Imperial inspectors were always too afraid to go to the front or died when tried to. "You look like the spitting image of him."

Markus answered silentlly, contemplating the fields, the trees and the sky. He closed his eyes again to feel the wind and the sun. “I sometimes worry you have got everything from your father. Even his uptight ways, you know you don’t need to call me sir, right? Feel at home with us.” He was his maternal uncle, so he had his favourites. “Except for her greenish eyes, I’m have to admit I’m a little sad you didn’t get anything from our side”, he laughed.

“Maybe, sir…”, he answered slowly, looking at the horizon before turning a quick stare at his uncle, “but then I’d have your ugly mug”, and both laughed. “At least you got her wit”, his uncle completed.

“I’m really sorry you had to wait”, his uncle said, after a few minutes. “Your letter arrived yesterday, and today I had to go to the city.”

“Don’t worry about it, sir”

“Uncle”, his uncle corrected with another laugh.

“Don’t worry about it, uncle”

“Ieva is visiting, by the way”, he said, talking about his older cousin. “How is she? I heard she married not long ago”, Markus said, trying to remember the few scraps of things he heard of his cousin – afterall, they hadn’t seen each other in 12 years. For him, she was still a tall little girl with a very pale round face and a pointy nose, and an even pointier attitude. She was as curious as she was smart, and terribly nosy. “Yes”, his uncle answered, “good fellow, works as an accountant in the civil government. That’s why they spared him from serving the army”.

Spared from serving the army, Markus mouthed in silence with amazement. “He knows how to type”, his uncle seemed to read his mind, “very few do." For a moment, Markus considered learning to use a typewriter. He moved his fingers around a little in the air, tying an imaginary typewriter, and decided that maybe later. There were many things he still wanted to learn and do. Markus wanted to be a little bit more like this fellow. Smart enough to find a nice job and a nice wife – and lucky enough to escape the army.

It was spring, and the fields were beginning to grow live again. It felt like this a different world since he left the trenches. Here, even some men could be spared from the army. Most were away, sure, and the fields were now populated by young girls

working the harvest. They walked around with baskets of eggs and wheat, lightly enjoying life and the sun, laughing among themselves. "Let's go to the lake", some of them were planning. For a moment, it seemed to Markus as though no worries existed in this other world. They looked at him and his dirty uniform with curiosity, before smiling with little laughs between themselves and continuing their daily walk. He felt out of place. Observed again, like on the train.

"You don't see that a lot", said Markuss.

"Girls?"

"Smiles".

He thought about his cousin, Junior. He was a little older than him and they seldom saw each other, since they lived in different cities, but in Christmas time, when the family came together, Junior would be his best friend. They would roam around fighting with sticks, calling themselves knights, and going on imaginary quests. Sometimes Kris and Junior's sister, Ieva, would join them too. Junior and his uncle were very much alike: with a permanent smile and a joke in the tip of the tongue.

But he had joined the Imperial Navy, and both saw each other once or twice during the war, and he had changed. Junior didn't smile anymore, nor he had a joke to crack. The last time they saw each other, he stood in a bar stool, drink in hand, completely Silent. Markus was in front him, but his eyes peered through like he was invisible – his eyes fixed at a place thousand yards away. It was like there was a ghost in the corner of the room. He said he didn't visit his home since the start of the war because he didn't get a leave, But Markus suspected he was afraid to be home again but he didn't said anything. He knew that fear, to feel out of place… Observed…

For the past 5 days Markus was treated as an outsider. He and his unit, the 3rd Kurzeme Rifleman, had just recapture a small village – it was a brutal slaughter the generals in St. Petersburg called "victory" when a courier gave him a letter stating his leave. "Go home, rest and enjoy", signed some staff officer he never heard about. *Thanks, why?* The Russian Army turned kind? No (of course). He imagined it had been due to the fact his unit had been fighting brutally since early spring, nearly destroyed when the Germans encircled them. But why him, of all the soldiers? The

very next day – as the battle raged - under a burning sky, he received the second letter signed by some Lieutenant Wilks of the 2nd Riga Regiment. Markus knew he would never see his brother again.

He disappeared, the letter said. Markus had troubled believing. Not only because it was a shock, but also because it wasn't. Kris and Markus hadn't seen each other in more than two years. He left home after a nasty fight and never turned back. Never gave any news. *He was last seen riding in the direction of Jelgava, bringing orders.* But the orders apparently never made it wherever they were supposed to reach. Why did he do this? He wasn't even an army courier. But it didn't mater anymore. What matters is that he disappeared, and this time was definite.

He thought about Junior again. Markus and Kris were very different, and he always found Kris too dramatic, too volatile, too immature, but it was Kris, and Kris could also be smart, extremely talented, extremely lively. And if – for the smallest chance possible, or better, by a miracle - he came back, if they found him, would he still be the same? Or would he stare at ghosts like his cousin?

The days following the letter, he was treated as a visitor in his own regiment. His captain had forbidden him to fight, so he wandered around the trenches looking for anything to do and avoiding artillery fire. "Enjoy home", some of his colleagues said, passing by before going to battle. He felt prohibited to do his duty. When he handed his leave to the officer inspecting the train, he felt like a deserter. The officer let a grunt before letting him in. War was the only thing he knew for the past years, and now he was going away from it. War had consumed his house, it had consumed his father, it was consuming his cousin and now it consumed his brother. It was like fire in a gigantic furnace, and the soldiers were thrown like logs to feed it. Entire forests of soldiers cut by german machines and turned into fuel. He was in Jelgava when it burned and screamed. The flares went up and down in the night… and that awful sound…

Tum, the wheel of the wagon had hit a rock and Markus woke from his daydream (and he thought of his mother: she would ask him if it should not be called "daynightmare", if it's bad, or even "daymare". Did such words exist? He didn't know, but he was

sure she would have said them anyway. She had always loved playing with words). "And how is it?", his uncle asked… "the war?"

"Months of uneasiness followed by seconds of terror". Markuss looked at the horizon again - he seemed small, stooped in his seat. Brutal, bloody, full of dirt, and yet, it was his home – or it felt more like home than there, crossing the wheat fields in ragged clothes.

"How do you keep your spirit up?", he had now realized a flicker of sombreness in his uncle's voice. He probably thought of his son in the navy, as well. Markus knew this question was not merely polite talk. He thought of the old telegraph operator, and the father walking his one-legged son home.

"It's hard, but I try" Markus sighed before trying to let his mouth slightly open in a half-smile. "I found some friends, and sometimes my colleagues play music in the trenches… I even tried to pick something up". His brother will love to hear it. *Would* love to hear it, he corrected. *No, stop thinking about it.* "I wish I still could go back home. I wish none of this had happened."

"So do all who live in such times", his uncle agreed with a sight. "So do I… and yet, it is not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us." Markus stood in awe of his uncle. Jokes and banter, like his Uncle's, he could find in the trenches. But wisdom, no. They hadn't seen each other in a decade and yet he treated him as a son, as Junior – the son that wouldn't come back.

They reached a clearing, where a wooden house stood on top of a little hill. A short cobblestone wall separated the wheat of the surrounding field from the grass of the house's yard and extended a little bit to the forest behind. The hill was small but full of life; the cattle slept in the grass, and so did the old family Terrier, their supposed watcher. A trail of smoke and delicious smell came from the chimney. Markus had forgotten what good food smelled like.

Before they even reached the top, the door bulged open, and his aunt ran to greet them. She was still using an apron and had her kitchen towel on her shoulder. A short, stubby woman, her arms seemed stronger than her husband's, for the hug almost suffocated Markus. "Oh dear, thanks God you're here" she said with a big smile. "You look so much like your father", His aunt

held his dirty cheeks in her hands. Ieva ran behind her. Still with her round face and pointy nose, and still taller than him. They too shared a hug. "Come inside,", said his aunt, "I have made an unforgettable luncheon for our travellers".

"Honey, would you mind if we…", Uncle said, slightly tilting his head to the right. "before?". It was then that his aunt realized the flowers he carried were not only out of courtesy. "Of course, of course! Oh dear… I'll wait inside".

His uncle took him to the side of the house. Beneath a tree stood a small gravel rectangle, with a stone on top. His father's name was carved in it. How strange it was to see a name so familiar in such an impersonal stone. It was the first time he ever saw it.

"Kingcups", Markus looked at the small yellow flowers in his hand. "Sorry, I didn't have time to go to the city to get some better". In Latvian they were called *purvas purenes*, *purvas* meant swamps, as these small flowers would often grow in forest grounds or around lakes and rivers. Recently, Markus had discovered they also grow in muddy trenches.

"A resilient little flower.", he continued. "I saw them outside my trench one day. A shell almost…" - he would have said *almost blew them away*, but in truth, it was almost *blew us away*. He stopped himself for a second before continuing. "It's a reminder of home for a man buried so far away from it."

"He would have loved it", his uncle reassured, placing the hands in his shoulder. "How long has it been?"

"One year and some months now… " his uncle tried to soften. "Can you believe it?" Markus asked before going silent again, contemplating the flower he would give to his not-dead-yet mother. Life is odd – it's resilient enough to burst flowers amid trenches, but also fragile that it threatened to leave her mother at every sigh. "I wish your brother was here". Markus did not respond.

"I told your mother about Kris", said Uncle.

"You shouldn't have"

"It's been a month already, Markus. She deserves to know."

"Can't you spare her the pain? Have some mercy!" for the first time since the station, Markus' voice was more than a mumble. He shrugged off his Uncle's hand out of his shoulder "She's already weak!"

"I spared her of living a lie, Markus. She deserved the truth. If it was my son, then I'd…", his uncle gulped, "… then I'd expect you to do the same" He recomposed. "She is stronger than you think. She carried your father all the way here, and she hasn't given up yet". *Nor will I*, Markuss wanted to add.

"It's brave, Markuss, to protect those you love". His uncle placed his hand on his shoulder again. This time, he accepted. "But bravery is also admitting you're limited. You cannot carry the world on your shoulders, nor hold all the pain yourself. Brave men know when to raise their swords, and the bravest, when to put their shields down". His uncle took the flowers out of Markuss' hand and placed it above the gravel. Both men went to lunch.

The house was not big, nor was it small – It had one kitchen that led to 3 bedrooms – but it was crammed with things. The central wooden table was crammed with food and kitchenware, while two other tables in the corners were being used as an unofficial storage, where mounts of wooden bowls or other things were kept. There were also two cupboards full of jars, some empty, some not. And the sweet smell of sausage and bread filled the air. Her aunt was glued to her stove, re-heating the food. It felt like home.

Markus knew most things were being rationed by the army, but he did not linger on the thought much, or else he would pity eating their food. She had been keeping the best things until her son came home, but since the army wouldn't give him a break, she shared it with her nephew. "Dear, would you like some?", his aunt asked, while cutting him some pieces. He didn't even need to answer. It was the best food he ate in months. While his Regiment cook gave his best to acquire spices for the soldiers (nobody dared to ask from where, and at what price), army food was far from being great, or nourishing.

"How was the voyage?", Ieva asked.

"Good, I supposed, as good as one could get in these cattle wagons of theirs", Markuss said. "And for a second I feared I left at the wrong station, because they now removed every sign."

"Why is that?", asked his aunt.

"To confuse the hostile german invader, they say".

"Ah yes, the *hostile* german invaders, not to be mistaken for the friendly german invaders I keep hearing about". Ieva added.

Only her and Markus laughed, and the conversation continued to the fields and travels of each. They talked and talked for so long Markus even felt his food get cold again, but he didn't mind: for a moment, that small wooden house, on a small hill north of Wenden, so many kilometres from home, seemed the most wholesome place in the world.

"How long are you staying with us?", his aunt asked. "4 days." Markuss said, while taking another spoonful of soup. He was starving.

"What?!". She almost dropped her knife. "They can't do that, can they? He just got here!". She held his uncle's clothes. "Darling, we have got to do something about it."

"I don't think we can", he's answer was one of sadness. He tilted his head down. If it was up to her aunt, she would march all the way to Army High Command and demand herself for her nephew a few extra days. "You deserve some rest".

"And we could really use an extra hand", his uncle said, "while your cousin is away".

Markuss didn't know what to say, but thankfully, Ieva interrupted before the silence settled. "Why?"

"The Germans are mobilizing their reserves. If we don't do anything by Christmas, we'll lose our chance to ever see home again." Before Markuss could continue, a door opened to a dark room, where a girl in red stripped dress quickly came out. She seemed as one of the girls they had passed by in the fields. Markuss had figured it was in that room his mother awaited him.

"She's awake now, m'lady", the girl said, making a small head nod and using her hands to lightly lift the tips of her dress up. She stared at Keidann in both curiosity and sadness.

"Oh, thank you my dear Laura", his aunt said, hugging the girl. "She's helping us take care of your mother, Markuss. Now, while we talk to her, would you like some lunch, dear?" His aunt said as she seated the girl named Laura. She didn't even have to answer.

Markuss stood in silence. the sunlight hit the window curtains, filling the room with a tern yellow glow. The air there was colder and the silence quieter. He could see the shape of his mother in the bed. He approached while his aunt awaited at the doorstep.

Promise me, Markuss. He didn't remember how much time he spent there, he hugged and talked to his mother, maybe even cried, but he only remembers these words. *Promise me you'll get your brother back.*

His mother smiled faintly and her green eyes, like two jade pearls, were attentive, altought she spoke with difficulty. Her gaze seemed to reflect the distant memories of staring at a night sky in winter. It reminded him of the afternoons they spent in the fields, and of the many days of joy and happiness – now long gone. It reminded him of his home, his father, and his brother – all now lost to the war. *Maybe* lost, he still had hope. At least his brother could still be spared.

Promise me you'll bring him safe.

And he promised. No matter the cost.

Act I

Chapter 2: The Lonely Oak

11 years before. Aizpute, in the heart of Courland.

There, on top of a small hill surrounded by the wheat fields of Courland, stood a gigantic Oak tree whose brown trunk and green leaves contrasted with the white-painted boards of the Baptist church behind it. In fact, it was so big it almost hid the church entirely and was so old its life was tenfold the time the little church ever existed.

In its many branches stood centuries and centuries of nests, and in spring, the birds returned home to visit their old home. But now, it the tree was also the nest for four small children who spent their days playing under it.

Their names were Markus and Kris Keidann, and Anna and Gustavs Anderman – a pair of pairs, Madam Keidann liked to call it. The Oak had seen their entire lives, from young seeds to the young kids they were. In fact, Mr. and Madam Keidann had married right before it – in such a festivity the village of Aizpute had never seen before or again.[5]

[5] It is common for Latvian to change the surname according to the gender. Anderman and Andermane for men and women, respectively.

But it was older, as old as memory and as time in that land. It had seen when the fields were dense forests covered by many Oaks like it. It had seen men came for the first time, with their rock tools to cut and to build. And with Oak, they built their homes, built their lifes, worshipped their gods.

It had seen the old pagans commemorate midsummer, when the harvests came to fruition and the tables would be filled with food and mead and joy. Families would gather to sing and dance around the fire, and the night was so short the sky was a penumbra coloured by the stars. And the young men would gather the leaves of the Oak to make wreaths and crowns and gather around it. There they sang the forgotten songs of old, and told stories of when the sky and earth were one, and when the first ovens were lit and when of bread was first tasted.

And Markuss loved hearing those stories, in bed before sleeping. They captured a feeling inside he could not explain, as if the stories were both so ancient and foreign and both so close and true. Every time he heard them, he thought a new thing – as if they kept inviting to be heard again and again. Those were stories of such times passed that Markus was sure they were already ancient the time they were first told.

Markus' mother told him once that the old Latvians loved talking so much, they would sing to trees and rocks, teaching them to speak. *Latvian is a small language for small people*, his mother would teach the children in the school, patting their heads and making a small fuss with their hair, *it is a language made for for the change of the wind when spring comes, and the feel of the grass in your fingers in the afternoon, or of the first hint frost before snow. It is the language for the skin of the apple and the churning of a bird and the worms that dig the earth. It's a language for the small beauty.*

And the old Latvians never bothered to write anything down, except for their cryptic runes in caves and rocks. No, it was as if they trusted these stories to be so self-evident as they could never be forgotten – and for centuries they passed from father to son and from mother to daughter. In fact, they never bothered to leave many material things behind. His mother once showed him a picture of many men in suits surrounding the recently discovered tomb of an ancient warrior. The engravings in the stone long lost and broken, and inside the remains of the warrior

could be seen, his ring and his axe and what used to be gifts of his loved ones. They didn't leave stone castles, what they left were crumbling paths of cobblestone and mossy walls that divided the fields families inhabited for centuries. Their wooden houses, and palisades long rotted and became nature again. Markus wondered how different the men and the warrior were – and if someday in the future other men would study the remains of our civilization.

His mother also told him something very interesting. She once said that for the ancients believed that everything in nature had a soul. There, beneath that Oak tree, Markuss had learned that everything had breath inside – the wind, the leaves, the grass. For the ancients, the rocks or caves or tress they drew their runes were not only tools for them to communicate, but that they would speak to us, in turn. Yes, speak to us. No two rocks were ever he same: even with the same drawing, one could find one placed on the top of a gravel mound – to signalize the dead – and other in a funeral pyre. Whoever read, or better, *talked* to a tablet of stone would have a connection as close to the tablet as he had to the engraver.

That was the midsummer, where the Oak would grow large, as if it tried to hug all the people that gathered beneath it. But in Autumn its leaves would turn brown and be taken east by the wind, as if the tree pointed to the coming warmth after a harsh winter. It was as if creation itself awaited its conclusion, as if one day something would come to crown the beauty final. And for all Markus knew, the Oak would still be there when the day came – its will ever bent on waiting in all his might.

But the Oak had also seen the cold, soaked with its hardships and labours. In those days, *Zemesmate* - mother earth – would come clad in all white and freeze the crops with her scythe, and take the children from their parents. The ancients measured their age with their winters. But not all was terror in the days without sun, for the souls of their ancestors would come in the sky in the form of northern lights – and paint the dark nights. It was not uncommon for the old and respected to be called *wise of many winters*. Mr. and Madam Keidann, Mr. and Madam Anderman, were wise of many winters.

And in the end of winter, the old Latvians would gather in their oaken forts and oaken villages and watch as the morning of

spring led a cavalcade. And they marvelled in wonder as they saw the display of the dawn light the aurora.

The Oak trees of the field had also been used for war. The old pagans had transformed them in pikes and shields, and ships to sail the Baltic sea and beyond. They came back with loot and jewels, and tales and legends to be told around the fire with a cup of mead. The Kuronians, as these vikings were called, raided and pillaged the Swedes and Poles and Danes as they could.

Even in death, the oak was used to make their caskets. In them would be placed beer and bread and other items to be used in the afterlife, and often an axe would be placed for protection against the evil spirits and would go to *Aizsaule*, the place beyond the sun. In there, they would feast with their ancestors like they did in midsummer.

And one day the Germans decided it was enough. For they came with ships and horses and knights from the Holy Land and ravaged and burned the land. In the great northern crusades, they exploited the tribes against each other, those not baptized by force were decapitated with it. And through centuries of war the old gods were driven away. They tore down the oak homes to build their castles of rock and stone, and soon the knights turned into landowners, and from landowners into lords and barons. And the old pagan kings and warriors were turned into serfs to work in the fields.

And there it stood, the Oak. It sat silent and saw everything change. He was the silent sentinel of the land since times immemorial. It had seen the Curonian warrior bid goodbye to his loved one, and gave shade when he came back tired and didn't found his home among the ruble and desolation. It also saw the missionaries preach and pray and the first Latvians take the cross and preach themselves. It saw marriages, it saw funerals – and it never said a word.

It saw the first Keidann take his name when the war was lost. A pagan warrior of old, whom with the blessing of a priest settled down. And there for centuries stood the family in a quiet life, and soon the village of Aizpute grew. Time enough for anyone to be capable of ever conceiving a tree or a history.

The entire region changed hand many times. For once it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, then of the proud

Swedish Empire, and finally to the Russian Empire. The emperors changed, but the German Nobles remained – and so did the Keidans. The *Osten-Sacken*, the *Mannerheims*, the *Grotthuß* – every Keidan firstborn knew their names and coats of arms.

There, they served as faithful serfs to the german nobles in their many solars and manors, tending the gardens and the woods, hunting game and sowing the fields. But it was Markus' and Kris' Great-Grandfather who gave the family the reputation it had – for he served the local lord in the Russo-Turk war. It was said he saved his lord's life in Crimea, and knelt and kissed his lord's hand for he was named Stewards of his lord's manor. He even kept his officer sabre of the war, to be kept sharp for the day it was needed again. He served his remaining years and in his grave the lord wrote "Faithful Servant, and Friend of Christ".

Markus' and Kris' Grandfather was also a good steward, thought not the intended one, because he was the youngest of four. He had come to the young Baptist church in Latvia and asked for the old lord the hill to build. And together with Old Gertners – the founder - and other brothers in faith, they raised that church board by board. Old Keidann, as he came to be called, was a simple man: a mind for woodwork that liked trees and music. One could find him making new chairs for the church or playing joyful hymns in his violin.

But soon the old lord passed away as well, and his sons were far and wide, and rarely spent their times in Aizpute, for they had many manors in many places. And life for the Keidanns became the quiet solitude of work in the fields they enjoyed. They continued to hunt and sow the fields, tend the gardens and te woods – and for the following decades they were the loyal stewards of Lords they seldom saw.

And the church grew and grew: Otto the Milkman, Madam Ponfrey the neighbor, Mr. Purvics the caretaker and so many others - and their choir grew as well. In Christmas people from all over the region would come and sing. It was Christmas 1891 when Old Keidann played the violin for the last time before passing later the next year. The choir was so angelic people often said their loved ones gone could hear from beyond the sky.

Gertners died somewhere around 1875, and soon the Keidanns became the caretakers of the church as well. Markus'

family was the first to arrive and last to leave on Sunday. Together with Mr. Purvics they would mop the floor and clean the chairs. Markus and Kris never loved the job much but Mr. Purvics would sometime bring candies and chocolate he bought in the center of the village as a gift for them.

For a long time, they had no Pastor, for they were a small rural church, so Markus' father usually brought the word. Markus would usually stay behind his father' leg in the pulpit – spying the congregation through his father's legs, thinking nobody could see him.

Markus' father was indeed a big man. Like his father, he loved woodwork and the sound of violins, though he himself never had the talent to play it – his heavy hands were too used to holding and axe to pick the correct notes – so he usually lent his strong bass to the choir. And thought physically imposing, he rarely raised his voice. Whenever he gave orders for the workers in the field, he gave them as a friend and councillor. He would roam around the lands – either his family's or his lord's – caring for nature. Markus' mother usually compared him to a big bear: a deep appreciator of honey and sleep in the afternoon.

Markus was around 4 when the church sat down in council and sent a letter for the capital, Riga, asking for a pastor educated in theology. In these old councils, votes were counted by families: The Purvics agreed, so did the Keidanns, and so on and so on. And after a few months Riga sent Pastor Anderman. He was a young preacher who had spent a year in missionary work in the Holy Land.

Not that *Holy Land* made much sense to Markus. At that age, he believed the world ended as far as his vision could go, and whenever his mother picked him up in her arms, he would often say "You told me the world was big, but I think it ends right there", as he pointed to the horizon. More often than not, she would walk over there with him in her arms, but it never convinced him much.

Pastor Anderman greatly emphasized in learning – even though the Russian Empire had forbidden teaching or writing in Latvian. The church found him a small house near the edge of the village and soon they began a local school. The teachers were his wife and Madam Keidann, often helped by the old ladies of Church.

There, in the school, the sons and daughters of all the poor and serfs of the region would come and study for no cost. There they saw the basics of everything: mathematics, physics, a little bit of astronomy, history, geography. But there was truly no matter that Madam Keidann loved teaching more than language and poetry.

On Sunday, Pastor Anderman said to the congregation that every men had the instinct to be creator, because our Father above was the great creator himself. Men would grow his gardens and tend his childrens because he too saw beauty in creation. When God created the animals, he called Adam and they named one by one together.