

# Cossacks, and 2 More

by [Esther Cameron](#) (May 2025)



Attack of the Cossacks in the Steppe (Franz Alekseevich Roubaud, 1881)

## Cossacks

*for A.T.*

"It's all because of the Cossacks,"  
Her mother would say to her,  
And she would say it to her children.  
The Cossacks, from whom her great-grandmother  
Barely escaped with her life  
And one of her sisters went mad  
Because of what they'd been through  
And the Cossacks reverberated through the generations  
In yelling and fights, dislocations and estrangements  
That mended only slowly through the years.

There are a lot of Cossacks in the world.

All of us meet them in one way or the other.  
There are Cossacks on the playground, on the teaching staff,  
On the Internet and of course in the government.  
They hide in corners and under the bed  
They whisper into our dreams  
Sometimes they instigate us against our own joy

Or prompt us to launch *cherems\** against one another  
They seem to have some control over the weather—  
They can institute a sudden freeze.  
(And it is seldom certain  
Which one of us invited them.)

Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned the Cossacks.  
Maybe the Cossacks made me mention them.  
Our friendship is like something we build in sand  
They gallop through and scatter from time to time.  
Yet there have been times, between raids,  
When I felt sure our mothers  
Were waving to each other across green meadows,  
And I am pretty sure we shall meet in *Gan Edent†*  
As beneath the almond tree in flower at Passover  
On the porch of your ramshackle house in the dusty town  
Where we shall feast without anyone needing to peel the  
vegetables  
And have a good laugh about Cossacks.

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[\*] anathemas

[†] Paradise

## **The May**

from Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*

"All my life," she'd say, "I have supped sorrow."

And no one understood. Her kin were poor,  
But the whole village had to scrape and borrow,

Hard work, small gain. She had no less nor more.  
Her melancholy lasted till she lost  
Her husband, then her sons in the Great War,

And then she grew serene. (Can griefs exhaust  
Grief?) In springtime she would cull white may  
And place it in her house, although she crossed

Her neighbors' superstition, for they say  
The may means death. "But all I loved are dead;  
Let me look on beauty."

So the spray  
Gleamed in her front room, lovely beyond dread.

## **Respite**

Now then begone, dull discontent,  
And likewise, fretting gloom!  
This morning I have learned the scent  
Of blackberry vines in bloom.

This morning I have seen a plant  
I never saw before.  
It was a single thin-leaved stalk,  
One yellow flower it bore.

Bright swallowtail came floating by,  
A song-sparrow did whistle,  
And I saw—what made my courage high—  
Worms feeding on the thistle!

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