

April 26, 1903

## Saskatoon

Stepping out of the tent, Dorothy kicked at tufts of dry grass with her shiny leather shoes.  
“For pity’s sake, Dodie, stand still!”

Dorothy held herself rigid while her mother tugged a silver hairbrush through her frizzy hair. Then Mam plunked a sailor hat on her head and straightened the folds in her loose-fitting navy dress. Mam had bought it a size too big so Dorothy could wear it next winter too.

“Not entirely presentable for church,” sighed Mam, “but it will have to do.”

Dorothy pressed her lips tight. It wasn’t fair! She had just sailed over an entire ocean and crossed a thousand miles of wilderness by train. Now she lived in a tent camp beside the tiny village of Saskatoon. Yet Mam expected her to look and behave exactly as she did back in England.

Mam picked a stray hair off Dorothy’s wool jacket. “Stand up straight.”

“This isn’t England, Mam!” The words spurted out before Dorothy could stop herself.

“Hold your tongue, Dorothy Bolton! I expect lady-like behaviour wherever you are.”

Dorothy fumed while her mother and older sister Lydia fussed over each other's hats. She followed them down the path to the restaurant tent, now set up for Sunday worship. A tall man with a clerical collar stood at the entrance. Mam gripped Dorothy's elbow, steering her toward him.

"Good morning, Mr. Lloyd," said Mam, holding out her right hand. She was wearing the same long white gloves she'd worn to church back in York. Dorothy wondered how long Mam would keep those gloves clean in the wilderness.

The Reverend Mr. Lloyd shook Mam's hand. "How are you, Mrs. Bolton? I heard you were feeling poorly."

Mam seemed taken aback by the question. She tightened her grip on Dorothy's arm.

Lydia answered for Mam. "Our mother had a spell of melancholy the other day when it was raining. Her spirits have lifted with the weather."

To avoid greeting Mr. Lloyd, Dorothy studied the ground. Puddles from two days ago had almost baked dry.

Mr. Lloyd lifted her chin. "I trust you are helping your mother as you should, Dorothy." She felt her cheeks redden as Mr. Lloyd stared at her. Then he patted her shoulder and turned to greet the next family.

The Boltons went inside the large marquee tent and squeezed into the third row of folding wooden chairs. Dorothy stretched, trying to peer over a wide hat with frilly feathers. The hat's owner shot a glare over her shoulder.

"For heaven's sake, sit still," hissed Mam.

During the service the Reverend Mr. Lloyd droned

on about preserving British values in their wilderness colony. Dorothy groaned inwardly. She'd already heard this sermon on the steamship to Canada. As they waited to file out afterwards, she scuffled the dead grass underfoot.

"Stop fidgeting, Dodie." Mam seized her arm.

"Why is this line so slow?"

"People wish to have a few words with Mr. Lloyd. You will wait respectfully, without speaking again."

Lydia touched Mam's shoulder, smiling sweetly. "I'll scoot back and get the fire started for tea. Give my regards to Mr. Lloyd for a fine sermon." She swished away in her satin skirt, out the rear door.

Feeling Mam's vice grip on her arm, Dorothy huffed with frustration. *Why didn't I think of that?* She marvelled at Lydia's ability to do what she wanted without prompting a lecture from Mam.

Slowly, the line moved forward. Now there were only four families ahead of them.

A scruffy boy with dirty clothes rushed up and whispered to Mr. Lloyd. Dorothy blinked. It was Victor Sutton, who had kept her company aboard ship when her entire family was ill. Mr. Lloyd apologized to those in line and hurried away with Victor.

Mam sighed as they walked back to their tent. "I had hoped to comment on Mr. Lloyd's sermon. What a pity he was called away to assist some common family who cannot manage their own affairs."

"That wasn't some common family," said Dorothy indignantly. "That was Victor." The moment the words left her mouth, she wished she had choked them back.

“Precisely my point, Dodie. Victor’s mother grew up in service and his father was a steel worker. I didn’t notice any Suttons at church. That is not a suitable family for you to befriend.”

Dorothy swallowed her defence of Victor. Instead she observed, “Our Frank wasn’t at church either.” Dorothy envied her older brother’s freedom, living with his new friend Patrick in a tent across the field.

“That’s different,” Mam retorted. “He went with Dad to inspect horses.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence. At the campsite Mam settled into the rocking chair Dad had unpacked for her comfort.

Dorothy was sent inside the tent to change into her workaday gingham dress. *What a fuss for nothing*, she thought, pulling off the cashmere frock. She couldn’t imagine when the promised Barr Colony would have social events fancy enough to require a dress like this.

Dorothy knew all about Mr. Barr’s pledge to build a proper British community: church, school, hospital and community hall for plays and operas. How Dad’s face had glowed when he read from Barr’s pamphlet last autumn! Because of that dream, two thousand Britishers had crammed into a ship to follow Mr. Barr to Canada.

On the trip Mr. Barr broke so many promises that nobody trusted his leadership anymore. Last night Dad and Frank went to a meeting and came back all agitated. Through the tent wall, Dorothy had listened to them spout off about Barr’s lies. Dad’s anger frightened her. How could they still follow Barr into the wilderness?

As she packed her church clothes away, Dorothy

shook her head. She would never figure out how grown-ups thought. She would just have to trust Dad. Dorothy tucked her fear into the steamer trunk and closed the lid.

"Hello, family," called a deep voice.

*Dad's back from the corral!*

Dorothy hurried outside just in time to hear Dad's tragic news. "A woman tried to cook inside a tent and the sparks from the campstove touched off the straw bedding. Right sharp the entire tent was a ball of fire."

Mam asked, "Was the woman hurt, Willy?"

"Seems her legs were singed but not deeply burned. Your friend Victor Sutton was the hero, Dodie."

Dorothy gaped at Dad.

"Victor ran from his campsite with two buckets of water and doused the woman, whose skirt was aflame. Mrs. Sutton put wet cloths to the burns, while he ran for the doctor."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy. "That's why Victor was covered with soot when he came for Reverend Lloyd."

Dad sat on a log, staring into the charred remains of their breakfast campfire. "The Suttons are level-headed. I pray they are nearby if we ever have such a calamity."

"I can't imagine we should ever need their help," sniffed Mam.

Dad didn't hear Mam. He was watching Lydia lift a kettle from their small tin campstove. She poured boiling water into a blue crockery teapot.

"Lydia, don't ever cook inside the tent."

"No, Dad. Was the tent destroyed?"

"They lost everything. 'Twas a young couple, newly married. Mr. Lloyd is taking a collection for them."

All the while Mam had been rocking. "How devastating for them. Perhaps they will give up this foolhardy adventure and return to England."

A flicker of annoyance crossed Dad's face. "Perhaps," he muttered.

Lydia lined up three mugs and one porcelain cup and saucer for Mam. She poured in condensed milk, extra for Dorothy, and topped the cups with tea.

Taking her mug, Dorothy sat beside Dad and snuggled against his red flannel shirt.

"We're not giving up, are we, Dad?"

The familiar twinkle returned to Dad's eyes. "We still have our tent, Dodie."

Dorothy studied their army tent, left over from the Boer War that had ended last year. You could only stand in the middle where a long pole held up the pointed roof. The seams dripped in the rain. The bottom wall dangled above ground, except where pegs held it down. The wind whistled in, chilling her while she slept. But it was better than no tent and Dorothy did not want to go back to England.

She grinned at Dad.

Dad drained his mug. "Frank offered us some split firewood. Come help me carry it, Dodie."

They walked to the last row of tents and found Frank and Patrick's campsite. Two black retriever pups, tied to wooden stakes, barked excitedly.

Dorothy giggled as each dog licked her face. "Look how big the pups have grown!"

"Hmm. Let's get the firewood back so we can set a stew simmering." Dad seemed too busy planning their

next move to have fun anymore. With a sigh Dorothy gathered an armful of kindling.

Dad built a blazing campfire. After it died back, he placed a grate over the burning logs and topped it with the big black pot. "There you be, Lydia. Ready to cook."

Lydia added a bucket of water, some cubes of beef and pre-soaked white beans. "You dice the onions, Dodie, while I chop this turnip."

Dorothy turned to Mam, still rocking in her chair. "Onions sting my eyes, Mam. Why do I always get the worst job?"

Mam gave her a withering look. "Do as you're told and hold your tongue."

With a grimace Dorothy started cutting onions on her block of wood.

Later Dorothy was sent next door to invite the Thorpe family for dinner. On the long train trip from Saint John, Dorothy had been shocked to learn that Mrs. Thorpe's large belly contained a baby. It was born their third night in Saskatoon.

Mam said, "With the new babe and another lively child, Mrs. Thorpe will appreciate a ready-made meal."

When Mrs. Thorpe arrived with the newborn, she had dark circles under her eyes. Mr. Thorpe tried to distract four-year-old Rose from clinging to her mother's skirt. The Thorpes gratefully accepted bowls of stew. While she ate, Mrs. Thorpe let Dorothy hold the sleeping infant. For some reason the baby cried all night and slept soundly all day.

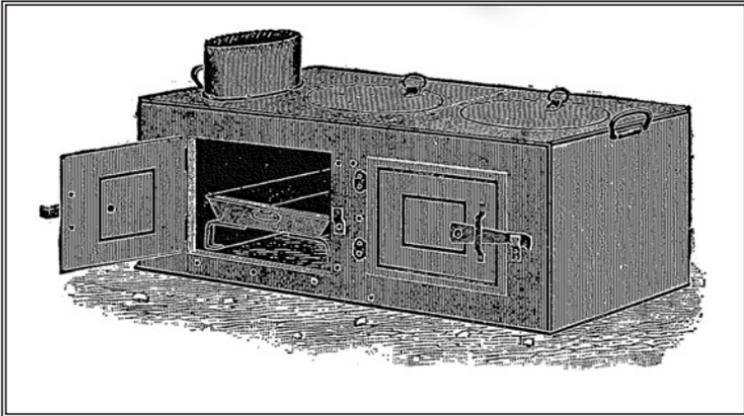
After dinner Rose insisted on snuggling close to Dorothy on the folded groundsheet while Mam read

aloud her favourite psalms from the bible.

Later that night Dorothy lay on her straw-filled mattress, listening to the sounds from the neighbouring tent. The newborn, Jasper George, was wailing and Rose was clamouring for another bedtime song. Dorothy hated to admit it, but she had actually grown to like Rose.

*Almost my little sister*, she thought drowsily.

Courtesy, Western Development Museum Collection



This portable campstove, made from thin sheets of tin-plated steel, is similar to the ones used by Barr Colonists. The open door shows the oven; behind the closed door is the woodbox. A longer pipe can be attached to direct smoke away from users. From an early catalogue of the Marshall-Wells Company, Winnipeg.