

*Homesteaders Series*

A New House  
for a New Family

*Revised Edition*

Book Three

Esther Allen Peterson

Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York

*For Don, who taught me about grace,  
and Don, Jr., who loves the land*



Copyright © 2010, 2021  
Royal Fireworks Online Learning, Inc.  
All Rights Reserved.

Royal Fireworks Press  
P.O. Box 399  
41 First Avenue  
Unionville, NY 10988-0399  
(845) 726-4444  
fax: (845) 726-3824  
email: [mail@rfwp.com](mailto:mail@rfwp.com)  
website: [rfwp.com](http://rfwp.com)



ISBN: 978-0-89824-886-9

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz  
Editor: Jennifer Ault  
Cover Illustration: Christopher Tice  
Book and Cover Designer: Kerri Ann Ruhl

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York, on acid-free paper  
using vegetable-based inks at the Royal Fireworks facility. 18mr21

## *Chapter One*

# The Wedding

September 5, 1869

Trygve and Oskar were clean. They had bathed in the creek and were wearing their Sunday best. The suit that Rebekka had sewn for Trygve at Christmas was already getting too small for him. The sleeves came up above his wrists, and the pants didn't reach his ankles. Oskar was wearing a suit that Trygve had already grown out of. The two boys almost looked as though they might be brothers, with their blond hair bleached nearly white by the summer sun.

Together they carried out the table that Trygve and his pa had made from split logs and placed it next to the two tables that had stood in the yard all summer. One was the table that Trygve had helped Oskar make, and the other he had helped Billy and Bobby Smith make. The tables were the first things the settlers had built after they'd claimed their land.

"Pastor Solheim won't get here for a little while yet," said Trygve, "but I want to make sure everything is ready when he does."

Oskar nodded. "Today is a big day," he said excitedly. "Today is the day we become brothers!"

Trygve smiled. At fifteen, he was four years older than Oskar, but already he felt an air of authority. In fact, after today Trygve would be the oldest of the nine children in their blended family. The Ytterhorns and the Olsens would officially become a single family in only a few hours.

“Oskar, you’ll have lots of brothers and sisters after the wedding,” said Signe, who had just come out of the house and had overheard the boys’ conversation. “Three new brothers and two new sisters.”

“And a new ma,” added Elna, who had followed Signe outside.

Oskar’s face clouded. “She’ll never be our real ma,” he said.

“Of course not,” Elna scolded. “But she’s wonderful and kind, and she’s been taking care of us and raising baby Noel alongside her own baby for months already. If we’re going to have a new ma, I’m glad it’s her.”

Oskar brightened. “I know,” he said. “I still miss Ma, though.”

Signe said gently, “We know.” She pointed to Trygve. “When our real ma died, it was so hard for us to accept that Pa wanted to marry Rebekka to be our ma instead. But now that Pa has died too, we’d be orphans without her. She takes care of us like we’re her own. Rolf is still only six, and Carrie is two, and Erik isn’t quite a year old yet. They need a mother, and Rebekka has been a good one for us.”

Elna smiled and tilted her head at Signe. “They’re not the only ones who need a ma. You and I are both only thirteen. There’s so much our mas didn’t have a chance to

teach us! And now look: Rebekka has already taught us how to make bread and how to spin yarn on the spinning wheel and how to knit and sew. She's as good as we could ever ask for in a ma, if we can't have our own."

Trygve nodded in agreement. "And I couldn't like and respect Nels more," he told Oskar and Elna. "Your pa is a good man, and I'm glad that he's going to be our pa, too."

"He *is* a good man," said a voice from behind them, and they turned to see Rebekka coming out of the house. Two younger children trailed behind her. She turned to them. "Rolf, you and Mari go and pick some flowers for the tables," she said.

As the two children hurried off to find flowers, Rebekka turned back to the scene before her. "Let's move this table a little that way," she directed Trygve and Oskar, and the boys lifted the tables again and rearranged them until Rebekka was satisfied.

When Rebekka had gone back into the house, Oskar whispered, "She's not usually this particular."

"She just wants everything to be perfect today," said Signe. "I would, too, if it was my wedding day."

Rebekka bustled back out of the house just as the two six-year-olds came into the yard carrying armfuls of purple and white asters and some black-eyed Susans. Rebekka filled three cups with water and arranged the flowers on the tables.

As she stood back to inspect her work, Nels came walking over from his sod house. He was carrying his violin.

“I wonder how many people come to church just to hear your pa play?” Signe asked Elna.

“Hard to say,” replied Elna. “But it doesn’t matter to me. I just like that there are so many people around us now.”

Little Carrie had toddled out into the yard, and now she held up two fingers and said, “Two!”

Signe smiled and scooped her up. “No, silly, that’s how old you are. And that’s how many families were left here after the Smiths decided to leave. But now there are six families. Eight if you count ours.”

“Soon to be seven,” Trygve added, grinning at her.

“Well, yes,” Signe smiled. “Seven after the wedding.”

Nels had taken his violin out of the case. He tucked it under his chin and played a few notes. He paused, tuned it, and then pulled the bow over the strings confidently. The strains of “*Sweet Hour of Prayer*” floated over the prairie, and one by one the families started coming.

The first ones to arrive were Delbert Dahlin and his two sons, Bjorn and Leif. Their mother had died on the way to the Dakota Territory, and they’d buried her somewhere in Minnesota. Nine-year-old Bjorn and six-year-old Leif had to take care of themselves while their pa tried to break the land. Bjorn did all of the cooking, and they mostly ate oatmeal, so whenever possible, Rebekka made extra food and sent it over to the Dahlin soddy.

As the Dahlins drew closer, Leif grinned. He trotted up to Rebekka and gave her a hug. Delbert was close behind him. “Nels,” he said, and he extended his hand in congratulations.

Nels shook it. “Good to see you, Delbert,” Nels told him.

Trygve saw Bjorn trailing behind his father, his eyes on the ground. “Hi,” said Trygve.

Bjorn never looked up, but he muttered, “Hi,” back and kicked at the dirt with his shoes.

Trygve wondered why it was so hard for Bjorn to talk to him. He remembered two and a half years earlier when he and his family had been the poorest people in their town in Norway. He’d felt embarrassed then, and he wondered if that’s how Bjorn felt now. But all of the families that were homesteading in their little community were from Norway, and they’d all been poor. That’s why they’d left their homes and made the treacherous journey across the ocean to America. The 1862 Homestead Act offered a chance for people from anywhere in the world to come to America and settle on their own 160-acre plot of land, where they could build a home, plant their own crops, and live a better life than what was available to them where they’d come from. No, being poor was hardly the reason Bjorn was so shy and withdrawn.

It might have been because of his father. Mrs. Klemstad was the community busybody, and she liked to gossip about how Delbert would go to nearby McCauleyville to get drunk, leaving the children at home alone and frittering away any money that they might have for necessary supplies. Rebekka had tried to encourage compassion. “None of us knows what that man has been through,” she’d told Mrs. Klemstad. “We shouldn’t judge him.” But Mrs. Klemstad didn’t pay any attention. She said that Delbert Dahlin was certainly on his way to hell.

Next came two sisters walking across the prairie. Laura Hansen and Astrid Gabrielsen were followed by their husbands, Olaf and Gudmann. Laura was pregnant with her first baby, and Astrid was hoping to be soon. When they'd arrived at the small community in June, Nels had taken Olaf and Gudmann to McCauleyville with the team of horses to buy doors and windows for their sod houses, which they'd built across the trail from each other. The newly rutted trail had become the main road through the community, running north from the oxcart trail.

Next came the Aune family with their six children. Trygve had wondered how they all fit in the small soddy that Mr. Aune had built. He'd found out a few weeks back when he'd taken them a leg of deer. There were three beds made from tree branches strung across cut logs that held straw and feather mattresses. They were lined up against the north wall and filled up half of the little sod house. The table and benches and the stove took up the other half, and there was no room for anyone to move around. When Trygve was there, two of the children sat on the bench by the table, and the other four sat on the beds.

Soon the two Eglund bachelors came strolling into the yard, and last of all were Severt and Lena Klemstad and their three girls. They all arranged themselves at the tables and on the ground and listened to Nels play the violin while they waited.

Finally Pastor Solheim, the Norwegian minister who came to McCauleyville to preach once every month, pulled up in his black horse-drawn carriage. He was going to hold



a Sunday service first and then officiate the wedding between Nels and Rebekka afterward.

Pastor Solheim climbed down from his carriage and greeted Nels and Rebekka. Then he stood up in front of the settlers and said, "I know we have a wedding today. Are there any baptisms? If there are none, we'll begin the service." Then, in his preacher voice, which was a half-tone higher than his regular speaking voice, he said, "We'll begin in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

While Pastor Solheim droned on and on, Trygve looked over at the woods that hugged the edges of the creek, which bubbled musically over rocks and past their cabin on its way to the Red River. The sumac was already a deep reddish brown, and the trees were starting to turn. There were yellow edges on the cottonwood trees, and the prairie grasses had dried into a deep golden red. Trygve saw a deer at the edge of the woods and thought with pride of the twenty-three deer that he'd shot to put meat on the tables of all of the settlers.

Signe was lost in her own daydream. She was thinking about how she and Elna would be going to McCauleyville to go to school as soon as they finished the work of canning and preserving all of the vegetables from the garden. It would be a big change from what they had done the year before. Elna's mother Anna had held school in the Olsen soddy, and the children had loved it, especially story time, when Anna read them great classic English and American novels. Anna's children, the Ytterhorn children, and the two Smith boys had learned so much and had gained such a command of the English language from their studies that both Signe

and Elna had decided to become teachers. But to do that, they needed more school themselves, and to get that, they would have to go to McCauleyville.

Pastor Solheim preached for an hour and twenty minutes, and at last came the abrupt “Amen.” The worshippers all suddenly awoke from their daydreams and returned to the awareness of the moment.

The minister continued. “Nels Olsen has informed me that he and Rebekka Ytterhorn wish to be married.” He looked at the couple. Nels squeezed Rebekka’s hand, and they got up, walked to the front of the gathering of settlers, and stood in front of Pastor Solheim.

Trygve looked at Rebekka. Her light brown hair that was always braided now hung loosely around her shoulders. She was wearing the same dress that she had worn when she’d married his pa. This was her second marriage, and again it was not for love. She was needed.

Pastor Solheim said solemnly, “I remember the last time I was here. It was for the funerals of the wife of Nels Olsen, the husband of Rebekka Ytterhorn, and another young man, all of whom were taken by smallpox. Now we ask the Lord Almighty to be present with these two families as they become one and to watch over them and protect them.” He paused. “Nels Olsen, do you take Rebekka to be your lawful wedded wife? To love her and cherish her until death do you part?”

Nels answered, “I do.”

Pastor Solheim turned to Rebekka. “Do you, Rebekka Ytterhorn, take Nels to be your lawful wedded husband and to love and obey him until death do you part?”

Rebekka answered, “I do.”

Pastor Solheim paused for effect. At last he said, “I pronounce you man and wife.”

As the settlers sang a joyful hymn, Trygve and Oskar carried out roasters full of turkey and goose that Trygve had shot and set them on the tables. After the last “amen,” the women spread the bounty of their gardens, their breads, and their cakes on the tables, and a celebration of food began. Fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters all lined up with their plates in their hands. Nels and Rebekka stood by the tables and accepted the well wishes of their neighbors. Their new life as one family had begun.