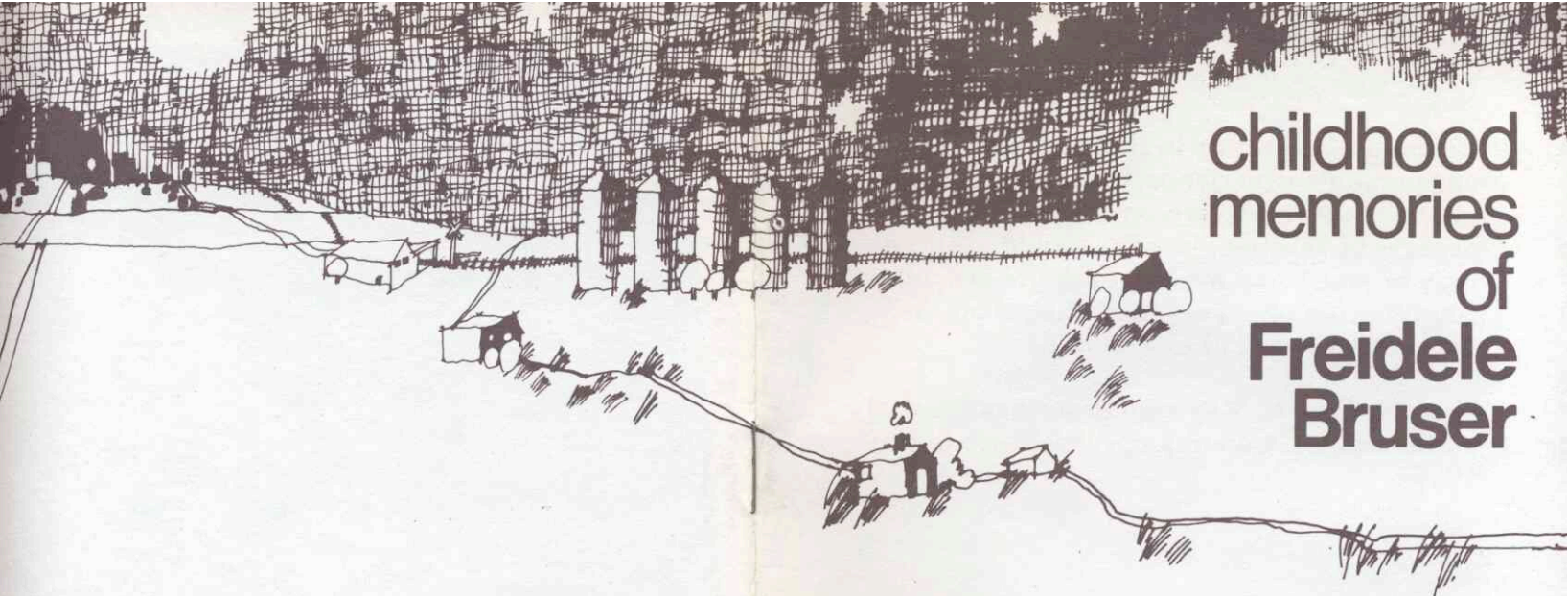


childhood
memories
of
**Freidele
Bruser**



Each autobiography in this series presents one person's experience, lived and remembered in his or her own special way. While aspects of this person's life circumstances may be shared by others, each life is a unique combination of events, and should not be viewed as typical of any group.

Freidele Bruser Maynard describes her early childhood in a Canadian prairie town in the 1930s.

Fredelle Bruser Maynard, *Raisins and Almonds*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972. Copyright 1964, 1967, 1968, 1972 by Fredelle Bruser Maynard. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

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Smalltown life in western Canada left Freidele memories full of rich detail. As she grew up, she wanted to be "like everyone else," but was troubled by her awareness that her family was Jewish and therefore different, even though they shared almost all the values of their neighbors.

Birch Hills

Birch Hills was two streets, a line of grain elevators, and a railway station. Not that I saw it so during the years I lived there. I was three when we arrived, nine when we moved away. We passed through many small towns afterwards, but Birch Hills has remained for me always The Town, the essential prairie experience. I can walk in my mind every foot of its wooden sidewalks, move through the rooms of our small brown house there as familiarly as if I had never left. . . .

It is strange to recollect that our town had no policeman. Such trouble as occurred—a drunk on the rampage, somebody's wife "gone crazy"—would be dealt with by the Mounties, the red-coated members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A Mountie's riding into town was an event. So was the occasional appearance of a wandering contingent of Salvation Army members, the women plain and lofty countenanced in their hard blue bonnets, the men a trifle seedy, making up on a rolling drum what they lacked in presence. Once, when the Army came, I disgraced myself terribly. They had been putting on a good show, those soldiers of the Lord, shaking their tambourines mightily and singing the risen Christ. But the response, in a devout Lutheran community, was embarrassingly lukewarm. When, at the climax of the street-corner service, the sergeant-major boomed out, "Who will COME and be WASHED in the BLOOD of the LAMB?" no one stepped forward. There was a long, awkward silence. He tried again, this time sup-

ported by a wail of women. Again, nothing. A reckless sense of social obligation overcame my normal shyness. I stepped forth, the only Jewish child in town, and presented myself for baptism.

* * * *

Our house struck two dominant notes—gentility (the Jewish *eydelkayt*) and comfort. Gentility was represented by the phonograph, a hand-wound affair on which we played “Darktown Strutters Ball” and Caruso arias, and the piano plus metronome. I much preferred the metronome to the piano, but was willing to play one in order to use the other. On the walls we displayed real pictures. (I knew many homes whose chief ornament was a calendar of a type I have never seen since. The scene, usually a landscape, was embossed and thickly encrusted, all over, with a glitter material that looked like coarse salt.) We were specially proud of two etchings, brought from “the old country” and presented to us by the Neatbys, an English family my parents admired and trusted because they were *educated*. Another elegance, in my parents’ bedroom, was an ivory dressing table set including marvelous objects like a hair receiver (for combings) and the chamois buffer that gave my mother’s fingernails their luminous sheen. Such possessions told me—told, I thought, the world—that though we might be poor we were not common, *prost*. . . .

Indoors, we played paper dolls and cards, or rummaged through the attic for dress-up costumes. Outdoors, our games ran the cycle of the seasons. Winter was skating, sledding, building snow houses or watching adult games, hockey and curling. . . .

Summer evenings, so far north, were late bright. You could race out after supper any night and find a gang ready to play. In the brief democracy of those waning hours, children of all ages joined in; it was the best

moment for team games. That is how I see Birch Hills now, in dusky lavender light. We have gathered in the field by the skating rink; the town lies behind us, the woods thicken round. I smell crushed grass and clover and—from a nearby garden, heavy, sickish-sweet—the white night-blooming tobacco plant. Fireflies wink and fade. Someone calls, “Run! Quick!” All the others have made it, across a dangerous no-man’s-land, to the safety of goal, and in the sudden dark I hear the leader’s cry:

“Red Rover, Red Rover,
I call Freidele over.”

Jewish Christmas

Christmas, when I was young, was the season of bitterness. Lights beckoned and tinsel shone, store windows glowed with mysterious promise, but I knew the brilliance was not for me. Being Jewish, I had long grown accustomed to isolation and difference. Difference was in my bones and blood, and in the pattern of my separate life. My parents were conspicuously unlike other children’s parents in our predominantly Norwegian community. Where my schoolmates were surrounded by blond giants appropriate to a village called Birch Hills, my family suggested still the Russian plains from which they had emigrated years before. My handsome father was a big man, but big without any suggestion of physical strength or agility; one could not imagine him at the wheel of a tractor. In a town that was all wheat and cattle, he seemed the one man wholly devoted to urban pursuits: he operated a general store. Instead of the native costume—overalls and mackinaws—he wore city suits and pearl-gray spats. In winter he was splendid in a plushy chinchilla coat with velvet collar, his black curly hair an extension of the high Astrakhan hat which he had brought from the Ukraine. I was proud of his good

looks, and yet uneasy about their distinctly oriental flavor.

My mother's difference was of another sort. Her beauty was not so much foreign as timeless. My friends had slender young Scandinavian mothers, light of foot and blue of eye; my mother was short and heavysset, but with a face of classic proportions. . . .

At home we spoke another language—Yiddish or Russian—and ate rich foods whose spicy odors bore no resemblance to the neighbor's cooking. We did not go to church or belong to clubs or, it seemed, take any meaningful part in the life of the town. Our social roots went, not down into the foreign soil on which fate had deposited us, but outwards, in delicate, sensitive connections, to other Jewish families in other lonely prairie towns. Sundays they congregated around our table, these strangers who were brothers; I saw that they too ate knishes and spoke with faintly foreign voices, but I could not feel for them or for their silent swarthy children the kinship I knew I owed to all those who had been, like us, both chosen and abandoned.

All year I walked in the shadow of difference; but at Christmas above all, I tasted it sour on my tongue. There was no room at the tree. "You have Hanukkah," my father reminded me. "That is *our* holiday." I knew the story, of course—how, over two thousand years ago, my people had triumphed over the enemies of their faith, and how a single jar of holy oil had miraculously burned eight days and nights in the temple of the Lord. I thought of my father lighting each night another candle in the *menorah*, my mother and I beside him as he recited the ancient prayer: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us by thy commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah." Yes, we had our miracle too. But how could it stand against the glamor of Christmas? What was *gelt*, the tra-

ditional gift coins, to a sled packed with surprises? What was Judas Maccabaeus the liberator compared with the Christ child in the manger? To my sense of exclusion was added a sense of shame. "You *killed* Christ!" said the boys on the playground. "You killed him!" I knew none of the facts behind this awful accusation, but I was afraid to ask. I was even afraid to raise my voice in the chorus of "Come All Ye Faithful" lest I be struck down for my unfaithfulness by my own God, the wrathful Jehovah. With all the passion of my child's heart I longed for a younger, more compassionate deity with flowing robe and silken hair. Reluctant conscript to a doomed army, I longed to change sides. I longed for Christmas.

Although my father was in all things else the soul of indulgence, in this one matter he stood firm as Moses. "You cannot have a tree, *herzele*. You shouldn't even want to sing the carols. You are a Jew." I turned the words over in my mind and on my tongue. What was it, to be a Jew in Birch Hills, Saskatchewan? Though my father spoke of Jewishness as a special distinction, as far as I could see it was an inheritance without a kingdom, a check on a bank that had failed. Being Jewish was mostly not doing things other people did—not eating pork, not going to Sunday school, not entering, even playfully, into childhood romances, because the only boys around were *goyishe* boys. I remember, when I was five or six falling in love with Edward Prince of Wales. Of the many arguments with which Mama might have dampened my ardor, she chose surely the most extraordinary. "You can't marry him. He isn't Jewish." And of course, finally, definitely, most crushing of all, being Jewish meant not celebrating Christ's birth. My parents allowed me to attend Christmas parties, but they made it clear that I must receive no gifts. How I envied the white and gold Norwegians! Their Lutheran church was not glamorous, but it was less frighteningly

strange than the synagogue I had visited in Winnipeg, and in the Lutheran church, each December, joy came upon the midnight clear.

It was the Lutheran Church and its annual concert which brought me closest to Christmas. Here there was always a tree, a jolly Santa Claus, and a program of songs and recitations. As the town's most accomplished elocutionist, I was regularly invited to perform. Usually my offering was comic or purely secular—*Santa's Mistake*, *The Night Before Christmas*, a scene from *A Christmas Carol*. But I had also memorized for such occasions a sweetly pious narrative about the housewife who, blindly absorbed in cleaning her house for the Lord's arrival, turns away a beggar and finds she has rebuffed the Savior himself. Oddly enough, my recital of this vitally un-Jewish material gave my parents no pain. My father, indeed, kept in his safe-deposit box along with other valuables a letter in which the Lutheran minister spoke gratefully of my last Christmas performance. "Through her great gift, your little Freidele has led many to Jesus." Though Papa seemed untroubled by considerations of whether this was a proper role for a Jewish child, reciting *The Visit* made me profoundly uneasy. And I suppose it was this feeling, combined with a natural disinclination to stand unbidden at the feast, which led me, the year I was seven, to rebel.

We were baking in the steamy kitchen, my mother and I—or rather she was baking while I watched, fascinated as always, the miracle of the strudel. First, the warm ball of dough, no larger than my mother's hand. Slap, punch, bang—again and again she lifted the dough and smacked it down on the board. Then came the moment I loved. Over the kitchen table, obliterating its patterned oilcloth, came a damask cloth; and over this in turn a cloud of flour. Beside it stood my mother, her hair bound in muslin, her hands and arms powdered with flour. She paused a moment. Then, like a dancer about to execute

a particularly difficult pirouette, she tossed the dough high in the air, catching it with a little stretching motion and tossing again until the ball was ball no longer but an almost transparent rectangle. The strudel was as large as the tablecloth now. "*Unter Freidele's vigele Ligt eyn groys veys tsigele*," she sang. "Under Freidele's little bed A white goat lays his silken head." *Tsigele iz geforen handlen Rozinkes mit mandlen. . . .*" For some reason that song, with its gay fantastic images of the white goat shopping for raisins and almonds, always made me sad. But then my father swung open the storm door and stood, stamping and jingling his galoshes buckles, on the icy mat.

"Boris, look how you track in the snow!"

Already flakes and stars were turning into muddy puddles. Still booted and icy-cheeked he swept us up—a kiss on the back of Mama's neck, the only spot not dedicated to strudel, and a hug for me.

"You know what? I have just now seen the preacher. Reverend Pederson, he wants you should recite at the Christmas concert."

I bent over the bowl of almonds and snapped the nutcracker.

"I should tell him it's all right, you'll speak a piece?"

No answer.

"Sweetheart—dear one—you'll do it?"

Suddenly the words burst out. "No, Papa! I don't want to!"

My father was astonished. "But why not? What is it with you?"

"I hate those concerts!" All at once my grievances swarmed up in an angry cloud. "I never

have any fun! And everybody else gets presents and Santa Claus never calls out 'Freidele Bruser'! They all know I'm Jewish!"

Papa was incredulous. "But, little daughter, always you've had a good time! Presents! What presents? A bag of candy, an orange? Tell me, is there a child in town with such toys as you have? What should you want with Santa Claus?"

It was true. My friends had tin tea sets and dolls with sawdust bodies and crude Celluloid smiles. I had an Eaton Beauty with real hair and delicate jointed body, two French dolls with rosy bisque faces and—new this last Hanukkah—Rachel, my baby doll. She was the marvel of the town: exquisite china head, overlarge and shaped like a real infant's, tiny wrinkled hands, legs convincingly bowed. I had a lace and taffeta doll bassinet, a hand-made cradle, a full set of rattan doll furniture, a teddy bear from Germany and real porcelain dishes from England. What *did* I want with Santa Claus? I didn't know. I burst into tears.

Papa was frantic now. What was fame and the applause of the Lutherans compared to his child's tears? Still bundled in his overcoat he knelt on the kitchen floor and hugged me to him, rocking and crooning. "Don't cry, my child, don't cry. You don't want to go, you don't have to. I tell them you have a sore throat, you can't come."

"Boris, wait. Listen to me." For the first time since my outburst, Mama spoke. She laid down the rolling pin, draped the strudel dough delicately over the table, and wiped her hands on her apron. "What kind of a fuss? You go or you don't go, it's not such a big thing. But so close to Christmas you shouldn't let them down. The one time we sit with them in the church and such joy you give them. Freidele, look at me. . . ." I snuffled loudly and obeyed, not without some satisfaction in the thought of the pathetic

picture I made. "Go this one time, for my sake. You'll see, it won't be so bad. And if you don't like it—pffff, no more! All right? Now, come help with the raisins."

On the night of the concert we gathered in the kitchen again, this time for the ritual of the bath. Papa set up the big tin tub on chairs next to the black iron stove. Then, while he heated pails of water and sloshed them into the tub, Mama set out my clothes. Everything about this moment contrived to make me feel pampered, special. I was lifted in and out of the steamy water, patted dry with thick towels, powdered from neck to toes with Mama's best scented talcum. Then came my "reciting outfit." My friends in Birch Hills had party dresses mail-ordered from Eaton's [large city department store from whose catalogs the families bought]—crackly taffeta or shiny rayon satin weighted with lace or flounces, and worn with long white stockings drawn up over long woolen underwear. My dress was Mama's own composition, a poem in palest peach crepe de chine created from remnants of her bridal trousseau. Simple and flounceless, it fell from my shoulders in a myriad of tiny pleats no wider than my thumbnail; on the low-slung sash hung a cluster of silk rosebuds. Regulation drop-seat underwear being unthinkable under such a costume, Mama had devised a snug little apricot chemise which made me, in a world of wool, feel excitingly naked.

When at last I stood on the church dais, the Christmas tree glittering and shimmering behind me, it was with the familiar feeling of strangeness. I looked out over the audience-congregation, grateful for the myopia that made faces indistinguishable, and began:

A letter came on Christmas morn
In which the Lord did say
"Behold my star shines in the east
And I shall come today.
Make bright thy hearth. . . ."

The words tripped on without thought or

effort. I knew by heart every nuance and gesture, down to the modest curtsey and the properly solemn pace with which I returned to my seat. There I huddled into the lining of Papa's coat, hardly hearing the "Beautiful, beautiful!" which accompanied his hug. For this was the dreaded moment. All around me, children twitched and whispered. Santa had come.

"Olaf Swenson!" Olaf tripped over a row of booted feet, leapt down the aisle and embraced an enormous package. "Ellen Njaa! Fern Dahl! Peter Bjorkstrom!" There was a regular procession now, all jubilant. Everywhere in the hall children laughed, shouted, rejoiced with their friends. "What'd you get?" "Look at mine!" In the seat next to me, Gunnar Olsen ripped through layers of tissue: "I got it! I got it!" His little sister wrestled with the contents of a red net stocking. A tin whistle rolled to my feet and I turned away, ignoring her breathless efforts to retrieve it.

And then— suddenly, incredibly, the miracle came. "Freidele Bruser!" For me, too, the star had shone. I looked up at my mother. A mistake surely. But she smiled and urged me to my feet. "Go on, look, he calls you!" It was true. Santa was actually coming to meet me. My gift, I saw, was not wrapped—and it could be no mistake. It was a doll, a doll just like Rachel, but dressed in christening gown and cap. "Oh Mama, look! He's brought me a doll! A twin for Rachel! She's just the right size for Rachel's clothes. I can take them both for walks in the carriage. They can have matching outfits. . . ." I was in an ecstasy of plans.

Mama did not seem to be listening. She lifted the hem of the gown. "How do you like her dress? Look, see the petticoat?"

"They're beautiful!" I hugged the doll rapturously. "Oh, Mama, I *love* her! I'm going to call her Ingrid. Ingrid and Rachel. . . ."

During the long walk home Mama was strangely quiet. Usually I held my parents' hands and swung between them. But now I stepped carefully, clutching Ingrid.

"You had a good time, yes?" Papa's breath frosted the night.

"Mmmmmmm." I rubbed my warm cheek against Ingrid's cold one. "It was just like a real Christmas. I got the best present of anybody. Look, Papa—did you see Ingrid's funny little cross face? It's just like Rachel's. I can't wait to get her home and see them side by side in the crib."

In the front hall, I shook the snow from Ingrid's lace bonnet. "A hot cup cocoa maybe?" Papa was already taking the milk from the icebox. "No, no, I want to get the twins ready for bed!" I broke from my mother's embrace. The stairs seemed longer than usual. In my arms Ingrid was cold and still, a snow princess. I could dress her in Rachel's flannel gown, that would be the thing. . . . The dolls and animals watched glassy-eyed as I knelt by the cradle. It rocked at my touch, oddly light. I flung back the blankets. Empty. Of course.

Sitting on the cold floor, the doll heavy in my lap, I wept for Christmas. Nothing had changed then, after all. For Jews there was no Santa Claus; I understood that. But my parents. . . . *Why* had they dressed Rachel?

From the kitchen below came the mingled aromas of hot chocolate and buttery popcorn. My mother called softly. "Let them call," I said to Ingrid-Rachel. "I don't care!" The face of the Christmas doll was round and blank under her cap; her dress was wet with my tears. Brushing them away, I heard my father enter the room. He made no move to touch me or lift me up. I turned and saw his face tender and sad like that of a Chagall violinist. "Mama worked every night on the

clothes," he said. "Yesterday even, knitting booties."

Stiff-fingered, trembling, I plucked at the sleeve of the christening gown. It was indeed a miracle—a wisp of batiste but as richly overlaid with embroidery as a coronation robe. For the first time I examined Rachel's new clothes—the lace insets and lace overlays, the French knots and scalloped edges, the rows of hemstitching through which tiny ribbons ran like fairy silk. The petticoat was tucked and pleated. Even the little diaper showed an edge of hand crochet. There were booties and mittens and a ravishing cap.

"Freidele, dear one, my heart," my father whispered. "We did not think. We could not know. Mama dressed Rachel in the new clothes, you should be happy with the others. We so much love you."

Outside my window, where the Christmas snow lay deep and crisp and even, I heard the shouts of neighbors returning from the concert. "Joy to the world!" they sang,

Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing . . .

It seemed to me, at that moment, that I too was a part of the song. I wrapped Rachel warmly in her shawl and took my father's hand.

To Walk the Golden Streets

Many children grow up, I suppose, not knowing how their fathers spend the hours between breakfast and dinner. For me, from the beginning, Papa's store was a central fact of existence, not only our living but our life. The store defined our position in the community (substantial though not rich, and faintly sus-

pect because we dealt in money). It also defined my father—set off, in a highly visible way, his personal qualities and his business gifts. He was not good at making money. What he loved was planning, organizing, displaying, talking to customers. Every store he had—and there were many, a steady rhythm of grand openings and bankruptcies—was a marvelously ordered world. At a time when country store windows went in heavily for stacked cans of tomato soup, Papa was an artist. Fans of orange crepe paper, gorgeously pinched and pleated, flared across the window rear. Twisted green streamers spun from one corner to the other, and white crepe rosettes lay scattered about like giant snowflakes, their delicate petals emphasizing the splendor of a fur hat, the softness of a glove. At Easter, when the Saskatchewan prairies were still locked in snow, Papa banked his window with Mother's ferns and begonias, trundled from home on the rickety store wagon. (Our old red wagon, painted and with built-up sides, doubled as delivery truck.) In September, the coziness of his windows made one positively long for cold: there were puffy quilts, Dr. Denton sleepers the color of porridge, brilliant red scarves, bulky toques, mittens and sleds and stiff heavy coats made of Hudson's Bay blankets. Come Christmas, the town children pressed against the glass, their fingers and steamy breaths leaving patterns of wonder. Here dolls, almost life size, sat around a table spread with Mama's own hand-embroidered linen. Some held dainty porcelain cups to parted lips; others leaned stiffly forward, eyes fixed on a bowl of nuts or a plate of shiny looped ribbon candy. In the corner, a group of friendly animals bent over a toy train; a teddy bear—what deep plush, what lambent eyes!—embraced a duck. There were no price tags. The window sang not "Buy!" but "Enjoy!"

Although almost all of Papa's stores failed miserably, each carried a name that was at once talisman and hope: *The O-Kay Store*.

Papa liked the bright, modern-sounding effect of that, but I always preferred the simple legend at the bottom of his sign: B. Bruser, General Merchant. Because Papa was not an ordinary storekeeper. He was a merchant prince, and his store was Ali Baba's cave. . . .

Mostly it was charge. In the last analysis, the O-Kay had just one big advantage over Eaton's: everything, even groceries, was to be had "on time." From harvest to harvest the farmer charged—sugar and flour and work gloves and overalls, patterns and percale, embroidery floss and rope and horses' feed bags, all moved across the counter. The figures in Papa's ledger mounted. He sent out bills regularly, but there was no question of payment before September. Everything depended upon the crops. And the crops, it seemed, depended upon a fearful number of contingencies. There was rain when we needed sun, or sun when we needed rain; the wheat might develop rust, or it might be beaten to the ground by one afternoon's hail. Some years grasshoppers, like biblical plagues, swept across the prairies harvesting the grain. So there it would be—September and no crop, or a crop of such low grade that the farmer had barely feed for his animals. No cash, more charge. Two years like this, and the O-Kay Store was bankrupt again.

Moving times were sad. There was first the unhealthy rush and confusion of the big final sale. "EVERYTHING MUST GO!" screamed the signs in the window. "GOODS SOLD BELOW COST!" At these times, Mama worked all day in the store, extra help bustled up and down the crowded aisles, and the cash register jingled.

"How come there is money?" I asked, tugging at the sagging edge of Papa's gray work sweater. "You said nobody had money."

Papa sighed. "Money to pay bills, no. But a little they have. A sale like this, a farmer has to take advantage."

Worst of all was the auction, when the contents of our house were spilled onto the lawn to be inspected, minutely described, and sold to the highest bidder. Even after two or three movings, I was never braced for the shocking melancholy of our possessions when they were exposed to public view. Most of the time I thought of our family as living, by rural standards, with a certain style, even grandeur. We always had a piano, a china cupboard full of wedding present silver, a proper dining room table with chairs that matched. Only on auction day, in the harsh September sunshine—or worse, in September rain, the furniture in tarpaulins and the buyers huddled under umbrellas—did I realize how thin was the veil of illusion. My mother's ferns, her cut-glass bowls and waxed bouquets of sweet peas, her crisp curtains and lace-edged cloths, had somehow blinded me to the truth, that our furniture was insubstantial as our hopes.

We left Birch Hills for Winnipeg the day of the first snow. I remember that I wandered out the back door, weary with waiting and restless in the silent house. On the last step I stood quite still a minute, mittened hands thrust into the pockets of my Hudson's Bay coat, my unbuckled galoshes flaring. All the way down to the ice house the yard was blue-white, sparkling. I thought of the times we had played fox and geese there, racing in wild circles as we cut the snow pie across and across and across, then scattering to the outer rim while the fox, dead center, decided who to chase. Today there was nobody to play with. I could throw myself down and make one last wide-winged angel, but that would mean snow down my neck and snow powdering my good traveling clothes. We were leaving Saskatchewan, leaving the prairies for-

ever. I lifted my foot and, heel to toe, heel to toe, stamped out my name in the snow. Freidele Bruser. Me. The letters, hardpacked, would ice over and disappear under wind-whipped drifts of white. In spring they would melt into the earth, or be borne as vapor through the skies. Other children would hunt for flowers in the April woods, swooping ecstatically on the first crocus or a round-eyed anemone with buds like bubbles of creamy satin. And none of them would know my name.

Why did I feel like crying? I *wanted* to go. Ever since I could remember, Winnipeg had been the golden city. Winnipeg was street-cars and cement sidewalks and stores—big stores, like Eaton's, floor after floor of unbelievable bliss. Winnipeg was libraries where you could take out five books at once and never pay anything as long as you returned them on time. Most of all, Winnipeg was belonging. In Birch Hills we were rootless. Winnipeg swept us up into a warm, laughing, weeping, extravagantly gesturing world of relations, all of whom rejoiced in the *naches* we brought them. ("A hundred in spelling!" my grandmother would say, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Oh, what a little head is this!") Whenever, in those days, I heard vaudeville performers tapping out the brisk melodies of "Golden Slippers"—"Oh, dem golden slippers To walk dem golden streets!"—I thought of Winnipeg. There, at last, my talents would be recognized. Writer? Singer? Musician? I wasn't sure. Anyway, I would *be* somebody. It was even possible that I might be discovered by a talent scout and carried off to Hollywood where, with my gift for elocution and my long black curls, I would replace the simpering heroine of the *Our Gang* comedies. . . .