

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.

[*] 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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