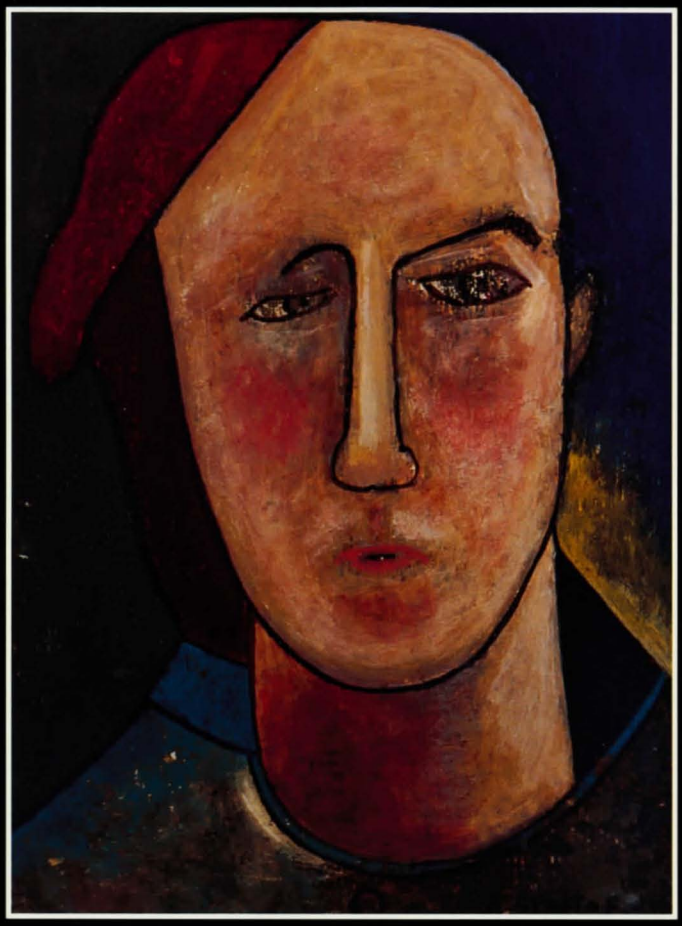

Unhappy Rebel

THE LIFE AND ART OF ANDY STRITOF

CVETKA KOCJANCIC

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Multicultural History Society of Ontario

1993

This is a volume in the Multicultural History Society of Ontario's series Ethnocultural Voices.

The Multicultural History Society of Ontario is a resource centre on the campus of the University of Toronto. It was created in 1976 by a group of academics, civil servants, librarians and archivists who saw a need for a special effort to preserve materials relevant to the province's immigrant and ethnic history.

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CONTENTS

FORWARD

The series Ethnocultural Voices presents the experiences of individual immigrants and members of ethnic groups. Usually the experiences narrated are those lived by their narrator. *Unhappy Rebel: The Life and Art of Andy Stritof*, however, is told by a fellow Slovenian who, through a fortuitous meeting with Stritof, became interested in both his life and his art.

Andy Stritof was no typical immigrant. As his biographer relates, he was one of the many young men who came to Canada in the 1920s and had not had time to establish themselves before the onset of the Depression. But he was unusual in that he became an artist in a country not then hospitable to the arts, and that he responded to rebuffs by refusing to sell his paintings. He was probably also unusual in developing a strong if idiosyncratic attachment to an adopted country in which his experiences were so often bitter.

Cvetka Kocjancic has done a service in presenting the story of an unusual man, and Dr. Gabriele Scardellato in editing the manuscript for publication by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario.

Jean Burnet
Multicultural History Society of Ontario
1993

About The Author

Cvetka Kocjancic was born in 1949 in a small village in Slovenia. In 1969 she emigrated to Canada and became an active member of the Slovenian-Canadian community in Toronto.

Over the last twenty years she has done a great deal of volunteer work for various Slovenian publications and for a Slovenian radio program in Toronto. Through these activities she has developed a great interest in the psychological problems of immigrants.

She also writes poems and short stories in her native language, many of which have been published in various magazines in Canada and abroad.

INTRODUCTION

I first met Andy Stritof in November 1981 when I was in charge of an arts and crafts show held in Toronto by the Radio Club Slovene Evening. Stritof, who was one of three Slovenian artists exhibiting their work at the show, stayed in our house for a few days, and during his visit he told me many interesting things about his life and his creativity. At that time I didn't know much about art, and, to be honest, I didn't even like his more abstract paintings. As a writer, I was much more interested in Andy's life story, but when he explained how his paintings were related to his life, I realized that if I wanted to understand his life I would have to learn as much as possible about art. In the process of doing that, I gained some understanding of modern art and even grew to like it. Andy was eager to talk to me about his paintings, yet in a mysterious way, as if telling me too much would rob his paintings of their magic power.

To understand Andy and his paintings, I had to listen to his stories about the hardships of his early years in Canada. At first I thought he was exaggerating, but after hearing similar stories of the period between the wars from other Slovenian immigrants, I began to take Andy's stories seriously. It was then that I decided to write a book about him, because I believe that the story of our early Slovenian immigrants in Canada has to be told and preserved for future generations.

Andy's story typifies the experience of an entire generation of European immigrants who came to Canada in the 1920s from war-torn homelands, hoping to find peace and economic security, but who soon found themselves in the middle of the Depression. Many young men who had planned to spend only a few years in this country had to stay indefinitely because they could not save

enough money for return fares. Many married men who had intended their wives and children to join them once they themselves were settled were unable to do so until the Depression was over. These enforced separations put a great strain on marriages and broke up many families.

For the first part of his life in Canada, Andy Stritof struggled, as did countless other immigrants, to adjust to a new country. He started in the forests of British Columbia and subsequently moved to Windsor, hoping to find work in the flourishing auto industry, but the Great Depression forced him to move on to the mining country of northern Ontario, where he stayed until the outbreak of the Second World War. Like many other immigrants in northern Ontario, Andy moved south to escape the loneliness and the cold winters. In 1941 he settled in Hamilton, Ontario, where he lived until October 1986, at which time he returned to his homeland.

On the surface, Andy adapted quite well to his new land and was soon able to make friends with other Canadians, to the point that for a time he ceased completely to associate with his countrymen. However, his frustrated love for the family homestead, which his mother had been forced to sell, and for the homeland he had left behind caused him great mental suffering. Because of his love for two countries, both of which underwent great changes during his lifetime, it was impossible for him to settle into a normal life. In my view, the strength of his feelings and his divided loyalties were important reasons why Andy turned to art, for as an artist he was able to sublimate his rebellious and revolutionary ideas.

Although it gave him great satisfaction to give artistic expression to his innermost thoughts, it did not bring him public recognition, partly because his muse did not often lead him to the styles popular at the time. If Andy had been willing to paint for the art market, he might have had more success, but his fierce integrity and pride would not allow any compromise. As an artist he considered himself a moral guardian of society, and that principle formed the basis of his whole philosophy of life. His passionate morality and pursuit of perfection were both his blessing and his curse. He willingly sacrificed hopes of personal happiness for his

art, with no assurance of success. Another reason for his lack of success may have lain in a subconscious fear of it: not only would he not go out of his way to seek sales; after a certain point, he stubbornly refused to sell his paintings. Only in his old age did he realize that he had missed his opportunity both to succeed in the art world and to propagate the message embodied in his paintings. By keeping his work private, he had buried all his creative talent in paintings that few people would ever see.

Andy was not a prolific artist: only about forty of his paintings have been preserved. But each of those pictures is a result of his internal struggle to transform his view of reality into an artistic form that would transmit his ideas into the future. He invested much of his soul in his paintings, which he regarded as his children. By refusing to sell them, he treated them as an overprotective parent would treat his or her offspring. He had the same wish for them that Slovenian mothers have for their children: he wanted them to remain together and enrich the Slovenian-Canadian community. Since Slovenes have no art gallery or art club in Canada, he decided to place his collected works in a trust fund, with the stipulation that an art organization be established to assist Slovenian-Canadian artists and to provide an atmosphere where they could meet and exchange ideas. Perhaps it was the company of the artists of his cultural background that Andy missed most in his life. With his generous gift to the Slovenian community he ensured that his ideas would live on and perhaps inspire others to express through art the beauty and hardship of human life.

Andy was more than eager to help me translate his messages into written form, which is much more understandable to ordinary people than abstract painting. From 1982 to 1986 I spent countless hours interviewing Andy, and I came to admire his great wisdom. I also cherish him as one of my dearest friends. I am happy to have the opportunity to share what I have learned from him with other Canadians. I am sure nothing would please Andy more than to see his life story and reproductions of some of his paintings in book form.

For the preparation of this book, I relied mainly on interviews with Andy, his notes on art, his personal correspondence with friends and relatives, newspaper clippings, and art show catalogues. From the books in his collection I was able to trace his intellectual progress from naive farmer to intelligent artist. One book in particular, Barry Lord's *The History of Painting in Canada*, gave me an understanding of the struggle of Canadian artists to create and preserve a Canadian identity.

To appreciate better how Andy was seen by other people, I interviewed some of the people who knew him, including his long-time friend, the gallery owner Bill Powell. His description of Andy as an "unhappy rebel who lived at the edge of madness" captures a complicated personality. In pursuit of knowledge and perfection, Andy at times ventured beyond the edge of sanity to bring back glimpses of a different reality. He is often thought of as an eccentric who talks only about himself and his art; to those of us who know him more intimately, he is a sensitive, compassionate man who always wanted to take the pain of other people onto his own shoulders and who rebelled against injustice on behalf of all the suffering people of the world.

In general, I found Andy's memory to be reliable, but it was impossible to check the accuracy of details, especially in the older material. Partly because of the resulting gaps in my information, I have chosen to present Andy's story in a semi-novelistic form rather than as a conventional biography. I also felt that a biography was too restrictive a form to convey Andy's personality, since I needed to use dialogue and detailed narrative to allow his powerful voice to be heard.

I have thus taken the liberty of recreating events, mostly on the basis of what Andy himself has told me, and of filling in small details and dialogue from my own imagination. As far as I was able to determine, most of the people mentioned in this book actually existed and all of the events described actually took place. A note about names in this book: it is not surprising that at the age of eighty Andy could not remember the full names of old-time friends and acquaintances. Where a name appears in full, it is the

actual name of the person referred to. Where only a first name appears, it may or may not be the person's real name.

For the most part, this book recounts the true story of an immigrant who was not quite able to adjust to a new way of life as countless other immigrants did. Andy was tempted to hide in the isolation of his private work, but as an artist he was compelled to stand up and be counted when the future of Canada was being built. He was determined to contribute to the creation of a Canadian national identity, because during his sixty years in Canada he came to regard himself as a true Canadian.

A version of this book appeared first in a Slovenian edition, published by Slovenska izseljenska matica. I wanted Canadians, both those of Slovenian origin and others, to be able to share Andy's story as well. I hope that some day all Canadians will appreciate Andy's decision to leave his works of art to Canadian Slovenes before returning to his homeland.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have helped me in the writing of this book. First and most important, I would like to thank Andy Stritof for sharing his life story with me. Next, I would like to express my appreciation to my husband and my relatives for their support and encouragement. I also have to mention Bill Powell, who took time to read the manuscript and to provide me with certain details of Andy's life. My thanks as well, for their information and insights, to the people who talked to me about Andy.

I would like to thank Joe Mauko for photographing the paintings, and Slovenska izseljenska matica for letting me use the colour separations. For the English version of this book I owe special thanks to my editor, Gilda Mekler, who helped me with the grammar as well as with stylistic improvements. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, especially to Jean Burnet, for publishing my manuscript.

To the New Land

The old steamer *Melita* was already four days late for its departure from Antwerp for Saint John, New Brunswick; the passengers, mostly young, single men, had become agitated and restless. The agent who had organized their emigration to Canada had told them their long voyage across the Atlantic would begin on March 24. Yet it was already the twenty-eighth and the ship gave no sign of moving; nor did anyone offer any explanation for the delay. So the eight Slovenes who shared a large cabin in the lower part of the ship could do nothing but wait and wonder.

The year was 1925, and the men were part of the second organized transport to western Canada of Slovenian workers destined for jobs on farms and railways. Since there was no passage available from any closer seaport, Slovenian emigrants were transported to Antwerp, where they joined other Europeans bound for Canada. Since 1924, when the United States adopted quotas for immigrants and effectively closed its doors to most, Canada had become the land of hope for the thousands of young Slovenian peasants. The homeland could no longer support all her sons: some had to "go with an empty stomach in search of bread," as the Slovenian saying has it. They didn't much care where they went; anything would be better than the knowledge that they were a burden to their families and their native land.

The thirty or so Slovenian men bound for Canada on the *Melita* had already had plenty of time to get acquainted. They had gathered at Ljubljana railway station, where the conductor put them in the same carriage, promising to take care of them until they reached Antwerp. For working class passengers like them, there were no sleeping and dining cars. The emigrants had come prepared for their three-day journey as peasants often prepared for

a long pilgrimage to some famous shrine: with home-made bread and wine and dried smoked sausages. Food would be provided once they reached Antwerp. When the whistle of the old steam locomotive announced its departure from Ljubljana, the Slovenian boys began to sing:

Farewell my friend,
Farewell my friend,
We'll soon be back
To our native land.

Only by singing could they suppress their tears as they gazed for the last time at the relatives who had come to see them off. There was sadness and solemnity in their farewell ritual. On the platform, the young men's mothers and wives, dressed in their dark Sunday clothes, their heads covered with colourful kerchiefs, wept silently. Their fathers, too proud to cry, used all their strength to control their emotions. The village boys who had come to see their friends off positioned themselves in small groups under the windows of the train, through which the departing men were leaning, and joined in the singing.

The journey through Europe seemed an eternity. Most of the passengers, who were not used to long train rides, found the hard wooden benches very uncomfortable. There was no room to lie down, and even if they dozed off sitting up they were soon awakened by an abrupt stop or by a loud whistle as the train approached a tunnel. As if to make up for the gloomy nights, however, the journey offered beautiful views during the day as the train rattled past small villages and towns and through majestic cities rich in history. For the most part, the boys maintained their good humour, and when they reached the great, bustling port of Antwerp, their spirits rose. Full of hopes and expectations, they boarded the ship that was to carry them to the promised land.

The boat is ready, holla dee dee,
To take us over this great big sea ...

Let's set the sails, holla dee dee,
I hope my loved one is thinking of me.

Together they sang this old folk song, preparing themselves for the long journey to the unknown world. But it seemed the ship was not ready. The next day they were supposed to leave the harbour, yet nothing happened. Rumours flew and grim forebodings began to assail the waiting passengers. By the fourth day of waiting, they were convinced that there must something wrong with the ship. They were now in no mood for singing, and when they weren't fretting about the seemingly marooned ship, their thoughts were on the other side of the ocean. What would the new land be like?

"I wish we would leave today. I can't stand this waiting any longer," said Andrej, pacing up and down the cabin between the two rows of solid wooden bunks that were almost its only furniture. The cabin was dark; through a small porthole, just enough sunlight penetrated to allow the passengers to distinguish day from night. The cabin was also very cold, but the passengers had been given plenty of blankets. Andrej was young and restless. His tall, muscular body was built to work in the fields, not to sit idly for days in a crowded little space. He was a talkative, good-looking man with a round face, a little short moustache, and bushy hair, a little wavy on top. Of all the passengers in the cabin, he was the most impatient to leave the harbour.

"Patience is God's grace, the priest from Metlika often used to say," Matija remarked.

"Yes, we Slovenes have been comforted with the promise of grace ever since our ancestors moved to the Alps from behind the Carpathian mountains. Our people waited patiently for God to save them from the powerful nations of Europe, from the Romans and Franks to the Turks and Germans. We don't have it any better now under the Serbian kingdom of the Karadjordjevic' dynasty. The rich at the top fill their pockets with gold, while the rest of the nation suffers. If you don't like it you can leave. The door is wide open," replied Andrej.

"That's true," Ivan said with an air of authority. Having once been to America, he had taken on the role of the expert. "Every citizen of America has an equal opportunity to become the president of the state. But he has to be extremely smart, capable, and rich."

"What is the difference between Canada and America?" asked a man with the heavy accent of the village of Ribnica.

"I suppose there are more Indians in Canada," said Andrej. "They asked me at the ministry in Ljubljana, before giving me my papers, if I wasn't afraid that Indians would attack me in Canada."

"Our priest from Metlika said the Slovenian missionary Baraga went to America about a hundred years ago and lived among Indians, and nothing bad happened to him. The Indians liked him very much," Matija said.

"What are they like, the Indians?" inquired the man from Ribnica.

Before Ivan could answer, Lojze chimed in, "They live deep in the woods and support themselves with fishing and hunting. They aren't too eager to work, but they sure like to dance."

"The Indians aren't DPs like Gypsies," Ivan added. "They've lived in Canada since before the white man came. Some people say the Indians aren't bad at all. They just like to keep to themselves. You don't have to worry. You probably won't have much to do with them."

"What kind of people are Canadians, then?" the man from Ribnica wanted to know. He had never thought about Canada before. As far as he was concerned, everyone who lived on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean was American. He had announced in his parish that he was going to America, and for some months the village boys had jokingly called him "American." Only now did he realize that Canada was distinct from the United States.

Ivan tried to explain, "There are many Anglo-Saxons in Canada; that's why it is still a British Dominion. I learned at school that there was a big revolution in North America and that at that time many British Loyalists fled to Canada; their descendants are still loyal to Britain. The British king is represented in

Canada by the governor general, while the prime minister, who rules the country, is elected by the people. There are also many French people in Canada. The French came to Canada even before the British. They claimed a big part of the country for the French king and named the land New France. They were later overpowered by the British, though. Their descendants still speak their own language. They're very much like we Slovenes were under Austro-Hungary, second-class citizens without rights."
That was about all Ivan knew about Canada. "It's been a long time since I've been in America," he said a little defensively, when the others clamoured for more information.

"I was only fifteen when we went back home to Notranjska. We lived quite well in America, except that my mother was homesick. She often cried in the evening. There was war back home. The most painful thing for her was that her mother and father were there alone, with nobody to take care of them. So my father promised to take her home just as soon as the war was over. When we got back, the house where my grandparents used to live was empty. The neighbours told us they had both died during the previous winter. The neighbours were jealous when my mother came back to claim the farm. My father was bothered by their sly remarks, but he bought himself friends with wine and brandy in the local *gostilna*. Until he spent his last American dollar in there, that is.

"From then on everything went wrong for us. My mother worked in the fields and at home, while my father drowned his sorrows. When his American savings were gone, he sold the fir trees and oaks for timber. When there was no more timber to sell, he started selling the land, piece by piece. After a few years, he died in an accident." The boys listened attentively while Ivan continued his story.

"One day my mother told me to take over the farm. She wanted me to get married and bring some life into that lonely house. A year later, Mici and I got married. She is a good and industrious woman, my Mici. We were doing quite well, except we couldn't pay off my father's debts. We could never save money.

When I realized there was no hope of saving the farm, I decided to go back to America. I figured it wouldn't be hard for me to find a job, since I already knew the language a little. When they wouldn't accept me in America, I decided to go to Canada. It doesn't really matter where I go, as long as I can save up some money quickly to return home."

"I decided to go to Canada for similar reasons," Andrej started to reveal his story. "My father died when I was five. According to his will I was supposed to inherit the house and farm. I guess he didn't trust my mother to manage the estate. She came from a family that didn't have much land of their own and no farm animals. She and her parents worked for other farmers. My father met her when she came to his house to help with the wheat harvest. She was hard working and good-looking as well, so my father decided to marry her, even without a dowry. He hired a maid to help with the cooking, the house work, and the animals. There was too much work for one woman at our farm, especially with two kids around. My brother, Franc, was five years younger than me.

"Coming from a poor family, my mother had a hard time getting used to her responsibilities as a housewife and always depended on my father to make decisions about the household. That's probably why he left the estate to me, and not to her. He was afraid if he left it to her she'd sell it after he died so she wouldn't have the burden of managing it. But, his plan didn't work out. Somehow, with the help of the mayor of the village, my mother managed to overturn my father's will legally. In return, she sent me to live with the mayor, who had no children of his own. I was to be his errand boy. My little brother stayed with mother. After a few years I was allowed to move back home. But, life was much different now. My mother neglected the farm and borrowed money to support us. My father's estate lasted her for ten, maybe fifteen years. During that time she mortgaged every piece of land, the house, and the barn.

"When I came back from the army, she told me it was my turn to manage the farm. I didn't want to take on her debts, but I also

didn't want my father's house to go to strangers. I kept remembering my father, who had entrusted me with his life's possessions. I wasn't even five years old when he put his trust in me to carry on the family farm, the name, the tradition. When Mother said, "It is up to you now," it sounded like a criticism. I was twenty-one years old and fully responsible for my own life. If I turned my back on the farm, it would be lost forever. Even the memory of the Stritof name would disappear from the village. I wouldn't be worthy of my name if I turned my back on my home, I thought. So one day the idea of America popped into my head. I figured I should go to America to save enough money to pay off the debts and in that way fulfil my father's dying wish that I take over the family farm. I had no money for the trip. I worked a whole year in the forests of Stajerska to save enough money for this journey."

"It so happens that America didn't accept me. It was hard for me to get the papers even for Canada. The agent had a long waiting list of people wanting to emigrate to Canada. To me it's really all the same where I go, as long as I have guaranteed work, good pay, and a place to stay. Sixty dollars a month plus room and board sounds pretty good. If I stay in Canada two years, I can save enough to pay off all our debts and buy myself a pair of oxen on top of it."

Suddenly Lojze interrupted. "Listen!" he cried. He was the first to notice the deep thrumming he remembered from his earlier ocean voyage. "Boys, the engines are starting! It looks like we're about to sail!"

A strange silence filled the cabin. "Pooch ... pooch ... pooch ... pooch" echoed from the big smokestack. To the passengers it sounded like a pleasant song that would accompany them all the way to the new world. A current of excitement swept over the ship. The passengers gathered on the upper deck to say good-bye to the old world. The women were weeping and the men waved at the receding shore, even though no one was waving back. Their gestures echoed those of thousands and thousands of emigrants who had said their good-byes before them. One more shipload of

people with fears, hopes, and dreams joined the great human river flowing steadily from Europe to America.

Antwerp harbour soon disappeared from view. They had been sailing for half a day before the Slovenes noticed some of the other passengers pointing excitedly at land on both horizons. "There's France on the left and England on the right," a sailor explained to Ivan. "We're passing through the English Channel." Ivan translated this information to his Slovenian friends, but the peasant boys shrugged. England was as foreign to them as the moon, except that they knew that the royal Karadjordjevic' family was friendly with the British monarchy. France was merely a vague concept, though they had heard tales of Napoleon's soldiers plundering their homeland. That was as far back as history extended in their peasant memories.

As the land disappeared, the ship began to roll on the more open water. On deck the Slovenes watched the whitecaps glittering in the sunset, but with nightfall they lost the last feeling of warmth from their homeland. It became cold on the open deck; they retreated to their cabins.

From the wicker travelling basket in which he carried all his belongings, the man from Ribnica pulled out a bottle of home-made *slivovica* and offered it to his companions. "There is no better medicine for body or soul than the original home-made plum brandy." The bottle passed from hand to hand, each man taking a long swallow. At last the Ribnican corked it again and put it back in his basket.

None of the Slovenian passengers intended to stay in Canada permanently. Each of them had his own reason for leaving his homeland, but they all had the same goal: to earn some money and return to the land of their fathers and forefathers. They worked hard all their lives and only at Christmas and Easter could they afford meat and white bread. Otherwise their diet consisted mostly of gruel, barley, potatoes, and sauerkraut. Yet it wasn't discontent with their standard of living that was driving these peasant men to a foreign land: it was the fear of losing their small patch of land.

When, after a few days at sea, the *Melita* met a French ship bound for Europe, the passengers became sentimental, thinking of the day soon when they would be sailing proudly back to their native land. With their minds full of rosy pictures of their triumphant return, the emigrants gave little thought to their life in a strange new country. Canada was merely an intermediate stage. Why bother with unnecessary details when everything was already organized for them? At least that was what the travel agents in Ljubljana had told them. The posters in the village taverns made emigration to Canada seem so simple and organized. The only requirements were good health, a freedom from military obligation, the ability to pay the one-way passage to Canada, and twenty-five dollars in cash in one's pocket. The travel agent would match emigrants with prospective employers, who had stated in their affidavits the working conditions they would provide and the wages they were willing to pay foreign farm workers.

Andrej, Metod, and Ivan had work contracts with the same farmer in a place called—they turned the strange sounds in their mouths—Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Lojze, too, was travelling to Moose Jaw, but he was to work for a different farmer. Four other Slovenes were going to Nova Scotia: at least that was what was written on their affidavits.

At first the Slovenian passengers barely felt any seasick. As long as their stock of *slivovica* lasted, they used it to cure headaches, stomach problems, and queasiness. When they finally did begin to notice how often they felt sick, each kept it to himself, a little embarrassed; they put it down to the unaccustomed foods on board ship. Instead of the familiar barley, potatoes, and black bread they were given fish, canned pork and beans, and salads made with a strange, sweet dressing. But when the experienced world traveller Ivan complained openly of being seasick, they all admitted to suffering the same sickness. Once Ivan had explained that even the strongest of men could be seasick, the boys were no longer ashamed to vomit into their buckets.

Once the big passenger ship reached the open sea it was tossed up and down in a violent rhythm; for days on end nothing could

be seen but gigantic, foamy, green-white waves. The passengers began to panic. Nor were the sailors much comfort; even they were worried, for they had never known such a stormy voyage. For days none of the passengers dared go on deck. The Slovenes kept to their cabins most of the time, close to their buckets. From the next cabin, they heard children crying and women shrieking. Eventually the shrieks subsided, and the children were lulled to sleep by women reciting the rosary.

On April 8, the sea was so rough that a mere glance through the portholes made the passengers retch. The next day, the weather was the same. The boys stayed in their bunks, in no mood even to talk; each buried in his own thoughts. On this gloomy day Andrej marked his twenty-second birthday.

As wave after enormous wave battered the ship, the frightened passengers could no longer accept the half-hearted reassurances of the sailors. The Italian passengers gathered around Father Antonio, who was travelling to Toronto to serve in an Italian church there. The priest, seeing people's need to be calmed, invited all the passengers to attend a special mass, which he celebrated in the dining room. For this occasion, he read the passage from the Gospels in which Jesus made the wind at sea die down. That afternoon the storm subsided. "You see, our prayers helped," said Matija to his fellow Slovenians.

"Sure, they helped, just like those processions the priests organized back home to ward off the hailstorms," said Andrej, smiling. "I still remember the time I carried the big heavy cross when I was an altar boy. I was walking the bumpy road and I tripped on a stone and fell down. The cross dropped out of my hands. I don't remember who picked me up or who carried on my job. "Protect us from hail and drought, O Lord," the women chanted, as the procession went up the hill where the chapel of the Mother of God stood. I kept walking, as if I was in some kind of trance. The next day there was a bad storm. The hailstones were as big as walnuts and all the crops were destroyed. "This was God's punishment on all of us," muttered the village women, "because of that irresponsible kid who threw down the crucifix."

"I wanted to ask the priest if there was any truth to those accusations, but I was too scared to show myself to him after what I'd done. "Don't make me be altar boy any more," I begged the mayor, my guardian. 'I'd much rather tend the cows and the sheep.' From then on, I went to the pastures at dawn every day instead of going to church. When I was alone in the woods, I often wondered why God had chosen to punish me. What had I done? On his deathbed, my father had committed me to God's grace and goodness. His last faint words to me had been, 'Be good and don't forget God. May the Lord guide you and protect you when I am no longer around to take care of you.'

"I desperately missed being an altar boy. All the little rituals of church life—the cup of tea and a piece of white bread with the priest after mass, the occasional small coins, and the priest's friendly, comforting words—they had been like heaven's blessing to me. Most of all, I missed the sense of closeness to God I felt in the quiet morning church. My mother had promised me that I, could be a priest too when I grew up. For a ten-year-old boy, it was an exciting ambition. One day I would be able to read to people from the important books; I would help them like my uncle—he was a priest in some far-sunday.away village. But the fiasco of the dropped crucifix crushed all my hopes of ever becoming a priest."

Matija from Metlika interrupted Andrej's story. "What kind of Catholic are you, if you don't believe in miracles?"

"I didn't say I didn't believe in *any* miracles," Andrej answered. "I just don't believe in all those stories of miracles people make up. Would you like to hear the story of a so-called miracle at the church of Vodice?" He didn't wait for their answer: Andrej was a good speaker and everyone enjoyed his stories.

"There was a young girl, Johanca, who went to church every day and claimed to be God's chosen one. Every Sunday during mass, the blood would pour down her forehead, just as Jesus had bled from the crown of thorns. The news of this miraculous happening quickly reached every remote corner of Slovenia. People came in great multitudes to worship Johanca of Vodice, who soon

became an expert on all heavenly matters. Of course the naive peasants were most interested in how their deceased loved ones were doing, and they would ask Johanca about them. 'Your mother is suffering very much in purgatory. By paying for six masses you can save her,' she told a worried pilgrim.

"To a pilgrim who seemed more prosperous, she suggested ten masses for the salvation of his deceased father. To a grieving widow, she suggested a donation of a dozen candles to the church. She had instructions handy for just about anyone. One day, a young man asked her about his mother. 'Your mother is still in purgatory.' Before she could advise him how much to donate to the church to save his mother's soul, the man said, 'You are badly mistaken. My mother is at home, cooking breakfast.'

"Johanca was confused. Suddenly, there was a great commotion in the church. The young men were furious at the way she had exploited the religious beliefs of simple, devout people. They grabbed her and pulled back her thick chestnut hair to reveal tubing filled with calf's blood, cunningly arranged so that one single touch to her head could start the blood flowing.

"This immediately became the gossip of the village, especially when the butcher admitted he supplied Johanca with fresh blood. The young priest of Vodice insisted he'd never known that the miracle wasn't authentic. The only people who believed in his innocence were some religious old women; but the authorities didn't want to charge a priest, out of respect for the church, so his part in the miracle making was hushed up. Johanca disappeared from Vodice. I heard she went back to a French circus she'd been with some years earlier."

With better weather, cheer returned to the cabin of Slovenian passengers. By the second week, they had become used to the rolling motion of the ship. They had even become used to the spaghetti with spicy red sauce that was often served for lunch or dinner. Lojze and Metod gravitated to the canteen, which became their favourite spot on the ship. Metod, in particular, could not seem to stop drinking. His friends warned him to watch his money, but he did not stop until it was all gone. He needed alcohol to

conquer the fears that beset him. Everything was changing in his life. In his twenty-three years, he had not travelled much. Occasionally he had gone to the farmers' market at Sentjernej, some thirty kilometres from his home, and a few times he had made a pilgrimage to the Mountain of Sorrow, the shrine dedicated to the Mother of God. These had seemed like expeditions to a boy who spent most of his days in the small village to which he had been sent as a child to tend the cows and help around the farm. And now he was going to the other side of the world! He never talked much about his reasons for going to America. He didn't even want to think about it: drinking helped keep his mind off the great unknown waiting for him.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning in mid-April when Ivan and Andrej noticed brown patches on the horizon. At first, Andrej did not believe his eyes, then he screamed at the top of his lungs, "Look! Dry land! America!"

"Canada!" Ivan corrected him. Before Saint John was clearly visible, all the passengers had gathered on deck to greet the land that offered them work and good pay at a time when poverty had forced them to leave their homelands.

A New Beginning

Wearing their Sunday suits and identical black velvet hats and carrying their wicker travelling cases, the Slovenian immigrants disembarked. "Boys, get your money and your affidavits ready," Ivan translated the instructions of the immigration official. From the inner pockets of their overcoats they pulled out money and documents. Metod, who could not find more than five dollars, wondered of he would be sent back in ignominy before he could even enter Canada. Now he bitterly regretted having spent his money so carelessly on alcohol.

Andrej and Ivan, who had a few extra dollars, came to the rescue, so that Metod too could show his twenty-five dollars. The official checked all the documents, and nodded: everything in order. Ivan, the only one of the group who spoke any English, became their unofficial leader and spokesman. From the official they received helpful instructions for finding the train station. The rest of their questions, such as how to get to Moose Jaw, not even he could answer. "I've never heard of Moose Jaw," he admitted. "It sounds like a little town somewhere in Saskatchewan. Didn't your agents back home give you directions?"

"Not really. But I guess we'll find it somehow, if we keep asking," said Ivan, before thanking the official.

"Safe journey and good luck in your new country," the uniformed man added with a smile. "I hope you'll like it in Canada."

At the train station, the Slovenian immigrants split into two groups. For almost a month they had lived so closely together, sharing stories and confidences, suffering common hardships and fears, that they had come to feel like a close-knit family. It seemed unthinkable that they should have to go separate ways, but, abruptly, the time for their separation had come. Lojze, Ivan, Andrej, and Metod, would still have a few days together while

crossing Canada by train; the other four were almost at their final destination. There wasn't much time to say good-bye. They shook hands and embraced, promising to meet again soon, God knew where or when! Having little sense of the distances in Canada, the peasant boys took it for granted that once they were settled they would visit each other.

The train station was very crowded, seemingly with all the ship's passengers, who tried to converse, mostly in sign language, showing their affidavits to the officials in hope of getting directions for their journey. While Ivan went to inquire about their train trip, the other three boys waited in front of the restaurant, where they were soon found by a sandwich vendor, who urged them to prepare for the long trip. "Good, inexpensive sandwiches! Buy here! No food on the train!"

"Yes, sir!" Lojze replied promptly, showing him a ten-dollar bill. In exchange, the vendor handed him ten sandwiches.

"Boys, we're in luck! The Trans-Canada train is leaving for Saskatchewan tonight," announced Ivan when he returned.

"Everything's going so well," said Lojze. "In the meantime, I've already taken care of our supper. Here, look at these sandwiches. There's plenty for all of us."

"Don't worry, I'll take special care of you," said the friendly, grey-haired conductor, when they finally found the right train. "In about two hours, the train will make a one-hour stop so that you can buy yourselves some supper at the restaurant. Should I let you know when we're about to stop?"

"That won't be necessary. We've already bought sandwiches," said Lojze.

"I see. Those unscrupulous salesmen have already got to you," sighed the conductor. "How much did you pay for them?"

"A dollar each."

"For ten dollars, you could get almost as much food in the store as you could carry. Be careful, boys. There are so many swindlers here. They'll do anything for money and don't care if they squeeze the last dollar from an ignorant victim." The boys

looked at each other, a little abashed that they had allowed themselves to be cheated as soon as they set foot in this country.

"They won't trick us so easily again," muttered Andrej.

"Never mind. In a few days we'll have some real food for a change," prophesied Lojze. "Bacon and eggs for breakfast, and roast beef for supper. There's always plenty of meat and eggs on an American farm."

"What about wine?" asked Metod, who looked somewhat depressed.

"They drink mostly beer in America. And whisky. Whisky is their national drink, like plum brandy in our country," explained Ivan.

Visions of sumptuous food and drink, as well as the monotonous motion of the train, lulled the young men to sleep; they slept sitting up, leaning on each other, until the next morning. They had expected to reach their destination in one day, but the trip took several days. They found the train ride extremely monotonous compared to that from Ljubljana to Antwerp. In Europe, there were small villages along the train tracks, and the workers in the fields would straighten their stooped backs to wave to the train passengers. Every patch of land—fields, meadows, and even woods—was carefully cultivated. In Europe everything was green at this time of year and the air was filled with the smell of freshly ploughed fields and early spring flowers.

But as soon as the Canadian train left the station, it entered a vast, unpeopled landscape, still covered in snow which was almost black along the tracks. The forests seemed like a jungle where no one had bothered to thin the trees, cut the underbrush, or rake the leaves. What would they do with leaves, anyway? No one here seemed to think that cattle need nice soft litter to sleep on. When the forests gave way to open country, they saw gigantic ranches where countless cattle roamed free in the snow, grazing. "Poor animals!" exclaimed Andrej. "How badly they treated them here. Back home we were so careful to protect them from getting cold, and here the cows are lying in the snow."

A few miles farther on, they saw another huge ranch, and some distance away a third. The Slovenian boys soon realized that the farms in Canada were different from those in Europe. Here, the farmer had all his land around his house. And how much land! In Europe all the houses were in the village, clustered around the parish church like chicks around a hen. On one side of the village were vineyards, on the other, forests and fields, divided into separate lots that belonged to each farm. People lived together and went to the fields with their neighbours; each family was self-sufficient, but they also felt a sense of community.

"Life must be terribly lonely on these farms," said Metod. "There aren't any neighbours around. At home, the village boys get together in the evenings to sing under the linden tree, and the men would go to the *gostilna* for a drink. What on earth can farmers do here to entertain themselves?"

"If there's no tavern nearby, at least you won't be tempted to spend your money on booze," Lojze teased him. Ivan and Andrej just smiled. Neither of them was interested in entertainment. They thought only of saving money; the less chance to spend it, the better.

As the train made its way through the prairies, the passengers began to thin out. There was enough room on the train now for the boys to lie down to sleep. When they awoke, it was a beautiful, sunny morning, though the endless plains on each side of the tracks were still covered with snow. This flat land seemed very dull. How often at home had they sworn when the plough hit a stone or a tree, or when they had had to guide the hay wagon down the twisted road? Here the land was beautifully flat, but there seemed to be no people to cultivate it. They travelled miles and miles before finally reaching a settlement. What could a farmer do with so much land, not even divided into separate fields?

"This is the land of wheat," said Ivan.

"But this much land couldn't be ploughed by a hundred horses," Metod objected. "How they harvest the wheat and thresh it is beyond my imagination."

"Oh well," said Lojze cheerily. "If everything goes well, we won't have to guess for long." The last time they had asked the conductor, he had told them they would finally reach Moose Jaw early that night. There was just one long stop before their final destination. While the train was stopped at Regina, they went to the station restaurant for a bite to eat. Metod, who could not afford any lunch, pretended he wasn't hungry but was persuaded by his friends to get off the train anyway, to keep them company.

"Four times pork and beans," ordered Ivan, winking at Lojze and Andrej to mean that the three would split the cost of Metod's meal. After travelling together for six weeks, sharing everything they had, they would not let Metod go hungry now. It was true that he had frittered away his money in the ship's canteen, but his friends could sympathize with the nervous boy.

Not that Metod seemed nervous now. As soon as he had reached dry land he had regained his confidence. He could believe once more that in a few years he would be on his way back to his homeland and the girl who had secretly pledged her love to him. She was the only one to believe in him and his plan for winning his independence with Canadian dollars. If he worked two or three years as hard as he had worked for the farmer at home, he could earn enough money to buy himself a nice farm in Slovenia and marry Barbara. He would raise his children on his own land and would never be forced to send them away to strangers who cared nothing for them.

Metod had not told his companions his life story until they were on the train but his spirits were immediately raised by this self-revelation, and for the first time in his life he knew the meaning of friendship. His own mother had never understood him so well as these three men who had entered his life only four weeks before.

This was their last meal together; to celebrate, they treated themselves to a glass of beer. Their next meal would be with their new landlords. Right now, they thought, the landlady was probably deciding what to prepare for the people who had come from a far-away European country to work on their farm. She would probably

serve them a holiday meal on their first day. They were slowly sipping their beer when Andrej realized the train had disappeared. "Damn you and your English!" he screamed at Ivan. "You told us the train was staying for three hours."

"That's what I was told."

"Are you sure you didn't misunderstand?"

"If only I had stayed on the train," said Metod.

"Now we're really in trouble," added Lojze. "We'll have to stay here overnight. And worst of all, the farmer will be waiting for us at the train station today, not tomorrow. If we aren't there, he might get somebody else."

"He can't get anybody that fast," Ivan assured them. "If he could, why would he bother bringing us all the way from Europe? If he doesn't come to pick us up, we'll find the way to his place somehow."

"That's all very well," grumbled Lojze sulkily. "But it may not be so easy."

"Look, I'm sorry," said Ivan. "But I'll do what I can to get us back on our journey. I'll make sure we all get to where we're going."

"All right," muttered Andrej. But the mood of celebration had vanished.

Before Ivan had a chance to ask a station official what could be done, he heard the announcement: "All passengers for Moose Jaw and Medicine Hat please board now." Running back to his friends, he announced triumphantly, "Get on the train fast, it's still at this station." There was no time for questions or explanations. Later they learned that during the stop at Regina, which was one of the largest railway junctions in Canada, the train had been moved to a siding, dismantled, and reassembled. Their luggage was still as they had left it.

Though no one apologized to Ivan, it was understood that his knowledge of North American ways was vindicated and that he was still the leader of the little group. They remembered with regret their abandoned half-full glasses of beer, but they consoled themselves with the thought that there would soon be plenty of

beer and food. The sun was about to set when they got off the train at Moose Jaw, the only passengers to do so. How should they address Mr. Green, the farmer who had contracted their services and who was to pick them up at the station? Master? No, that would mean they considered themselves his servants. Surely they had not come thousands of miles just to become servants to a rich man who didn't know their language, their way of life. No, they would not be mere servants. They would be considered farm workers. That was written on their affidavits. Yet they must show respect to the prosperous farmer who would give them work and a place to live in this new land. The difficulty was resolved by Lojze, who suggested they call him "boss."

They looked around the train station. Where was their new boss? There was nobody in sight except a slovenly man sitting in a horse-drawn buggy. His red hair, which reached almost to his shoulders, was partly covered with a knitted hat suitable for a child. His thick red beard had evidently not been washed or trimmed for some time. His coat had probably once been green but was now an indeterminate mud colour. He wore dirty rubber boots. "Could this man be Mr. Green's driver?" Andrej wondered.

"I doubt it," said Ivan. "Surely he would come himself." So the four sat down on their baskets and waited patiently for the boss who had sent for them. After watching the newcomers for a time, the red-haired man climbed down from his buggy and walked towards them.

"Are you looking for work?"

"Yes! Yes!" exclaimed all four. "We are waiting for Mr. Green," Ivan told him in his broken English.

"Who do you think I am?" the man asked sarcastically. Then he turned to Andrej, who seemed to be the strongest of the four: "You want to work for thirty dollars a month?" When Ivan translated this, Andy was speechless with rage and disappointment.

Ivan answered for him, "You promised us sixty dollars a month. It says so on our affidavits. You signed them, and the Canadian government approved them."

"I don't give a damn about the Canadian government," the man said. "I'll pay him thirty dollars, and that's my top price." Andy was overwhelmed by shame and anger at this shoddy treatment. In a rush, all the feelings of childhood came back to him. How often he had been cheated and treated as a thing of no importance! As a child he had borne his fate with patience, knowing he could change nothing, and dreaming of the future. But now he was a grown man. He had chosen freely to come to this new land in search of freedom and respect and had fallen straight into the trap of a calculating swindler.

"No!" he cried. "Even if I starve to death, I will not sell myself for such low pay to this dishonest man." When Ivan translated Andrej's answer, Mr. Green just shrugged.

"What about you?" he asked. "Would you like to work for me for twenty-five dollars?"

"You just said thirty dollars."

"That was for him. He's bigger and stronger. To you I can only pay twenty-five." At that pay Ivan would have to stay in Canada not two years but five to earn the money he needed.

"No, I will not work for you for twenty-five dollars," he answered. Lojze, too, refused to be cheated out of over half of his promised wages. Finally, Mr. Green turned to Metod, the smallest and weakest-looking of the four. "If you are prepared to work for twenty dollars a month, you can come with me. You will get free room and board." Metod, who had no money left, agreed even before Ivan could translate the sum offered. After all, what choice had he? He had no money left; he knew that his friends were short of money too, and he did not want to be a burden to them any longer. He would have worked for nothing, just for decent food and a roof over his head. He swallowed his disappointment; having lived with poverty and poor treatment all his life, he supposed his fate had followed him to this new land. Mr. Green gestured to Metod to put his travelling basket on the buggy and to sit beside him. A whip cracked, and the horses started off. Metod half turned to wave to his friends and watch them recede from sight. Lojze, Ivan, and Andrej had become like brothers to him. He wanted to

embrace them and tell them how much he was suffering. But now he was snatched away with no chance for a proper farewell. If only he could shake hands with them as Slovenian custom called for! It seemed that this land took away even those small comforts. "He must be an awful man," said Ivan after the buggy had disappeared from sight. "How dirty and unkempt he is! If he doesn't care for himself, how can he care about anybody else?" In Slovenia, the peasants washed and dressed in their best clothes when they went to buy oxen at the county fair.

"He behaved as if he was buying slaves," said Lojze. "He acted as though he was doing us a favour. Maybe he thought he wouldn't have to negotiate at all. He probably thought we wouldn't understand any English and would be totally at his mercy. No, we won't sell ourselves as slaves!"

"Poor Metod," said Andrej. "We sold him out the way Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt." The biblical story he had heard so often as an altar boy had come to his mind. In all the confusion, they forgot that Lojze had been supposed to work for another farmer, who hadn't come to the train station. Perhaps it was just as well, thought Lojze.

WORKING FOR THE RAILWAY

Now the little band of Slovenes who had arrived in Canada so hopefully a week ago had dwindled to three. A month of weary travelling and their hard-earned savings had brought them to this little town in the middle of the vast plains of Canada. Their money was almost gone, and they had gained nothing except a hard lesson about the vulnerability of immigrants to mistreatment. But what now? Where could they go and what could they do? It was Lojze who first had an idea. He had the address of a man from his village who had emigrated to Canada a year before and was living in a town called Cranbrook. It was a slim connection but better than none. They agreed to stick together and to try to find Lojze's acquaintance. The stationmaster told them they could easily get to Cranbrook by travelling some five hundred miles farther in the same direction. A month ago five hundred miles had seemed like an enormous distance, but what was distance in this immense land?

On the hard wooden benches in the waiting room they dozed a little, and at two o'clock in the morning they continued their journey across Alberta and into British Columbia. In the thirty years since the railway had been built, even this remote part of Canada had become attractive to immigrants, especially those from Scandinavia, Germany, Holland, and the Ukraine, who flocked to this land to make a living for themselves and their children.

From Lethbridge on, the countryside became gradually more rugged and hilly, until the young men found themselves among imposing mountains that made them homesick for the mountains of Europe. When they finally reached Cranbrook, they followed the other passengers toward the centre of town. From his days in the United States, Ivan knew that everything in a small town happened in the saloon. After strolling about the quiet town for a while, they came to a small glass-fronted building, from which they heard raucous shouts in several languages. They entered a dimly lit room, filled with strong young men. It was a pool hall, the small-town,

western Canadian equivalent of the saloon or the *gostilna* of their own country. Because the owner was a Ukrainian, by the name of Shopka, it had become the gathering place of Slavs. Shopka immediately recognized the name that Lojze showed him.

"He used to come here, but I haven't seen him for more than six months," he said. "I can introduce you to two other Slovenians, though. They're sitting in that corner. Ask them, maybe they can help you." Lojze, Ivan, and Andrej went over and introduced themselves. The men were excited to meet compatriots, and demanded news from the homeland.

Then Andrej asked, "How come you aren't working? Is today a holiday or something?"

"How come we aren't working?" They seemed surprised, as if sitting idly in the tavern was their everyday routine. "Where do you think we would get work? There's no factory here...no farms ...no work at all."

"How do you live then?"

"We're waiting."

"For what?"

"To find some kind of job."

"How do you live without work?"

"We saved some money last year by working in the forests. When the winter's over, we'll probably be able to find logging work again."

"I've only been in Canada for a year, and I have no money saved," said one young man. "But I get some money from my sister in the States."

"Why don't you join her?" Andrej asked.

"I'm not allowed to. America wouldn't accept me. There are some agents here who smuggle you across the border—for a good price, of course."

"There are rumours," interrupted the second man, "that some of these unscrupulous agents will rob you and throw you into the water, instead of getting you across the border. Anyway, life in America isn't much better than here. There are huge numbers of people out of work there. Thousands of Americans have come to

British Columbia in the last few years. Some were looking for gold in the Fraser Valley; others wanted to get work on the railway or in the forest industry. Right now things are very bad, but they'll pick up in the spring, when it gets warmer." The three friends looked at each other, confused and anxious. They had planned their arrival in Canada for the middle of spring, yet it was almost May, and these men were talking about "the spring when it gets warmer." When does the Canadian spring start, they wondered? With only a few dollars left in their pockets, they could not afford to wait in pool halls and boarding houses for the snow to melt. They needed work right away.

They were advised to inquire at the Canadian Pacific Railway office. Early the next morning, after spending the night at Shopka's boarding house, they went to the CPR office, where they were told that there might be work for two men. They were excited to hear of work, but what about the third man?

"Better something than nothing," said Ivan.

"Where do we go?" they inquired.

"We're building new railway tracks not far from here. You take the train to the village of Yahk. The Kingsgate work camp is just past the village, right by the U.S. border. There you will get a place to stay. Tell the foreman I sent you."

"When does the next train leave?"

"Well, the passenger train for Seattle goes through every morning, but you've missed today's train. There's a freight train taking materials to Kingsgate. I might be able to get you a ride on that train this afternoon, if you don't mind travelling freight." Three hours later they were sitting on their wicker travelling cases while the train slowly made its way through the valley of the Moyie River. Thick dark forests rose up on both sides of the valley. The tall, straight pines seemed to reach to the sky. Except for a few yards cleared back from the tracks, the dense forest lay untouched.

At Kingsgate, the tracks, following the river, made a wide left turn and the camp lay before them: a mere cluster of old, rusting rail cars in a raw clearing. The Slovenes easily found the

foreman's office, in a car in the middle of the temporary settlement. "I'll take you and you," said the foreman, pointing to Lojze and Ivan. "But we only need two guys. The other guy will have to leave. This isn't a hotel."

Ivan pleaded with the foreman to hire Andrej as well. "We travelled thousands of miles together and we can't just abandon him now." Eventually the foreman conceded that Andrej could stay with the other two in the barracks, even if there was no work for him. Andrej was touched by the generosity of his friends. Never before had he been so dependent on the charity of other people. Even as a child he had earned his living by doing chores for the mayor. Now, at twenty-two, at the peak of his physical strength, he was about to live off friends who were willing to share their barracks and their hard-earned wages. But what else could he do? Support himself by stealing and cheating, or by gambling? It was unthinkable: honesty was too deeply ingrained in him. Besides, without knowing the language, he couldn't cheat even if he wanted to.

"At least I can wash, cook, and clean for you," he said. Railway car no. 10 was covered with a thick coat of rust and dirt. When they opened the creaking door, the stench that rushed out at them almost made them faint. The barracks appeared to have never been cleaned. Two dirty mattresses lay on the floor; a wooden box served as a table. One bench remained from the days when the car ran on rails. The only other furniture was a small iron stove. A window opening on the other side was covered with wooden planks. Through a gap in the planks came a cold draft.

The young men put their travelling cases down and stared. Surely this filthy car couldn't be their home! After all their eager speculations about life in the promised land, it was hard to realize that this was to be home in Canada; but the sooner they accepted it, the better, thought Andrej. He was too tired to care much. His head was buzzing with so many thoughts and impressions that he couldn't hold any one for long. All three were hungry, but the nearest store, the foreman had told them, was some two miles away, on the American side. Andrej volunteered to start his

household duties right away by going shopping. Ivan offered to go with him, but Andrej refused. "You need to rest for work tomorrow. I'll manage somehow. Just tell me the words to say."

"Eggs, milk, coffee, bread...," Andrej kept repeating all the way to the store, where he recited the foreign words to the salesgirl all in a rush as if they were a magic formula. When she just looked at him strangely, Andrej realized he must not have pronounced the words correctly. The girl, who knew all thirty men at the camp, knew immediately that Andrej was a newcomer. She showed him a few essential things, and Andrej just nodded. With the groceries he returned proudly to the barracks, where Lojze and Ivan were already sleeping. Andrej, too, was tired. He curled up on the wooden bench and fell asleep.

In the morning, Andrej rose first, prepared breakfast for his friends, and packed a lunch for them to take to work. "This shack will look better when you get back," he promised. As soon as they left for work, Andrej started on his chores. In the woods behind the camp he gathered some dry branches, and along the railway tracks he found some pieces of wood. When he lit the little black stove, he was almost suffocated by the thick smoke that poured out of it. Once the smoke cleared he threw himself into the cleaning. He cleared away the litter of papers, tin cans, and bottles from the floor, and scrubbed the walls, floor, and bench in the hope of avoiding infection from those who had occupied the place before them. By the time his friends came home, he had imposed a rough orderliness on the old car. For supper he served them tea and canned pork and beans.

Day after day Lojze and Ivan would come home bone-tired from their day's work, but what they found hardest to bear was the lack of comradeship in their work. The bosses were calculating strangers, and their co-workers mostly immigrants competing with each other in fear of losing their jobs. "I work like a horse and I'm treated like an animal," complained Ivan. "Even worse. Here, they don't tell you to stop working if it starts to rain. Nobody cares if a worker catches cold. There are thousands of people ready to take his place." In the evenings the men talked about their work, about

the small events of the day. They never mentioned their homeland, as if the long journey had erased it from their memory. But at night, when everything was quiet and their bodies rested on the dirty mattresses, their souls often wandered back home.

"Mici! Mici!" cried Ivan in his sleep. "Look, I'm coming home to you. This place is hell."

On another mattress Lojze murmured, "Mother! Mother! Mary, don't you recognize me?" Night after night Andrej listened to the unconscious laments of his friends, torn between two countries, between two continents. He himself lay sleepless, slapping at the bedbugs and brooding about his homeland.

One day he bought paper and a pencil and suggested that they all write home. Ivan notified his wife of his safe arrival in Canada and his work on the railway. Lojze told his wife he was happy with his work and the place where he was staying with two other Slovenes. He complained only of the long Canadian winter. Andrej, with no job to brag about, found it hard to know what to write. Unable to tell his mother that he was out of work and living on the generosity of his friends, he told her only that he had arrived safely in Canada and had made very good friends.

By the middle of May the weather had become a little warmer. The snow had almost melted in the lowlands, and the smell of spring was in the air. Almost overnight the grass turned green, and the songs of birds could be heard from every tree. The rebirth of nature was visible everywhere. But life by the railway tracks was as dull and lonely as ever, and from day to day Andrej became more depressed. He had no words with which to comfort his friends, who revealed their grief only at night, in their dreams. He began to blame himself, seeing himself as a heavy burden for them. He tried to think of a way out of his dependency, but without work there was nothing he could do.

When he received a letter from his childhood sweetheart, who had emigrated to America a few years earlier, he thought he saw a glimmer of hope. As a teenager, Zofi had been passionately in love with Andrej and had written him embarrassing love letters. But her letter from the United States expressed the thoughts of a

grown woman. She invited him to visit her in Cleveland, where she was living with her uncle. America! Andrej was there almost every day, every time he visited the store on the American side. He wondered what would happen if he were simply to board the train on the other side of the border. But he didn't want to risk a confrontation with the authorities, since if he were caught, he would be sent back to his homeland, disgraced and humiliated.

He remembered the stories of agents who would smuggle people over the border. But that route was dangerous; besides, he didn't have the money. Yet America had a powerful attraction for him. He imagined that everything would be different there. One evening, while he was standing by the river thinking about Zofi, he was seized by a sudden urge to jump into the water and end his painful life. "You are a failure, Andrej!" an inner voice told him. "All your life other people have had to take care of you. Even now you are a burden to others. How hard Lojze and Ivan work while you, the youngest and the strongest, sit at home all day!" He could not shake off these bitter thoughts. The white-blue water of the Moyie River roared by, untouched by Andrej's suffering. Suddenly he jumped into the icy water. But at the threshold of death, the image of Zofi entered his mind. He kicked and pulled against the current until he reached shore and was able to haul himself out. He was on the opposite bank of the river; he slipped quietly into the forest.

He felt as if he had been reborn; as if the cold water had cleansed him of all his tortured thoughts. He had no time to think about his past or his future. The troubled life he had almost thrown away on the other side of the river suddenly became beautiful. He was buoyed up by a sense of great victory, the victory over his own death. His thoughts were now as clear as the water of the Moyie River: life is worth fighting for.

In the thick forest he found a path: surely it would take him south. When the path disappeared, Andrej kept walking in the direction he assumed was south. Though he was shivering from his wet clothes, he felt an uncanny strength, as if he could walk all the way to Cleveland if he only knew where that was. Now that he

was in America he would surely find the place somehow. Soon night covered the woods; only here and there the faint moonlight penetrated through the thick trees. Andrej's euphoria vanished with the light. He lost all sense of direction. He heard the piercing cry of a coyote, and an eerie feeling swept over him. He tore a branch off a tree as a weapon in case he needed to defend himself against wild beasts. When he found himself on the shore of a lake he didn't know which way to turn.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, although he could not believe that his voice would be heard by a living soul. His voice echoed along the surface of the water in all directions. For a moment he thought he heard a dog barking; once again he shouted for help. This time there was no doubt: the dog was barking in reply, as if it had recognized the human voice. Tired and freezing cold, Andrej held onto the thought that where there is a dog there must also be people. Slowly he walked in the direction of the barking. He had no idea how long he had been walking when he became aware of the presence of an animal. He tensed, and then sighed with relief when the dog came up to him and nuzzled his hand, barking in a friendly manner.

Then Andrej made out a human form in the darkness; a man addressed him in a strange language. On the ship coming to Canada, and later on the train, Andrej had heard many strange languages, but nothing like this one. Finally, the man took him by the arm and guided him into a hut, which appeared to be made of bark. A fire was burning in the centre. The man gestured to Andrej to sit close to the fire. On the other side a woman and two girls were sitting on a bearskin rug. The man and his family had black hair, long and unkempt, and dark eyes. Their complexion was dark, almost bronze, much darker than the summer tans of the farmers that Andrej knew.

Suddenly Andrej realized who these dark people were—Indians! He was gripped by an unreasoning fear. He had heard vague stories about the godless Indians. "Aren't you afraid the Indians will kill you?" a civil servant had asked in Ljubljana. Now he was in an Indian hut, at the mercy of these strange, though

friendly-looking, people. Was the Indian too friendly? Had he walked into a trap?

The woman made him a kind of tea with an odd but pleasant taste and offered him some rabbit meat. Meanwhile the girls were talking and giggling. They must be talking about him, Andrej thought, embarrassed. He was a curiosity to them. Unable to speak their language and casting about for a way to converse with them, he picked up a piece of thin wood and a stump of charcoal lying beside the fire and began to draw a picture. Excited, the girls offered him more wood for drawings, and soon they had found a common language. After the girls fell asleep, the old Indian drew a picture of a canoe and showed it to Andrej. He lay awake in the hut all night dreading what might happen to him in the morning. Next day, the Indian got into his canoe with Andrej and began to paddle steadily. Andrej did not realize they had entered the Moyie River until the Indian tied up his canoe at the Canadian-American border, in front of the familiar grocery store. The salesgirl ran out of the shop, wide-eyed, and began gesturing to the Indian. Andrej understood that she was assuring the Indian that Andrej would be all right now.

When Andrej returned to his barracks, he was astonished to find it unchanged. Burying his head in the mattress, he reflected on the meaning of his life, on the grace of God that had brought him back into this awful place to cleanse him of his sinful thoughts and make him respect life again.

God! As a child he had believed that God dwelled in the village church, but his simple faith had ebbed away over the years. In the two months since he had come to Canada he hadn't heard the name of God, except in the many-tongued curses of the railway workers. Yet the day before he had felt extraordinarily close to God. It seemed that God had ordered him to swim after his mad leap into the river and had guided him through the middle of the forest for help. For these Indians, whom he had feared as blood-thirsty savages, were surely messengers of God's goodness, of the affection and help that a man can offer his fellow man. Slowly he awoke from his daydreaming, lit the stove, and cooked supper.

"Where were you yesterday?" asked Ivan when he came home from work.

"I got lost," Andrej answered. His friends did not bother him with further questions. They had too many problems of their own. But Andrej was sure that the salesgirl at the store knew the whole truth. His eyes must have revealed it to her the day the Indian brought him back: his despair, his contrition, even his shame at failing in his suicide attempt. What else is left to a man who can neither live nor die?

Andrej always believed it was this young woman who interceded with the foreman to find him his first job in Canada, because a week later he was offered work at a new railway construction site. He was delighted to get a job, even though it meant being separated from his friends. Perhaps they would meet again, perhaps not. He had begun to accept such changes as the fate of an immigrant. Back home things were different; people lived close together from birth to death. Here, friendship was just a brief encounter.

Though the work was hard, and the pay low—only twenty-five cents an hour, life at the second work camp at first seemed better because the camp had a cook who made three hearty meals for the railway workers every day. But the workers at the tracks were mostly Italians, and the Italian foreman gave preferential treatment to his countrymen. "Hurry up," he often shouted at Andrej. "Work faster, or else I'll find somebody else!" The years of patiently suffered injustices all seemed to crowd in on him. The man who had left his homeland to escape corruption, who never had a harsh word for anyone, was now overcome with rage and felt ready to kill. He grabbed the first thing at hand, a large chunk of wood, and flung it at the foreman, who ducked just in time. His co-workers just watched.

When he returned to his barracks in the evening, Andrej felt unwell. Barely conscious of his surroundings, he thought he was still at the construction site. He saw his foreman lying in a pool of blood and the workers pointing at him and calling him a killer. The room began to spin. Andrej was no longer a grown man. He was

a child, holding onto the priest's robe and reciting the strange foreign words: "*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!*" As a child, even when he had been beaten and humiliated, he had been comforted by the hope that somewhere there was a better, more just world, where people were like brothers and sisters, where there was no difference between rich and poor, where all people were respected equally. As an altar boy, Andrej had often heard those sweet words about justice and goodness and had longed to find this better place.

Today he came to believe that there was no justice for him in this world. The most humiliating thing for him was his own loss of control. "You became like a wild beast," an inner voice kept telling him in the moments of relative lucidity. "Die like a dog in this foreign country! It will be no great loss!"

All through the night Andrej drifted in and out of a delirium. When he regained consciousness he was terribly ill, and there was nobody to help him. In fear of death he panicked. When the cook came into his room the next day, Andrej did not recognize him. Perhaps he thought the man was a priest administering the last rites, for he kept repeating the prayer of his childhood: "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

"Wake up, Andrej! Wake up and eat. I brought you some soup," the cook said. "For God's sake, Andrej, wake up and eat!" The cook's rough voice and gentle words brought Andrej back to reality. He took the cup and drank the soup in order not to offend God, who had sent a saviour into his barracks. Over the next few days, the cook visited many times, bringing soup or hot tea. His words, although spoken in a foreign language, were filled with compassion and warmth and were like balm to Andrej's soul.

What had the cook said? "For God's sake, eat!" Andrej took those words literally: the cook was God's messenger. In his close encounter with death he had stood alone before his rightful judge, repenting his second sin. Love your neighbour as yourself, was God's word. Yet hadn't he hated himself when he rejected life and jumped into the water? Hadn't he failed to love his neighbour when he struck out against another human being? Hadn't he lost

faith in both himself and humanity when he locked himself in his barracks to die like a dog?

"Where is your faith, Andrej?" the inner voice asked him. "I am your God: life, hope, love. We've travelled a long way together, suffered many injustices together...and we still have a long way to go. Don't look for me in the golden vessels of the church. Find me, rather, in the soup of the compassionate Italian cook or in the tea of an Indian woman. Even through this rough worker's hands I am giving you new strength for life: even in a strange language I am speaking to you of hope and love."

In the Forests of British Columbia

A few days later, Andrej received a letter from his mother informing him that she had been forced to sell the farm because he hadn't sent her any money. On reading her words he almost fell into despair again. He struggled to hold on to his sanity. He had to accept the fact that the farm he had dreamed of returning to was gone. He had no home and no reason to return. "Good-bye my home, lost forever!" he said to himself. "Good-bye, my homeland. This Canadian land is big and wide. This is going to be my new homeland. I'll become a Canadian—just as Frenchmen, Englishmen, Ukrainians, Italians became Canadians."

They were brave words, but time and again he was almost incapacitated by a wave of homesickness. Eventually it was anger that finally helped him cast off his sadness, for he blamed his mother bitterly for selling the homestead—his home. All his child's love for his mother turned to hatred, and she seemed to him to be the source of all the evil in his life. Had she not sold the property that for generations had belonged to the Stritof family? Had she not forced him to emigrate, because she favoured her younger son over the elder? Even as a child, Andrej had had to live with strangers, while Franc was allowed to stay with his mother. Although the story of his childhood was, in truth, a common one in Slovenian families at the time, to Andrej it now assumed the proportions of a tragedy. Gradually his anger turned against his brother as well. In his mind he disowned them both, his mother and his brother. It was easy for him to break the connection: he simply stopped writing. Even if they wanted to get in touch with him, they would have no way of finding him.

It was better that way, Andrej thought. It was better to receive no letters from home than to suffer the pain of receiving bad news

from his mother. At least now his scars were beginning to heal, and with the farm gone he no longer felt he had to earn money as fast as possible to pay off the mortgage. Now he was responsible for himself and his own future.

Fed up with his job on the railway, he quit and went back to Cranbrook, where he stopped in to have a few drinks at Shopka's pool hall and to inquire about the news from the outside world. The real money, he was told, was in forest work, and the place to get work was farther north. In the company of three young Slovenes Andrej took a train to the town of Golden, which lay on the Columbia River, nestled between the Rocky and Selkirk mountains.

At the first tavern in Golden they inquired about jobs. "The coal mine I work at is looking for two strong men," said a man sitting at the bar. Two of Andrej's companions disappeared from the tavern and ran straight to the mining office; two hours later they were back at the tavern with good news.

"There must be some work in the forests," said Andrej to his new friend, who was still looking for a job. "All these huge forests...." They were advised to see the owner of a big logging company, who when he heard they were experienced woodsmen, hired them immediately. A shrewd man, he offered the newcomers a flat rate to log a certain area. After inspecting the forests, Andrej and his friend decided they could earn good money. The lower part of the woods would be hard going, but they could make up time on the upper part. Andrej was quite happy with this arrangement. At least there was nobody to push him. They were working for themselves now, and the faster they worked, the more they would earn.

They decided to get the worst part of the job out of the way first. The lower section was rough ground and dense with tangled underbrush. The work was heavy and dangerous. They had to handle their axes with great care. At the end of the week, the owner paid them for the first half of the job, praising them for clearing in one week an area that would have taken some workers a month. Next week, when they returned to clear the upper part of

the woods, they found someone else working on that piece of land. "You guys made a mistake," said Andrej. "This is our place to work." The men insisted there was no mistake. The owner had showed them exactly this spot.

"We had a contract with you for the upper part as well as for the lower part," Andrej remonstrated with the owner.

"I changed that contract last Saturday," replied the owner calmly. "Those men are going to clear that lot for a quarter of what I would have to pay you." They had been cheated because they were too honest and too eager to work, thought Andrej. They should have finished the easier part first. But he shrugged off his anger and disappointment; he would have to roll with the punches if he wanted to get along.

"I have another job for you if you want," offered the owner.

"We don't want piecework any more. We'll work if you pay us by the hour."

"I'll pay three dollars a day."

"Fine," answered Andrej for both of them. He liked the new job because he didn't have to push himself too hard. He easily kept pace with the other workers. The owner soon realized he could get more work out of Andrej.

"Do you know how handle horses?" he asked him.

"Of course," said Andrej. "I drove a team for years on the farm back home."

"Good. I'll have you work with horses from now on. You will move logs down from the mountains." Next day Andrej reported for work at the stable.

"I'll give you the best working horses," said the stable boy with an unpleasant grin. He brought two sturdy horses from the stable. When Andrej touched their bridle, the horses went wild, lifting him up like a rag. The stable boy looked on, laughing. "You still like horses, greenhorn?" he sneered.

Anger and the threat of danger gave Andrej a burst of great strength. He grabbed their bridle and hit each horse on the nose; surprised and frightened, the animals lowered their heads and became submissive. "Good horses!" Andrej murmured, stroking

their heads. As the stable boys watched in amazement, Andrej continued to address the horses in his native language. Though they did not understand Slovenian, they could sense love and consideration, and Andrej gave them that. He made sure they always had enough food, water, and rest. In return, the animals worked hard and willingly.

Andrej enjoyed working with horses, and the pay was good, but his co-workers soon became jealous. It was customary for horse drivers to work in pairs; one day Andrej's partner, an impatient Scot, went back to the forest right after lunch without giving the horses time to rest. Andrej stubbornly refused to join him until the animals had had at least half an hour's rest. Ignoring his warning, the Scot bridled the horses and drove off.

An hour later, Andrej caught up with the Scot halfway up the mountain. One of the horses lay on the ground, exhausted and unmoving; the man was screaming at it and whipping it repeatedly. Meanwhile the other horse was becoming restless, and the wagon was beginning to slip downhill. Andrej had arrived just in time. "Unharness the horse!" he shouted, realizing what had happened. "Move the wagon away." Bending over the horse, Andrej patted it on the head until it stopped shaking. Then he cut a trench in the ground with his axe so that its hooves could get a firm grip. Finally, he pulled the horse by the tail to help lift it. Slowly, the animal rose.

Once both horses were safely back in harness, the Scot began to scream at Andrej, blaming him for his accident. "It's all your fault," he said. "If you had come to the woods with me, it wouldn't have happened. You lazy greenhorn!"

"I saved your horse," protested Andrej. "What more do you want from me?" But his partner, pleased to have a complaint against Andrej, told the boss his own version and was believed. Once again Andrej found himself without work. Where to now? In the forests of British Columbia, experienced loggers had no trouble finding a job. On a tip from a co-worker, Andrej went to the small settlement of Yahk.

There he met another Slovene, Martin, looking for work, and together they travelled by bus to a remote forest settlement where, they had heard, workers were needed. It was almost dark when they arrived at the logging camp. "No work here!" said the red-haired Irish foreman. Apparently he wanted to keep his logging camp Irish and considered Slavs to be invaders in his ethnic enclave. But he could not violate the unwritten rule of hospitality for forest workers. "Make up a bed for these lousy greenhorns," he muttered to his wife.

Andrej, who was by now used to insults, took the rude welcome in stride. His companion, however, was badly shaken. All the way back to Yahk the next day, he fretted. "I think we're being followed by detectives," Martin said to Andrej.

"Why should we be?" asked Andrej. "We didn't do anything wrong."

"What if the Irishman told them about the lice? He could tell the detectives we infested the camp with lice. Didn't you hear when he said 'lousy greenhorns'?" Andrej tried to persuade his travelling companion that his fear was irrational: nobody was ever arrested for having lice. Yet Andrej did not find such signs of mental imbalance surprising, for life in a foreign country, especially under such working conditions, might break even the healthiest of men. The pressure to earn enough money to send for his wife and children was just too much for this poor man, he thought.

By now Andrej felt himself to be an experienced immigrant. He had learned enough English to get by, and after breaking his ties with his homeland, he felt free. He had began to believe in the future. With his strong faith, he comforted his friend: "Nothing is lost yet. We'll get a job." When they arrived back in Yahk, he asked Martin to wait outside while he asked for work at a lumber office.

Yes, he was told, they needed two men, when he hurried outside to share the good news, his friend was nowhere in sight. Andrej looked everywhere for him, but he seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Andrej was startled but not really shocked. Living the disjointed life of a transient worker, he

was learning to accept friendship as transitory. In fact it had begun to seem almost normal to make friends with a man in a tavern, learn his whole life story in two days, and then lose all trace of him forever.

Afraid that someone else would get that job, Andrej did not spend much time searching for his friend. He travelled by train to the village of Wardner and continued his journey by bus to the end of the Bull River. But at the logging company, the friendly Swede foreman refused to hire him because the work demanded two people. He agreed, however, to save the job while Andrej went back to Yahk to find himself a partner. His first stop was the village tavern. To his amazement, his friend who had disappeared so unexpectedly the day before was playing cards at a table in the corner. "Here you are!" Andrej exclaimed. "I've been looking all over for you. I finally got a job for both of us."

"So what?" mumbled Martin without looking up.

"We start right away—and the pay's good. Are you coming?"

"Don't bother me. Can't you see I'm busy now? I can't leave now when everything is going so well for me."

"For heaven's sake, Martin, this isn't the way to earn money! They won't let you get away with it, even if you win. This is a loser's game. This way you'll never earn enough money to bring your wife and children over."

Martin merely hunched his shoulders and concentrated on his hand. So Andrej shrugged and asked a Ukrainian he met at the tavern if he would be interested in the job. "Why not, if the pay's good?" the man answered. Early that evening, Andrej and his new partner reported for the work at the logging company at Wardner. The foreman was glad to see Andrej back with a strong-looking companion.

"Most of my lumberjacks live in barracks up in the forest," he told them. "There's space for you two there. Our cook at the lumber camp will make sure you have plenty of food."

Andrej was pleased with the camp set-up. He didn't mind sharing with his companion and was delighted that the barracks were near the river, so that he could wash without anybody

complaining about how much water he used. By nightfall they felt at home. Next morning the foreman took them to the work site. "All these tall pines have to go. You start at the bottom and work upwards. Push the logs down the mountain ridges into the river. There shouldn't be any problem if you do the work right."

The mountain was so steep they could almost push the trees directly into the river. Andrej wondered what strange force held the trees so erect. His co-worker didn't have much experience with forestry, but he quickly learned from Andrej how to handle the axe and saw. With hooks they arranged the logs neatly along a straight path so that they would slide smoothly into the river.

In the evenings Andrej spent most of his time sitting by the fire, drawing pictures on thin pieces of wood. Drawing had started as a mere game for him; something to while away the time in this isolated spot, but it quickly became engrossing. He experimented with charcoal made from different kinds of wood, and with different strokes and surfaces. He sketched the things most familiar to him: a saw, an axe, a hook, a log. He was overwhelmed by the impressions these homely objects made on him. Even in his homeland, he realized, the axe and the saw had been shaping his future. Working with those tools had brought him the fare to emigrate, and the ability to make a living. Here, these tools were an essential part of his being; he was dependent on them for his very existence. The axe, the saw, and the hook were all part of him. Yet he was in command of these tools; without him, they would mean nothing. The man and the tools existed in a curious symbiosis. Without the touch of a human hand, the tools would lie motionless on the ground while the tall pine trees would grow even taller; and without tools the man would be unable to make even the smallest tree fall.

He began to think how infinitely small a man is compared to God, the invisible and all-powerful. Living among total strangers in this wilderness, Andrej was intensely conscious of the presence of God. He could think about life, this beautiful gift of God, for hours. How small is a man: yet through his power the tallest trees fall! How high and wide is a mountain: yet a man digs a tunnel

through it! How big is the world: and yet a man can adapt himself to any place and condition. Animals live in their own territories for generations, moving only as far as their daily needs take them. When they die, nothing remains. These towering pine trees cannot tell other pines about their long journey to the saw mill, where they are transformed into smooth boards and thence into houses and ships. A tree is forever mute: it cannot share its tale of death and resurrection. But Andrej, a man, could describe on a piece of a paper everything that happened to him. On a piece of wood he could draw an axe, a saw, a hook, and the whole world would understand him. A hundred years from now, he thought, someone might discover his pictures among the remnants of these barracks and be surprised that a man in 1926 used these primitive tools to cut down the gigantic trees of British Columbia.

By the middle of November the river had frozen and Andrej was out of work again. His drawings were buried under a heavy layer of snow. He packed his belongings in his wicker suitcase and was soon on his way back to Cranbrook. This town served as a meeting place; loggers came from hundreds of miles around to spend the winter there. This annual migration was a source of great profit for the town's businesses. The men went first to the barber, then to the store to get some decent clothes. Some of them visited the dentist, for gold teeth were a symbol of wealth and pride and many young men sacrificed a perfectly healthy tooth in the belief that a glint of gold in their mouths would win them female admiration.

Emerging from the isolation of the deep forests, these rough men craved company, pleasures, and distractions. Some of them fell for the easy charms of girls who clung to any man as long as he had money in his pocket. Others were drawn into the company of card sharks who bled them dry. Some turned to bootleggers, drowning their sorrows in home-made wine and liquor. The few sober, frugal men hid from these temptations, holing up in lonely boarding houses to wait for spring.

By now Andrej felt at home in the Ukrainian pool hall and at Shopka's boarding house. Shopka liked this intense young man,

even though he didn't spend much money in the tavern, and he would make sure he had a room for him whenever he was in town. Seeing how handy Andrej was with hammer and wood, Shopka made him an enticing offer: "I've bought an old house that needs fixing up. Would you be interested? I can't pay much, but you can have free room and board. And the work will keep you from the temptation to spend your savings." The house kept Andrej busy for two months. Shopka was delighted: the old shack looked almost elegant, and the renovations had cost a fraction of his estimates.

The spring of 1926 came early. Like bears, the loggers emerged from hibernation to earn some money again. Those who had spent all their savings on women and liquor took their Sunday suits to the second-hand store, where they exchanged them for work pants and boots. Thus outfitted, they waited for jobs to turn up.

One day a Ukrainian by the name of George asked Andrej to work as his partner at a sawmill in Kimberley. "The job's paid by piecework. The more work we do, the more we get paid. I'm giving you the first opportunity to be my partner, because I know you're an honest and hard-working man." Andrej jumped at the chance because he liked working with wood. George assured him that the machine work was not as hard and dangerous as it seemed. So they went to Kimberley, where George's job from the previous year was still waiting for him.

George was eager to teach Andrej to work with the saw. They loaded big logs into the saw, making sure that all four sides were cut evenly to form a square beam. As soon as Andrej was able to manage the machine without his supervision, George began disappearing for hours at a time. At first Andrej didn't mind, but then he began to wonder and one day he asked him directly, "Where were you all day yesterday?"

"I was in town on business," George answered. Andrej accepted this answer. But eventually, his suspicions were aroused.

"What if you stay here today," he suggested to his partner, "and I'll go into town on business. Just tell me what I have to do."

Pushed into a corner, George could think of no tasks for Andrej in town. So he became angry. "I was the one who found you this job. If it weren't for me, you'd still be waiting for work in Cranbrook. I taught you how to handle the machinery and this is the thanks I get. Distrust! If you don't like the way we work, I'll quit. Just remember there'll be no work for you, either, if I go."

"The way we work? Can't you see that for the past two weeks you've only appeared for work twice? I've been working for the both of us. I refuse to be exploited that way." The next day George came to deliver their pay cheque.

"This is your last pay," he told Andrej spitefully. "I told the owner we were quitting. I don't want to work with people like you." George disappeared with his share of the money. Perhaps, thought Andrej wryly, the local gambling spots and brothels had lost their appeal for him. Andrej went to the owner of the sawmill and begged for some kind of job. He spent the rest of the season as a handyman, working at odd jobs.

In October he received a second letter from Zofi. It seemed an age since he had first thought of going to her in America. He had never told her of his mad attempt to cross the border. He had written to her several times but had never received an answer, not surprisingly, with his wanderings to remote places. He was a little surprised that this letter had reached him. It had taken almost a month to travel from Shopka's boarding house, which he used as a forwarding address.

Andrej was moved to tears reading the letter, written in verse:

I am trembling with a broken heart
My soul is full of fear
I hate to be so far apart
From you, my dear.

The naive phrases called up for Andrej a picture from his school days. Everyone called the tiny girl who sat in front of him the American, because she had been born in the United States. But except for her American citizenship she retained nothing of that

faraway land. She had been only a year old when her mother brought her to Slovenia.

Zofi wrote that when she had returned to her birth-place as a grown woman, she had felt a complete foreigner. Slovenian men in Cleveland flocked around her like flies; she despised their crass attempts to woo her with gold teeth, big salaries, and rich uncles. She wanted a pure and disinterested love, which she found in a man who lived thousands of miles away and had struggled to express her yearning in this clumsy poem.

After receiving Zofi's letter, Andrej became restless. Tired of always moving, of constant change and insecurity, he wanted to go back to civilization, to settle down and work at one place for at least a year. And he wanted to be closer to Zofi, his only link on this continent to his old life. He obtained a map, and found Cleveland, half a continent away. But not far from it, on the Canadian side of the border, was a city called Windsor. He would go there, he decided.

When he went back to Cranbrook to say good-bye, Shopka tried to dissuade him from his project. "There are thousands of people out of work in Windsor," Shopka told him. When he saw that Andrej's mind was made up, he urged him, "At least wait until spring. There's another house for sale here on this street. I was thinking that you and I could buy it and share the profit. It would keep you busy during the winter, and after it's all fixed up we can sell it for good money. Or we can rent it."

"I might be persuaded to stay here for a few months and help you fix the house, but I don't want to go into partnership. Why don't you buy it yourself?"

"I haven't enough money."

"I can lend you some."

Shopka was reluctant to borrow from Andrej, but the opportunity was too tempting: "I promise to pay you back every dollar, with interest, of course."

The house repairs were finished by spring. When Shopka could not immediately find a buyer, he tried to persuade Andrej to change his mind about leaving, but nothing could keep Andrej

there for another summer. "I am leaving tomorrow," he announced to Shopka the day after Easter.

"I can't possibly give you all the money back today. If I had a few days I could borrow it from somebody else."

"Don't worry. I can wait for the rest of my money. You can send it to me in Windsor. I trust you, Shopka. You were the only person whose help I could always count on." When the time for farewells came the next morning, Shopka embraced Andrej as a father embraces his own son.

"God be with you!" he shouted after him.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

It was a foggy afternoon in the spring of 1927 when Andrej stepped off the train at Windsor. Not knowing which way to go, he simply followed the crowd and soon found himself on Walker Street, a busy thoroughfare lined with two- and three-storey buildings, each with apartments over a store or restaurant. In a restaurant window Andrej noticed a sign advertising "room for rent." Well, why not, he thought. This street might be a little noisy, but after a year of living like a hermit in the wilds it would be a pleasant change to watch streetcars go by from the window. "Ten dollars per month. You won't find a better price anywhere," said the man at the bar when he inquired. "My wife will show you the place." A fat, elderly woman came out of the kitchen, took off her apron, and told Andrej to follow her.

They walked almost to the end of Walker Street, and then onto a side street. Right at the end of the street the woman stopped in front of a shack no bigger than the railway barracks in British Columbia. "I know you'll like it here," she smiled at Andrej as she opened the door. Andrej was surprised to see a frail male figure sitting on the bed. "Why are you still here?" the woman asked him sternly. "Didn't you say you would be gone by now? I've rented this place to another tenant." Regaining her calm with an obvious effort, she told Andrej that there was a shortage of rooms in Windsor but he needn't worry, the room was his. Glaring at the former tenant, she left.

The man rose awkwardly from the bed, pulled his suitcase from underneath it, and started to collect his belongings. "I would have left before," he muttered, abashed. "But I haven't been well."

"I didn't mean to drive you out," Andrej said. "The woman told me the room was empty."

"I intended to move."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know. If I had money, I'd go back to the States. As it is, I'll probably stay in Windsor."

"Why are you moving then, if you intend to stay in Windsor?"

"I have to get out of here. I can't afford to pay the rent. I've been off work for a year." Andrej realized that the landlady had used him to throw the poor man out on the street. "If you have no place to go, you can stay here with me," Andrej said.

"I don't want to be in your way."

"I know," Andrej said. "I was in a similar situation once myself."

"You honestly wouldn't mind if I stayed here until tomorrow?" asked the young man.

"You don't have to feel so uneasy," Andrej said warmly. "Should I tell you how many times I was dependent on strangers to help me? Besides, I hope we won't be strangers much longer. My name is Andy Stritof." He decided to start using the English form of his name, which was much easier for Canadians to pronounce.

"I am John Hribar," the man introduced himself.

Andy told him about his life in British Columbia, about the Indians who rescued him when he tried to escape to the United States, and about the Italian cook who helped him overcome his mental struggle. In turn, John told him that he had worked in American mines since he was seventeen. When he was laid off, he moved to Canada, where he worked for a while at General Motors until he found himself among the unemployed again. In a year, he spent all his savings. "But you're not from the United States originally," said Andy. "Your accent sounds familiar."

"I'm from Yugoslavia. Actually, from the northern part, Slovenia."

"Then we are countrymen!" exclaimed Andy, switching to Slovenian. "Do you know where the village of Cerknica is? That's where I'm from. When did you come?"

"I left my homeland seven years ago," said John. "My father was killed in the First World War. My grandfather took care of me until I was seventeen. Then my uncle took me to his place in America. At first, it wasn't too bad. There were a lot of Slovenes in the mines with us. But what's going to happen to me now, I don't know."

"Don't worry," said Andy. "I'm not about to see a fellow countryman thrown out. You can stay here as long as you want. Tomorrow I'll get another mattress, so we can be a little more comfortable. With my savings we ought to survive through the summer and winter. Besides, one of us is sure to get a job this summer."

"I'd offer you some food, but there's none left," said John. "I can make you tea, though."

"Okay, you make tea, and I'll go and buy some bread and butter."

It was the simplest of suppers, but they both enjoyed it. The two men, who had been strangers two hours earlier, felt like old friends. As John was moving his belongings back under the bed after supper, a strange sound came out of a bag.

"What have you there?" asked Andy.

"An accordion.I used to play it when I was in a good mood. As a child, I watched my grandfather play his button-box accordion, and when he wasn't around, I practised it secretly. When I was leaving for America, he gave it to me. 'Take this,' he said. 'It might come in handy where you are going. There's no better cure for loneliness than the sweet tune of an old-fashioned button-box accordion.' I took it as a souvenir of my homeland."

Though Andy had spoken confidently of finding work, job hunting became a nightmare. Every morning long lines of young, healthy men waited in front of the factories to apply for jobs. Andy was not worried since he had enough to live on for the moment and enjoyed having some free time. Much of his time he spent at the library, where he was attracted to the art books. Sketching his tools in the forest had come as a small revelation to him. He knew that drawing was important to him, and now he was eager to know

how various artists had worked. At first he read and looked indiscriminately, simply absorbing ideas and images uncritically.

John stayed with Andy all winter. The food Andy supplied helped him regain some of his strength. He coughed often but blamed it on the cold winter. The old shack was falling apart. Using his own money for materials, Andy made some repairs and painted the walls. To amuse himself he also painted a mural on one wall of the room—a picture of Windsor Castle that he had found in a magazine. When he was finished, the entire wall looked like a big window with a magnificent view. This was Andy's first attempt to paint with colour, and he could sense its expressive potential. John praised his work, calling him "a real artist."

Now that he saw what he was capable of, Andy became even more excited about art. He knew though that his friend's praise was too generous and that he was still far from being a real artist. He didn't know what art was all about. He only knew that painting was fun and that his painting made the room much more pleasant to live in. In the following months many Slovenes whom John and Andy met visited the shack. They all admired the elaborate mural, and word about Andy's talent spread through the Slovene community, even reaching across the border.

In Detroit the Slovenes had well-established cultural activities, with their own social clubs, choirs, and a dramatic society. A special event was planned for the summer of 1928—the Slovenian opera company of Cleveland had been invited to perform in Detroit. Andy was asked to paint a backdrop for the stage, and since he was still without work, he was glad of a diversion from his monotonous life.

To Andy's pleasure and embarrassment, the president of the Slovenian club in Detroit received him with the honours usually reserved for the parish priest. He was served the best wine and *potica*, the rich walnut roll that concluded festive dinners in Slovenia, and was treated with deference. "Don't call me Mr. Stritof," he objected. "I'd feel much more comfortable if you would call me Andy. I'm pleased you have so much faith in my

work, but I'm no smarter than you. I just have a different talent, that's all."

For the next two weeks, Andy spent most of his days at the Slavic National Home, hanging canvas and painting. Club members dropped in every day to admire his work and bring him cigarettes and newspapers. A large group of Slovenes was expected to come from Cleveland for the performance on an organized bus trip. With barely controlled anticipation, Andy sent a postcard to Zofi, inviting her to join the group.

The stage set was better than he could have hoped, and his triumph would be complete if Zofi could see it. Surely she would come! What would this girl from his childhood be like now? When the bus from Cleveland pulled up on Sunday, Andy was there to meet it. A young woman in a pretty flowered—print dress got off and ran towards him. Zofi! She obviously knew him, but he hardly recognized her face beneath a big red hat decorated with artificial flowers. She hugged Andy and kissed him passionately on the lips. In front of so many! No Slovenian girl would behave so. Slovenian boys and girls did not kiss openly. Embarrassed, Andy took her inside the hall to escape the curious onlookers.

Finding herself at a loss for words after the initial burst of joyful chatter, Zofi lit a cigarette and twirled it nervously in her hand, the way prostitutes did in Cranbrook. Andy looked at her in disgust—a woman with a cigarette! This girl, whom he had imagined as a pure and delicate as a Slovenian flower, had the free and easy manner of a crass American woman. Despite their common language and childhood memories, she seemed to Andy a total stranger. After the show he avoided her, instead discussing politics and the workers' movement with his countrymen.

Andy admired the American Slovenes who had worked so hard to organize this cultural performance. His own part had been small, but he wanted to do more for his people. On the Canadian side of the border his countrymen were scattered and often lonely. Several Slovenes who had come over from Windsor for the day, seeing what a joint effort could do, decided on the spot to form their own club.

Andy was eager to get the club going right away. Should it be an independent group or part of a larger body? After talking the issues over with his friends, he suggested they form a chapter of the large American Slovenian National Benefit Society (SNPJ), a well-established organization, that could offer its members security in case of sickness or accident. In all other respects, the Canadian group would function as an independent club.

In the fall of 1928 Slovenes from Windsor officially formed their own branch of the SNPJ. Andy, who became the club's secretary, took his work seriously. "If we want to promote Slovenian culture, we ought to get some Slovenian books," he suggested at one of the meetings. "How can we teach the children about our culture if we don't educate ourselves first?" He wrote to the Ministry of Emigration in Ljubljana to have some suitable books sent. As soon as two boxes of books had arrived, they opened a library. Storage space though, turned out to be unnecessary, for all the books were immediately borrowed; at the next meeting books simply changed hands. These peasant people, who had read little at home, snatched eagerly at the volumes of poetry, novels, and essays as if they embodied their entire homeland.

Pregelj, who had played the organ in his native village of Begunje, organized a choir; the first, unofficial performance took place at his home at Christmas. On hearing the beautiful Slovenian carols once more the guests became nostalgic. In the spring they presented a concert at Lancaster Hall to a full house. The audience comprised not only the entire Slovenian community, but many Serbs and Croats as well.

Encouraged by the success of their choir, the Slovenes expanded their cultural activities. In an industrial part of the city they found an empty warehouse that they could rent cheaply. For the next few weeks, Andy and John spent most of their time cleaning and renovating the building, which, with the help of some other members, they transformed into Slovenian Hall. Besides a large hall with a simple stage, they also had a small room that served as a library, where they displayed the books of Cankar,

Prešeren, Gregorčič, Aškerc, and other Slovenian poets and novelists.

"Now that we have plenty of books and a hall with a stage, we could put on a play," Andy suggested to the members.

"A play?" asked one of the men. "But we have no experience. Except for some dressing up for Hallowe'en, and some comedy sketches at peasant weddings, none of us has done any acting before. Where do you plan to get Slovenian actors?"

"Don't underestimate yourself," Andy answered. "You'll never know what you can do till you try. I know you'd make a good actor, and your wife wouldn't be bad, either. We'll teach ourselves how to perform." At that very meeting, the Slovene Drama Society was formed. As the society's secretary, Andy was responsible for finding a suitable play. Although their Slovenian library contained many comedies that Andy knew would be popular, he felt that their old-country nostalgia and sentimentality would be out of place during this trying time of unrest among workers and intolerable working conditions.

His eye was caught by the drama *Paris Commune*[1], for it dealt with poverty, oppression, and class, which were relevant issues in Windsor and across the country. Unemployed workers and their families were starving, and those working for shamefully low wages were not much better off.

After a lengthy debate, the next meeting of the Slovene Drama Society chose *Paris Commune* over the comedy *This Happy Day* by Anton Tomaž Linhart. Despite some good-natured grumbling from those who didn't get the lead parts, all the amateur actors were pleased with Andy's casting. To people who had never seen a live performance before, it was thrilling to be chosen for any part.

The women members of the group offered to make costumes if someone could give them an idea of what they were supposed to look like. Andy volunteered to make sketches and help the

1. Slovenian author unknown. C.K.

seamstresses. The old worn-out clothes for the proletariat at the barricades were easier to find than the elaborate costumes of the French bourgeoisie, but Andy traded several of his paintings to a rich factory owner in exchange for some old brocade curtains, and the local theatre agreed to lend him a few white wigs. Props and scenery, however, were another matter. Andy bought much of these out of the last of his savings. He was still looking for a job and was becoming desperate when a Polish acquaintance told him he knew someone who could find him a job.

"Our Polish priest has connections with the manager of General Motors," he told Andy. "For the right donation to the church, he'll get you a job."

"I'm not a slave to sell myself like that!" protested Andy. "That's totally corrupt. Without work you don't have money, and without money you can't get a job. And the distribution of jobs is neatly managed by God's representative on earth: the more you pay him, the better the job you get! Even if I had the money, I wouldn't have anything to do with a scheme like that."

The next day Andy received a letter from Shopka, along with the repayment of his loan. The money came like a gift from heaven, for by this time Andy had given up hope of ever seeing it again. His faith in human beings was reaffirmed by Shopka's honesty.

With renewed determination he threw himself into the production of *Paris Commune*. He made sure that the play was well publicized among Serbs, Croats, and other Slavic immigrants and the play was sold out. The performance went off without a hitch but the next day, a headline in the *Border City Star* read: "Yugoslav Immigrants Spreading Radical Spirit Among Workers." This kind of publicity made the Serbs and Croats shrink from their association with the Slovenes, and they became rare visitors at the Slovenian Hall.

The immigrant groups were also being driven apart by nationalism, as the political situation in Yugoslavia deteriorated. On June 20, 1928, a government supporter opened fire at the opposition during the debate in the *Skupstina*, killing Stjepan Radic

and two other members of the Croat Peasant Party. After that incident, relations became strained between Serbian and Croatian immigrants, who took sides with their countrymen back home. Even among Slovenes the communal spirit began to weaken. They were peace-loving people who avoided political conflict. Slovenian men even refused to join the strikers on the picket lines for fear of trouble.

Meanwhile economic conditions in Windsor continued to deteriorate. After months of unemployment, people began to lose hope and drift away to the mining regions of northern Ontario. Some of the men had been waiting for construction to start on the proposed tunnel under the river to Detroit, indefinitely postponed by the onset of the Depression.

As Slovenes left for places like Sudbury, the membership of the Slovenian Club declined steadily, until it finally closed its doors. The club had been Andy's whole life, and now that it was gone he felt all the tragedy of unemployment. The money Shopka had sent him was long gone. While his room-mate, John Hribar, had had a job he had been paying all the expenses for both of them; now John was again out of work.

On hearing that Chrysler was hiring, Andy went to the factory early in the morning to make sure he would be the first in line. Somehow he managed to hold on to the steel fence so that he wouldn't be pushed aside by the crowd. As it turned out, no new men were hired that day. Perhaps it had been false news, or perhaps they were only hiring people with connections. A representative of the company came out and shouted through the fence, "Sorry, guys, there's no work here!"

"When can we come back?" Andy asked, who was standing right opposite him. "When will you be hiring again?"

The man looked at Andy's pale face and strong, muscular body and asked him quietly, "Where did you work last?" Andy had his answer ready. He had decided that he couldn't afford to admit how long he had been out of work.

"At Ray Brothers in Toronto," he said.

"What did you do there?"

"Painting."

"Come back in the afternoon and we'll talk some more." From hundreds of men he had been singled out to be asked a question, to be offered hope. If he could only convince the man of his abilities! In the afternoon there was no line in front of the gate and no guard to keep the angry crowd away. "I'm sorry. The job I had in mind for you this morning is gone," the personnel manager told Andy." Andy was visibly disappointed, especially after his hopes had been raised in the morning. "However, I have another job for you on the assembly line." Andy was overjoyed to have finally been given a break. For a few months, life settled into a normal routine; he worked hard, received a regular pay cheque, and didn't have to worry about the rent.

His happiness didn't last long. When, after a few months Chrysler started mass layoffs, Andy was among the first to go. By now Canada was in the grip of the Depression, with its bread lines, soup kitchens, and shanty towns. Across the country hundreds of thousands of workers had lost their jobs, and those who still had jobs had to accept drastic pay cuts. In those days welfare was minimal and there was no unemployment insurance, no minimum wage laws, and few legal rights for workers.

Andy's only place of refuge in those bleak days was the library, where he went every day. Though he still read art books, he also felt a need to understand what was happening to him and to those around him, so he read newspapers, books on politics, and the pamphlets that he found lying about. Like many others, his political awakening came through reflection on the bitter suffering of the people. He began to realize that the roots of his suffering lay in the whole social and economic system.

In those days, the group most active in organizing workers and leading the fight for better working conditions was the Communist Party, whose ranks contained people of many political stripes who set aside their ideological differences and rallied to the workers' cause. Conditions for the poor were unbearable: people were starving and something had to be done. One day a young man approached Andy in the library: "I can see you are reading about

the conditions of Canadian workers. Would you be willing to do something to improve the situation?" Andy stared the stranger, unable to say a word. "Don't be startled," the man said. "You're Andy Stritof, the Slovenian artist. I met you a year ago at the performance of *Paris Commune*. I am Binder, the secretary of the Communist Party of Windsor."

"I'm not really an artist," Andy answered modestly, "but if there is anything I can do, I would be happy to help you."

"We're organizing the May Day demonstrations, and we need someone to do the signs and placards. There's a meeting at the Ukrainian National Home next Tuesday. Come and join us if you are interested in helping." Andy gladly offered his talent to help destitute workers. On Tuesday, he attended the meeting. The planning committee for the large workers' protest consisted of three men: Ritz, Binder, and Reinhard. Binder, a small, chubby Jew, was responsible for the speeches; Ritz, an elderly Ukrainian immigrant, promised to obtain the necessary licences; Andy volunteered to do the art work. During the last week in April they met daily to plan every detail. The day before the planned demonstration, Ritz came to the meeting in a rage.

"Boys, we're in trouble," he said. "We didn't get the permit. The mayor won't give us a permit to hold a rally."

"They won't stop us," said Binder decisively. "If they don't want to give us a permit, we'll hold an illegal rally. We have great support from the workers. There won't be enough room in jail for all the protesters."

"We'll be the ones to get arrested," said Ritz, calm now and smiling, as if getting arrested were as normal as going shopping. But Andy, who had never intentionally broken the law before, was confused and anxious. Could an illegal act be morally justified? Could he stand being imprisoned? "We ought to have a good supper tonight. Tomorrow might be a long day," said Ritz.

"Especially if the authorities stretch it a little," added Binder.

When they emptied their pockets, they had a total of ten cents, hardly enough to satisfy the hunger of three grown men. They bought what they could—a loaf of bread and some butter. "This is

our last supper together," said Andy, who was the most worried about the demonstrations. He expected no mercy for the leaders of the workers' movement. He had read section 98 of the Criminal Code which provided for sweeping powers of arrest, imprisonment, or deportation of anyone taking part in a public protest.

Early in the morning of May 1, 1930, a crowd began to gather at the park, preparing to march to City Hall; by ten o'clock they were ready to start. Ritz was at the head of the marchers; behind him walked an elderly Finnish woman carrying a sign, followed by Binder and Andy and then the rest of the crowd. Over two thousand dissatisfied workers and their relatives joined the protest march.

Overcome with a sense of solidarity, Andy forgot his fears. He was remembering the procession in his native village, where despairing peasants had gathered to ask God to grant them good weather. Today's procession reminded him of that old religious ritual, even to the old woman carrying a wooden cross at the head of the procession. Today, however, there was no Christ hanging on the cross, but rather the huge caricature Andy had drawn of a fat capitalist pressing a man and woman to the ground with heavy feet. Under the picture, a slogan proclaimed, "Down with capitalistic imperialism."

At this procession, there were no old women reciting the rosary, but young men and women shouting, "Capitalists, let us live! Capitalists, have mercy on our children! Capitalists, we are people, too! Capitalists, give us an honest day's pay for an honest day's work!" Daydreaming, Andy was transported back to the procession he had led as a ten-year old altar boy. The pleas directed to the capitalists seemed as far-fetched as the prayers of the faithful peasants to almighty God in the distant heavens.

If it hadn't been for that unfortunate procession so long ago, thought Andy, he might have been a priest today, working in some parish in Slovenia. He would not need to beg for work in a foreign land. He would have his own housekeeper to cook and clean for him. And even if he had decided to emigrate, he would have a

much better life in Canada as a priest. He would live comfortably like that Polish priest who sold jobs to desperate workers.

Suddenly, Andy was jolted from his daydream by general confusion and panic. From all sides, the marchers were surrounded by police, who were dispersing the illegal protesters with sticks and water. The old woman in front of Andy fell to the ground, struck by a policeman with his billy club. Andy grabbed the policeman with one hand and with the other hand raised the woman's sign. "No! You are not going to destroy our symbols," he shouted.

Before he knew it, Andy found himself in handcuffs, shoved into a police wagon; there he was greeted by Binder and Ritz, who had been arrested a few moments earlier. Many other protesters were also arrested. Hungry and thirsty, they waited in the crowded police station while the authorities decided what to do with them. They were kept overnight and would have been kept longer had it not been for the support of their comrades. Bail had been set at a total of twelve thousand dollars; somehow the workers and their leaders managed to raise this enormous sum.

Released on bail, the prisoners were swept off to Veterans' Hall, where they were given a hero's welcome by sympathizers with the workers' movement. The most fervent orator was the lawyer, who had the manner of a priest leading his flock; in fact, he had been an Anglican priest but had abandoned his pulpit to become a lawyer. He offered free legal advice to workers struggling for justice.

But when Binder's and Ritz's cases came before the court a few weeks later, the lawyer could do nothing for them: they were found guilty and jailed for six months. Andy dreaded prison and feared he might be deported. He had done nothing wrong, he thought; why should he be punished? Yet it would be useless to try to convince the judge that he was not even a member of the Communist Party. The fact that he had been at the head of a demonstration led by Communists would be evidence enough. After agonized soul-searching, Andy decided at the last moment to desert his friends.

When the judge asked him if he had anything to say in his defence, he lied. "I was on my way the store when this huge crowd of people swept me from the sidewalk. I had to run in front of them to avoid being trampled." The arresting officer scowled, but as he could not remember exactly when he had first seen Andy, the case was dismissed. This incident left Andy more cautious and less trusting. Wanting to avoid any chance of running afoul of the law, he did not visit Binder or Ritz in jail, and even after they were released, he avoided them, partly out of shame and partly out of fear.

One summer evening, a little over a year after the ill-fated march, Ritz came to visit Andy, distraught. "Andy, I need your help," he said. "Binder needs our help now more than ever."

"Is he in jail again?"

"No. This is a worse tragedy. His two daughters have drowned, and he is utterly beside himself. The rabbi will have nothing to do with the funeral. He doesn't want to be associated with the secretary of the Communist Party. 'Let the communists bury their own,' he says. Andy, we have to help Binder in his sorrow."

"But what can I do?" asked Andy.

"Can you think of some suitable decoration for the funeral home?"

Andy wanted to do what he could to comfort his fellow human being in his grief. How did communists bury their own? What rituals would help an atheist in the face of death? Andy had no time to find out: he had to improvise. He bought red linen to cover the caskets and gold paint; then he asked Ritz to inquire among his Jewish friends how to say "last farewell" in Hebrew. He then wrote those words on the cloth in Hebrew and English; in the middle of the cloth he painted a hammer and sickle. After working on this all night, he set off for the funeral home early the next morning, the red linen in a paper bag. But before he reached his destination, he was stopped by two policemen.

"Where are you going at this early hour?" they asked him.

"What kind of a freedom is this?" asked Andy. "Am I forbidden to walk the streets of Windsor?"

"Don't be so smart!" one of the policemen warned him. "Let's see what you have in that bag."

"It's my business what I carry in my bag. Don't worry, whatever it is, it isn't stolen." The officer was infuriated by Andy's defiance.

"Hand me your bag!" he demanded. When Andy did not comply, he yanked it out of his hand. "I knew you were a communist, but I couldn't prove it before. You got away last year, but this time I got you."

"I am not a communist and you have no right to accuse me of that. You have no proof."

"What's this? Isn't this clear proof?" the officer said.

"No, this is just a picture. I am an artist and I can paint whatever I like."

"All right, into the car. We're going to the station." The officers showed the police commissioner Andy's red linen with the symbol of the hammer and sickle. "This man was walking on the streets of Windsor with this communist propaganda, in contravention of section 98 of the Criminal Code."

"I did nothing against the law," Andy protested. "I had this linen tucked away in the bag. Besides, according to section 98, I could walk all the way to Ottawa wrapped in this linen. I could even take a friend with me, as along as there were only two of us."

The commissioner nodded to the officer, who threw the linen on the floor and screamed at Andy to pick it up and get lost. When Andy refused the officer was forced to pick it up for him.

"They're hunting communists as they hunted witches in the Middle Ages," Andy told Binder and Ritz when he tried to explain what had happened.

They covered the caskets with the red linen and decorated the room with flowers and candles. In the evening, Binder's friends and acquaintances gathered to offer their condolences. Instead of prayers, children recited poems about the suffering of workers' children, and a workers' choir sang a few touching songs. Even those who had come just out of curiosity were moved to tears.

In Search of Knowledge

Andy's friend and room-mate, John Hribar, who had been sick for some time, seemed to be getting worse. He was always tired, coughed frequently, and complained of chest pains. Andy had long suspected that John's illness was more than a cold or flu; his fears were confirmed when John began to cough blood. He took him to a doctor immediately, who diagnosed an advanced case of TB. Though holding out no hope for John's recovery, the doctor recommended that he be hospitalized since the government paid the medical expenses in such cases. Even with the best care at the sanatorium, however, John died within a month.

At first, Andy accepted his friend's death with quiet resignation. He took responsibility for writing to inform John's relatives back home, and his Slovenian friends helped him arrange the funeral. But in a few days he became depressed and found his thoughts constantly revolving around death. A week later he received a visit from a community health nurse who had come to ask him to have a medical examination, since tuberculosis is contagious. When the nurse admired the mural in Andy's shack, he told her he had painted it himself.

"Are you an artist?"

"I'm a painter. I'm not much of an artist." But when Andy went to see the sanatorium doctor, the nurse introduced him as an artist.

"We have to take good care of artists," said the doctor, smiling. "Canada needs good and honest artists. Your lungs are fine, but you are mentally exhausted. In this state of mind, and under your living conditions, you could easily develop tuberculosis. We can keep you here for a while, as a protective measure."

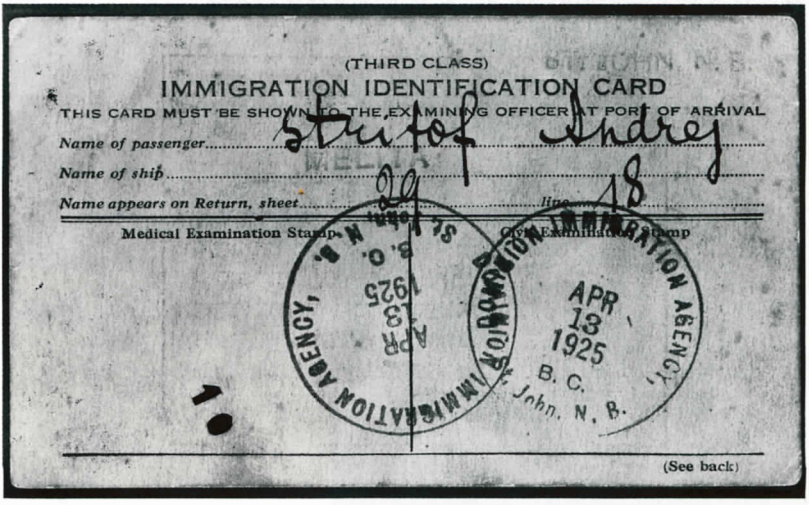
Andy was glad to stay if he didn't have to pay. In the sanatorium Andy finally realized how tired he had become of living. It seemed that his life ran in a vicious circle. Whenever he tried to stand on his own feet, he would once more slip into a helpless state. His time in hospital seemed like a fairy tale. He was given three big meals a day and was made much of by the nurses and the doctor.

He used this time in the sanatorium to think about his life and where his creative talent was leading him. In a magazine he happened to read about the Mexican artist Diego Rivera, who was commissioned by Rockefeller to paint a mural representing modern civilization at Rockefeller Plaza in New York. Not liking the political content of the work, Rockefeller refused to accept it. Since the contract did not specify the nature of the image, a court ordered the magnate to pay the artist's fee. To the great indignation of many American intellectuals, Rockefeller ordered the work destroyed. In defiance, Rivera recreated his masterpiece in another New York location.

Andy was unable to forget this story of a humble Mexican artist who had outwitted one of the richest men in America. He realized that true art is more than just a design or an image, that it comes from the spirit: it is the free expression of the artist's feelings and thoughts. Yet a person is not only an individual but a member of society, mused Andy. Should the artist not be searching for better relations within society? Can art serve as a kind of blueprint for solving social problems?

This was a new dimension of art for Andy, who had until now been teaching himself to draw from art manuals he borrowed from the library. From those books, Andy had learned only how to mix colours, divide space, and draw lines. It had never crossed his mind before that he could also learn about art from books on history, philosophy, and theology. Now he felt that he was caught up in something much bigger than his talent for painting, as if some invisible force were guiding his life down to the smallest detail. He was both stirred and confused when he came upon an article about a book written by an Anglican bishop, called *How to*

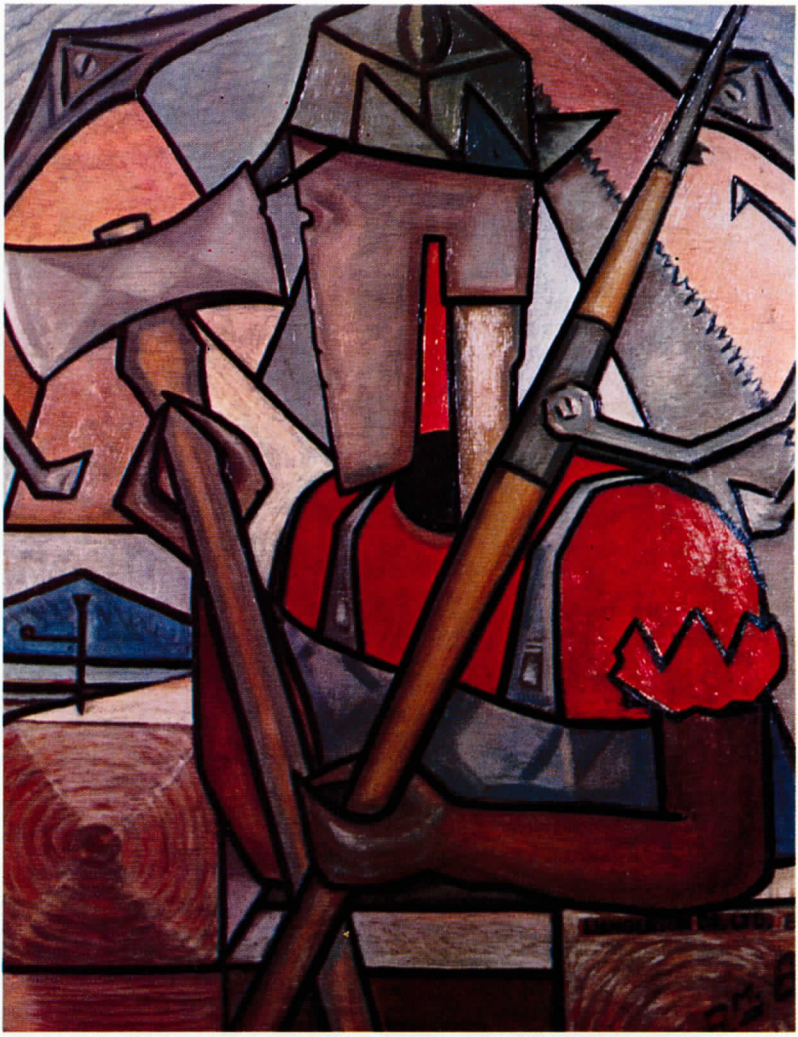
The original Stritof farmstead in Cajnarji, Slovenia.



Landing card issued to Stritof, Andrej and stamped at St. John, New Brunswick, 13 April 1925.

Stritof with Mrs. Kostanjevec and her daughter, 1933.

Stritof and his portrait of the Slovenian writer, Ivan Cankar, 1938.



The Lumberjack, Andrej Stritof.

Andy Stritof in front of his paint store, with a friend in Schumacher, Ontario, 1940.

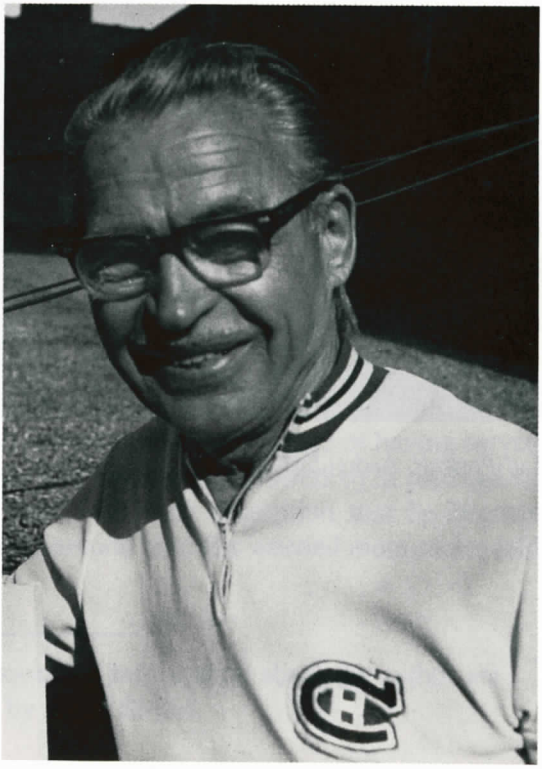
Andy Stritof, Schumacher, Ontario, 1940.

Miners, Andrej Stritof.

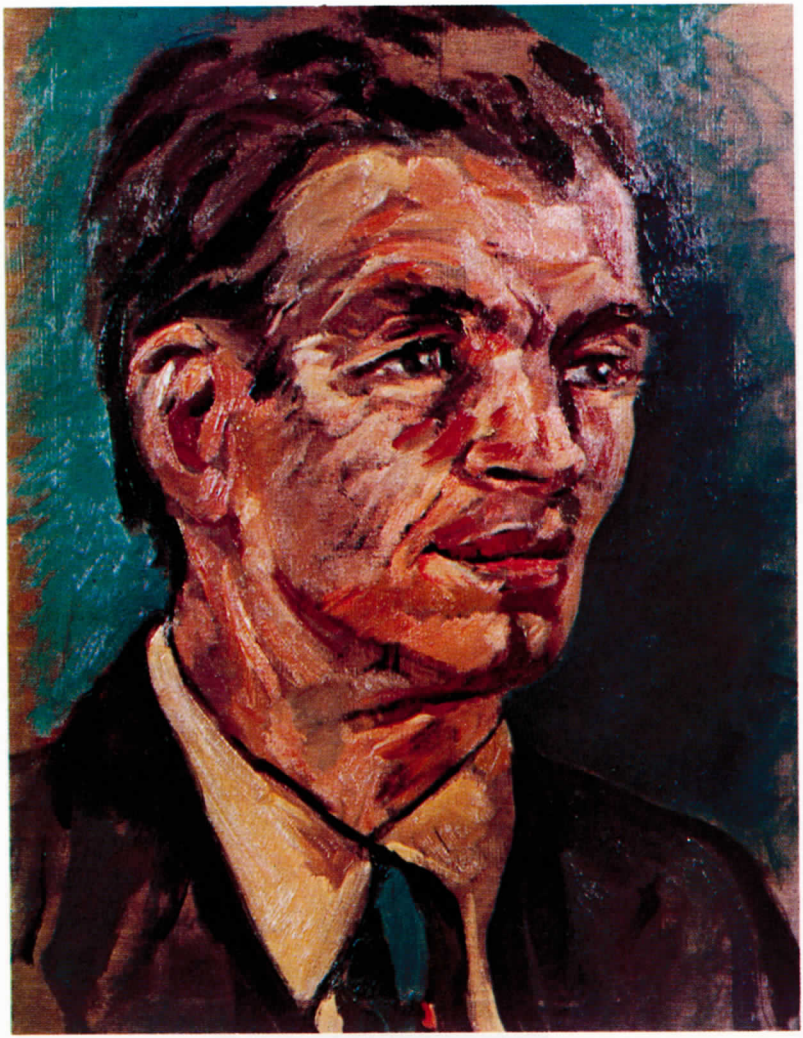
Musicians, Andrej Stritof.

Arthur Chrystal and Andy Stritof, the Rock Gardens, Hamilton, Ontario, 1952.

Andy Stritof and his brother Franc, Slovenia, 1970.



Andy Stritof, 1970.



Self-Portrait, Andrej Stritof.

Abolish God from Heaven and Capitalists from Earth.[2] The words sounded strange but right. For the first time in years Andy felt compelled to examine his own religious feelings. The simple faith of his childhood had wavered as he grew up. Having been forced to give up the tradition of Sunday church-going in the Canadian wilderness, he had fallen out of the habit and after a time had come to regard Sunday as an ordinary day, especially when he was unemployed and all days seemed the same. But what was it that had turned him away from organized religion?

Though was part of his religious upbringing that he could not accept, he knew that, in his heart, he did believe in God. In fact, he respected most of the church's teaching, except for the claim that God dwelt somewhere up high in the heavens, looking down on His people. Ever since learning that the earth is round, he had doubted this religious dogma. He decided to write a letter to the author, Bishop Brown, asking to borrow a copy of his latest book. In his letter, he told the bishop he was confused about religion, especially when he saw how some of God's representatives on earth behaved. And how could there be so many different religions, if there is only one God?

Bishop Brown wrote back warmly, touched by the young man's ingenuous search for truth, and offered to send him copies of both his own books and other books that he might find useful in his quest. He told Andy that his book had been attacked so harshly both by business and by his own colleagues that he began to fear he had sown his seeds on stony ground. He encouraged Andy to pursue his vocation as an artist, while warning him that art demands the highest spiritual freedom, self-denial, and self-sacrifice and offers no reward but the knowledge of having served the one and true God. The letter was followed by a package of books, which Andy read with such absorption that he became almost blind to the world around him. His worried room-mates told

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2. The title of this book and information about the author are indicated as recalled by Andy Stritof.

the doctor that he was reading half the night. "Andy, are you really a communist?" the doctor asked him bluntly.

"No, I have never been a communist."

"I heard you were reading some communist books."

"I'm reading the books Bishop Brown sent me," explained Andy.

"Did he send you *Das Kapital*?"

"Not just *Das Kapital*. You see, I am reading about God as well. I would like to get to know Him better. I would like to be close to Him again. I feel I have been so far away from Him lately." The doctor was disturbed by Andy's feverish earnestness, his rapid shifts of direction, and the urgency with which he discussed abstract problems. Uneasy about Andy's mental health, he decided to keep him in hospital a few more weeks.

Weeks went by while Andy lived entirely in his thoughts. How could God be so unjust as to allow people who wanted to work to starve, while others who had never worked in their lives were rolling in money? If he expressed these thoughts aloud, he was regarded as communist and was avoided by other patients. He felt isolated in the midst of people. It was his friend, the nurse who had first brought him in, who understood his mental struggles and offered sensible advice.

"Andy, nobody can make decisions for you," she said. "You have to determine your own life. Other men your age are already married and have families, while you are too busy thinking about yourself and your art. Your art will never make you rich. You know how artists have lived in the past and how they are struggling now. There is no reason to believe that things will ever improve for true artists. If you still want this kind of life, you'll have to accept the hardship that comes with it. It will be a struggle, but all of life is a struggle. The end of struggle is the end of life. Weak people end their lives because they are afraid to live. But you are young and strong and smart. You have your whole life in front of you. Don't waste it fighting yourself.

"You know, you can never resolve all the great questions, no matter how much you think about them. You should learn to enjoy

life, so that you'll have no regrets in your old age, if you ever reach old age. Stop trying to change the whole world; you can't do it. Accept life with all its joys and sorrows."

Andy was abashed that this kind woman could see so far into his heart, at the same time he was grateful for her affection and frankness. Yes, he thought, the doors to his true freedom would open when he stopped fighting himself. He had to embrace the force that was driving him towards creativity and strive to achieve his purpose on this planet. Slowly Andy emerged from his introspective daze. He was drawn farther out of himself when he met a pretty Ukrainian girl who was visiting her father. For days he watched Tania, too shy to speak, until one day she broke the ice by offering him a big, red apple. He started to joke with her, and they soon became good friends. Her father did not object: on the contrary, he kept telling Tania what a fine boy Andy was.

Before long the friendship flowered into a romance. Andy loved Tania, but, still lacking confidence, he had trouble expressing his love. He was willing to let her lead him, but when she suggested that they be married once he was released from hospital, he drew back. "How do you expect us to live?" he demanded. "I have no place to stay, no savings, no means to support us."

"We'll live on relief."

"What kind of life is that? I've seen how the wives and children of unemployed workers suffer; I would rather never marry than see my children starving. I can't bring children into this world under such conditions." Andy had to recover and put his life in order before he could talk about commitments. With this strong incentive, he managed to convince himself and his doctor that he was cured and able to cope with life outside the hospital.

As soon as Andy was released from the sanatorium, he set out to find work, which in Windsor in 1934 was still scarce. By chance he discovered that the owner of the tavern at the Dominion Golf Park, where he had stopped to look for a job, was a rich Serb. Andy told him that he was actually a painter, a struggling artist, willing to take any job to support himself. "How about painting some pictures on the walls of my tavern?" the man asked. Andy

jumped at the chance, especially since the owner offered him free room and board while he worked. For the next few weeks he worked hard on the tavern murals. The picture of an ancient monastery turned out much better than Andy had expected.

The tavern was frequented by a rich clientele who, attracted by Andy's painting, offered him more commissions. For the most part he was asked to paint landscapes, pictures of people's home towns. In these large oil paintings, he showed a fine sense of colour. But his goal now was his own survival and for the time being painting was his job. Though he was not eager to do merely decorative art work, he needed money so badly that he was willing to set aside his principles. With his earnings he was able to afford a few small luxuries, including a decent room in a boarding house and a movie once a week. Yet he still did not feel financially secure enough to contemplate marriage.

Andy had been seeing less and less of Tania when one day he learned that she had married an Italian. How could she have married someone else? He knew Tania didn't really love her husband, but had settled for second best. He supposed she had grown tired of waiting for something that might never happen. He remembered with regret that she had wanted to marry him months before. She had wanted to put her faith in love and in life. She had been willing to share his poverty and his difficulties. Should he have married her and let everything else work itself out? No, Andy wanted to give her more. He wanted to give her his undivided love and financial security. He would rather deny himself her love until he achieved financial stability. But perhaps that could never happen. Perhaps Tania had made the right decision.

He tried to comfort himself with the thought that a marriage to Tania would never have succeeded. His only true love was art. She excited him with dreams of beauty. When he was depressed, tired, humiliated, she comforted like a mother. To this silent companion Andy entrusted all his sorrows. She understood him; she felt his pain. He threw himself into his painting, expressing his sorrow and frustrated love in images, and received some comfort. But art did not offer him the lasting inner peace he craved.

Among Miners in Northern Ontario

Life in Windsor became unbearable for Andy: there were too many painful memories. He decided to move to another town where he could start afresh. Having heard that Sudbury had a growing Slovenian community and that its economy was healthier than Windsor's, he moved there in the spring of 1935. On his arrival, he called on Frank Kostanjevec, a countryman who had moved to Sudbury two years before, to inquire about rooming houses. He was greeted enthusiastically by his old friend.

"Why don't you stay with us, Uncle Andy?" asked Tony, Frank's sixteen-year-old son, who remembered Andy from the days of the Slovenian Club.

"Be quiet!" said his father. "You know Andy wouldn't want to stay with us."

"If you have an empty room, I'd be more than happy to stay with you. You can trust me. I'll behave properly and won't bring girls into the house."

"It's not that," said Kostanjevec. "We still have one room empty, if you'd like to stay with us."

As soon as Andy settled into his friend's rooming house, the news about his artistic talent began to spread throughout the mining town. Miners from various countries who were eagerly building halls and community centres, wanted decorations that would express their pride in their culture and enhance prestige of their buildings. Andy was hard-pressed to accept all the commissions he was offered for murals and stage decorations. Although he was not eager to paint postcard pictures of European landmarks on walls, at the same time he realized that those pictures had great sentimental value for the immigrants. To satisfy his inner need, he also did other paintings, which he was reluctant to show to

anybody. His favourite was a portrait of a dark, greyish male figure looking down with almost closed eyes, embracing a bright, blonde young woman whose optimistic gaze is turned upwards.

There were four other boarders at Kostanjevec's boarding house, all single men living quite comfortably on their miner's wages and spending their money mostly on liquor and women. They all flirted with Kostanjevec's pretty seventeen-year-old daughter Mary, who blithely ignored them. These men became jealous of Andy, who seemed to be as much of a favourite with the girl as with her father. They teased him for giving her a portrait he had painted of the great Slovenian novelist Ivan Cankar. Knowing how much she enjoyed Cankar's short stories, he had painted a colour portrait from a black and white photo in one of Cankar's books.

At first Andy shrugged off the boarders' taunts as a joke. The girl just had a teenager's crush on him, he thought. As for himself, he enjoyed her friendship but wanted nothing to do with romance. Gradually he realized how much she was suffering from unrequited love. She was surrounded by men leering at her, while the one she had chosen did not return her love. "My canary died last night," Mary told Andy one morning.

"I'm sorry," he said, knowing she had adored the cheerful little bird.

"Doesn't he remind you of us? Aren't we like two caged birds, unable to sing together?"

"Your bird died, but you're still alive. There's a whole life ahead of you to enjoy."

"I know you don't love me, because you think I am too young for you."

"That's not the reason. You wouldn't understand if I told you why I can't love you. I don't even know myself why I can't fall in love with you."

"Things would be different if we got married. Away from all the distraction, we would get used to each other and learn to love each other," she said.

"As the old saying goes, marriage is an iron cage," Andy interrupted her. "I need freedom. I am sorry I can't love you in that way. It would be nice if I could. I can't love anyone. My only mistress is art." He expected her to laugh, but she didn't; two tears trickled down her cheeks.

"I really love you," she said. "And I want you to be happy. I want you to be happy in whatever you do." That evening Andy told his landlord he was moving on. A deathly silence filled the room. Then the old man whispered, "I thought this story would have a different ending."

Andy's first plan was to move to Kirkland Lake. In 1936 there were some five hundred Slovenes living in the area; they were the largest and most active Slovenian community in Canada. As early as 1933 they had founded their own benefit society, which offered its members insurance in case of illness and death. But at the suggestion of a friend, Andy decided instead to go to Schumacher, a small mining town just outside Timmins, not far from Kirkland Lake. Though there was not much interest there in Andy's art, he was able to get work as a house painter. There were a number of Yugoslavs there, mostly Serbs and Croats, but Andy avoided them, not wanting to become embroiled in nationalist disputes.

Most of his free time he spent in a small grocery store in the centre of town. The owner was a friendly and cheerful Bulgarian with a wooden leg. As well as buying ordinary merchandise, which was displayed in the front room of the house, trusted customers could buy beer and other drinks in the kitchen while listening to the radio, at that time not a common possession. Andy knew bootlegging was illegal, but he also knew that the man's legitimate business would hardly support his family. So he would sit in the homey atmosphere of the kitchen and buy a beer or two for the chance to listen to the radio.

A few days before Christmas, 1936, Andy was about to enter the store when he heard loud cries: "Fire! Help! Please help my child!" Realizing that the owner, with his wooden leg, was helpless, Andy ordered him to get out, dashed through the flames into the kitchen, and grabbed the little boy. By this time the frame

house was burning like a torch. There was no time to look for the doors; holding the child, Andy jumped through the storefront window.

Only when he was outside did Andy realize what he had done. The burst of strength he had summoned to save the boy disappeared, leaving him trembling and appalled at the thought of what might have happened. He was standing on the sidewalk, his clothes torn and covered with blood; he had cut his leg on the broken glass. The neighbours, busy helping the family, did not notice Andy quietly walking away to find a store where he could buy some bandages. When he found one, the salesgirl suggested he see a doctor and told him there was one living above the store.

"What a Christmas present!" the doctor said after bandaging Andy's leg.

"Yes! I saved a child's life. I'm sorry I couldn't do more. The house burned to the ground." But the doctor was less interested in hearing about the fire than in finding out whether Andy had enough money to cover the medical bill. Andy was bewildered by the man's callousness whereas Andy had risked his life, the doctor would not give a few minutes of his time.

When winter came there was little steady work in town except in the mine. But Andy was convinced that John Hribar's fatal illness had been caused by working in the mine. Though Andy did not demand much from life, he did want to stay healthy.

In the spring of 1937, he began his own house-painting business in Schumacher; now he was his own boss, the owner of Sun Paint. He was the most versatile painter in town, painting walls, floors, and theatre stages; he even painted gold initials on neckties for miners who wanted a status symbol. During the summer, when there was a great demand for house painting, he hired two painters. In the winter, when business was slow, he worked on his paintings. This schedule went well for the next two years.

Andy was no longer reluctant to do decorative artwork, which was how he thought of all the little European villages and houses he was asked him to paint. He was surprised by how sentimental

the immigrants were about their native villages. The best present a man could buy for a homesick wife was a picture of her birthplace. With his house-painting business and his painting, Andy was earning more than enough to get by; in fact he was even able to afford a radio and an old Pontiac, which made him something of a celebrity among his friends.

With a Slovenian friend, he often drove to Timmins to visit the Papez family, recently arrived from Yugoslavia. Andy was interested in hearing news from his homeland, while his friend was more attracted to their two lovely daughters. Andy understood the homesickness of those girls, who often complained they would never get used to living in Canada. "Our classmates make fun of us because we don't speak English. The other girls get together at lunch and talk and we're all alone. We'll never learn how to speak properly. Even if we remember the words, we can't pronounce them correctly. We want to go home. Everything is so different here. At home people are friendly and polite."

Andy could find few words to comfort them, but he brought them some Slovenian books and he assured them that they would get used to this country. With the passing of time, the girls had idealized their living conditions in Yugoslavia, forgetting the extreme poverty that had forced their family to emigrate. Finally their parents agreed that it would be best to go back. On Palm Sunday, 1941, the girls told Andy that they would soon be leaving for their homeland. "Why would you want to return to Yugoslavia now?" Andy asked. "War could break out any time."

"Just because other European countries are at war, that doesn't mean there'll be war in Yugoslavia."

"Everything is pointing that way. The Slovenian writer Louis Adamic from America recently visited Yugoslavia, and he said everybody there was preparing for war."

"That's only political propaganda," the girls insisted.

"Believe me, it won't be long before Hitler attacks Yugoslavia. The country is too important strategically for him to ignore." When Andy visited the family the next day, it was as if there had been a death in the house.

"Did you hear that Hitler's forces marched into Yugoslavia yesterday?" asked Mr. Papez. The girls did not feel like talking. They tried to keep busy knitting, but they could not hide their feelings. All those long winter months they had stubbornly clung to the belief that their homeland would be spared. Now they were forced to accept the truth. The room was filled with silence. Everyone's thoughts were of the homeland. What did the future hold? What would happen to their relatives?

THE WAR YEARS

With the outbreak of war, everything changed. The streets were full of young men in uniform, about to leave for the battlefields of Europe out of patriotism, to fight Nazism, or simply to get off relief and have money to send home to their wives and children. Meanwhile, Canadian industry, especially the war industry, began to thrive.

In spite of the Depression, many Slovenian miners had managed to save enough to start a new life somewhere else, very often by buying a fruit farm in the Niagara Peninsula. Andy, who at thirty-seven was still single, had neither the desire nor the money to buy a farm. Yet, with most of his friends gone, he too wanted to move on. He chose to go to Hamilton, where after an unsuccessful search for work, he settled for occasional painting jobs for factory owners. When he wasn't working, he spent most of his time in the public library, anxiously following the war news in the newspapers. The news from Yugoslavia was always distressing. He wanted to do something for his war-torn homeland, yet he felt helpless.

And now he was tormented by thoughts of his mother and brother. He felt guilty for all the years he had shut them out of his life. From the depths of his heart surged up the love that he had masked with hatred and injured pride. What was happening to them now? At a time like this he wanted to be with them, to forget all old quarrels. He was ashamed of his selfishness. Instead of understanding his mother, he had betrayed her love. How could he now atone for this sin? How could he make up for all those long years when his injured pride had stopped him from writing to her? He felt now that there could be no excuse: he should have stood by his mother in her trials. Now that she was faced with an even greater crisis, he felt he had no right to shed tears for her suffering.

He was being driven to despair by his self-hatred and frustrated love.

He wrote to her at the last known address and then waited anxiously for an answer; none came. Was she punishing him? He felt unworthy of her forgiveness but hoped nevertheless that she would let him know how she and Franc were doing. If only a postcard with her handwriting would come! Frantic now, Andy wrote to his other relatives in Slovenia, but there was no word of his mother and his brother. Finally his aunt informed him that his mother was living somewhere in Ljubljana, which was at the time occupied by Italian forces and surrounded by barbed wire, isolated from the rest of the country.

Andy could do nothing for his mother and brother; yet he felt he must do something if he was to stay sane. He began to collect food and old clothes, which he sent to his distant relatives. At least this made him feel closer to his suffering country. He could only hope that some good people would help his mother.

As the war dragged on, Andy continued to haunt the library, reading the newspapers. The reports about Yugoslavia were confusing. In Canadian papers Mihajlović was given all the credit for the resistance movement; in some Slovenian papers from the United States, however, Tito and his partisans were praised, while Mihajlović was regarded as a traitor. Rather than unite to fight a common enemy, the people of Yugoslavia had separated into several nationalist factions. Splinter groups, such as the Home Defenders in Slovenia, the Chetnics in Serbia, and the Ustasi in Croatia, were conducting bloody internal wars against communism, believing that by doing so they were fighting for God. The Yugoslavians at home were confused, and so were those abroad.

After two years of fighting, the Allies threw their support to Tito and his partisans, who soon gained great victories in parts of Bosnia and Hercegovina. On November 29, 1943, the formation of the New Yugoslavia was proclaimed, with Tito as its leader, to the shock of the Allies, who had not been consulted. In Canada, where Yugoslavian immigrants were forced to choose sides, the antagonism between Serbian and Croatian immigrants deepened, fostered

by strongly nationalistic organizations, each supporting its own faction back home. For Slovenes, this internal division was something new: in the past, liberal and conservative Slovenes might have disagreed, but they had always had common goals and aspirations and common hopes for the future of their country.

For many Yugoslavian immigrants, the common goal during the war years was to help the devastated homeland and its suffering people. To that end a number of organizations were founded. In March 1944 the League of Canadian Slovenes appealed to all Slovenian immigrants to collect food, clothes, and money for their countrymen. Similar appeals were made by Croatian and Serbian leagues.

On May 7, 1945, banner headlines in newspapers around the world proclaimed the surrender of Germany and the end of the war in Europe. For the Yugoslavian people the war was over, but their country had been destroyed: they were left with burned and razed homes, poverty and devastation, and people bearing the scars of bullet and grenade injuries and the deeper emotional scars that could not be healed so easily.

Eager to help, Andy attended a convention of the War Relief Fund in 1946, at which a representative of the Yugoslav Red Cross, Dr. Robert Neubauer, appealed for medical supplies: "The hospitals are destroyed. Medicine is scarce ... and there are a great many sick people. Typhus and other contagious diseases harvest their victims every day. People returning from the woods and concentration camps need medical help, but without proper equipment and medicine, we cannot do much."

After the meeting Andy managed to exchange a few words with the doctor. "My mother and brother used to live in Ljubljana. I lost touch with them. I wonder if they are still alive. I am so worried about them. Is there any way I can find out about them?"

"Tell me your brother's name and some information about him."

"Franc Stritof," said Andy.

"Stritof? Stritof? That name sounds familiar," said Dr. Neubauer. "I believe I operated on him. If I am not mistaken, he

was in a tank division of Sercer's Brigade. I'll try to find out what happened to him and I'll let you know." Andy now dared to hope. A few months later he was overjoyed to receive a letter from Ljubljana, from his brother. He wrote back immediately. After expressing his sorrow at their long separation and his delight at finding his family again, he wrote:

> I received your precious letter and the clippings from the newspaper. Tears came to my eyes while I was reading the article about the liberation of Yugoslavia and the glorious entry of the Partisans into free Ljubljana. I could imagine this proud event so vividly. Oh, how I would like to be there to hug you and shake your hand! Like many others here, I feel that this great victory will be enshrined in the history of our country with the blood of courageous people. To those who lost their lives in the war, who sacrificed their lives for the better future of our country, I express my greatest admiration. I am convinced that your victory will have an enormous effect on the social reorganization of the world.

Andy also wrote to his mother at the address his brother had given him, telling her how worried he had been and how overjoyed he was to learn that she had survived the war. In a separate package he sent her some winter clothes.

In the spring of 1947 he received a letter from his mother:

> My dearest son,
>
> In this first letter, your sad and lonely mother sends you warm greetings. Thank you for all the things you have sent me. I am sorry I didn't tell you years ago about the problems that forced me to sell our homestead. My dear son, I have to tell you why I married again. I realized I was growing old. I had no help from anybody. Then I met this man, a retired railway worker, who proposed marriage to me. He told me he wouldn't live long, but he wanted to get

married before he died. He died three years after we got married. I was supposed to get a widow's pension of 700 dinars a month, but I only got 200. That's how things were with me. Franc didn't want to stay home with me. Now he has a good job. I am telling you, I always wanted you two to have a better life than I had. Nothing good ever happened in my life. Now that I am old and sick, things are even worse. I can't work any more. Please write to me if you can, and I'll write back to you all about our life.

My dear son, I have to stop writing now. Once again I wish you health and happiness in that faraway land. Easter is near and I wish you all the best for the holidays. Greetings and kisses from your sad mother. Please be kind and write to me soon. Your letter means everything in the world to me.

Reading this letter, Andy cried like a child, overcome by the torrent of maternal love that had been dammed up all those years. He was more hurt by the gentle complaints and open yearning expressed in her letter than he would have been by bitter reproaches. All she had ever wanted was to hear from him—she hadn't wanted his money—and he had refused to write to her for so long. If he could only beg her forgiveness and make up for all those lost years! But his rebelliousness and stubborn pride would not allow him to say that he was sorry.

Overwhelmed by guilt, he defended himself in his own mind. He had every right to be angry with his mother, he argued with his silent accuser, to rebel against her for selling their home. He saw himself as the victim of his own mother, his corrupt homeland, and exploitative capitalist powers. For all those years he had silently suffered injustices, and now his mother was making him feel guilty! He should have told her years ago how he felt about her selling the house. At least then she would understand why he was angry.

Attempting to retain some dignity, he wrote:

Dear Mother,

I was delighted to receive your letter and to learn that you are all right. I can imagine how hard the war must have been on you. Life hasn't been easy for me either. I would have written you about my troubles, but I didn't want to bother you with them. If you hadn't mortgaged our house, I would never have needed to leave home. I would have stayed home and seen to it that you were properly cared for in your old age. You complain of loneliness. How do you think I felt all those years being here alone, having nobody to take care of me when I was sick? If Father had had his way, the house of Stritof would still be respected in our village. You and I could be living there now. You betrayed my father and you betrayed me. Even when I was little, you took me to court to overturn Father's last will and testament. After you got what you wanted, you gave me away to strangers. You have chosen Franc over me. I know it was easier for you to love Franc.

You can't imagine how much I have suffered because of you. The last straw was your letter informing me that you had sold the homestead. For centuries, that house had belonged to the Stritof family. We were once the richest people in the village. Now we are all homeless, thanks to you. I've tried so hard to get rid of the memories, but they kept returning.

Would you at least send me a photograph of my father and one of our old house, so that I can make a picture of it? I have taken up painting. Enclosed I am sending you some photographs of my pictures so you can see what kind of work I am doing.

Your son, Andy.

A few months later, Andy received a reply from his mother:

My dear child,

Why did you write me such an angry and provocative letter? How badly you judge your good and loving mother! I don't deserve this. I couldn't stay in our home village after you left. I was treated too badly. Nobody would help me work the fields. For a while, I rented them out. I wanted to sell part of the land, but there was no buyer. I had no choice but to borrow money against the land. When the debtors came after me, I had to sell everything. I couldn't fight them, even if I knew I was being cheated. I had nobody on my side. I had to sell, or else the courts would have sold the farm. That was the saddest moment for me. With the money that was left over, I bought a small house in Ljubljana. But the house was later destroyed by a hailstorm. I had no insurance on it, and I had no money to rebuild it. I lost money on that house.

My dear son, don't ever write to me that I abandoned you, my own child, that I loved others more than my own children! I loved you just as much as I loved Franc. Remember that you only have one mother. Keep that in mind even after I close my tearful eyes forever. No one can write things from the bottom of her heart the way your mother can. You have only one mother, even though you do not respect me. You don't know the circumstances. Oh, how much injustice I have suffered! I hope you will find out that I was innocent. By then, it may be too late. I am telling you this from my heart. I forgive you for what you have said about me, the way a mother always forgives her own child.

I know how badly you were affected. I beg you to come back. Don't worry so much about how things were then, how they are now, and how they are going to be in the future. You will feel more at peace if you don't think

so much about that. You only have one mother and I am begging you not to reject me that way. I was so terribly depressed when I read your letter. I am sorry, my dear son, that I wasn't able to save our homestead for you. I beg you, please, forgive me. I admit my weaknesses and my mistakes.

I wouldn't write this if you hadn't accused me of being responsible for your suffering. I think we have all suffered long enough. Stop dreaming about how nice it would have been if you and I were living together back in Cerknica. Your cousin Jože had to leave his farm, his wife, and his children to go to war. He never came back. Why do you keep blaming me for the loss of the estate? My dear son, if you were here today, you would not be able to keep that farm. The state would take it. I think it is right that the state took the excessive property from the rich and gave it to the poor. If you were here, you would not be allowed to have more than others.

I thank you kindly for those two little pieces of paper, your pictures, even if I don't understand anything about art. I am sorry I can't send you the photographs you asked for. The Italians, who occupied this land, burned them because Franc was with the partisans. They took other things as well. All the savings I had, I invested in gold, believing that was safer than keeping the money in the bank. The Italians took everything.

Forgive me if I have said anything wrong. I wish you much health and happiness. My only wish in life is to see you again. I hope you will visit us soon, so I can personally tell you what happened, so you won't need to be ashamed of me any more. Thank you for the parcel you sent me. The whole neighbourhood came to see what I got. I was so proud of you. Can you send me some sewing needles? They cannot be bought here.

Warm greetings from your mother.

Andy read this letter over and over, becoming more confused each time. He was amazed at her simple solution to very complicated problem: forget what happened. Forget and forgive. Don't think how things might have been, but how things are. Face reality, however cruel it is. This solution went against all Andy's principles. He always wanted to expose injustice and rebel against it, even if he was alone against everyone. He was ashamed that his mother, in all her simplicity, could see deep into his soul and point out his weaknesses. He could not forgive her for opening old wounds and forcing him to face his own imperfections. He wanted to write back to her, but the words wouldn't come. He kept postponing the writing until finally he laid her letter away between the pages of an old Bible and put both the letter and his mother out of his mind.

Working for the Yugoslavian War Relief Fund kept him busy. In October 1947 the Slovenes of Hamilton founded their own branch of the League of Canadian Slovenes, with Joe Staresincic as president and Andy as secretary. This organization, formed to help the war-torn homeland and keep people informed about the true situation in Yugoslavia, became the focus of Andy's activities for the next two years. He helped to organize membership campaigns and fund-raising events. In contrast to the members of the Slovenian Benefit Society, whose members were addressed as "brother," members of the League addressed each other as "comrade." When the centralization of the League of Canadian Yugoslavs was proposed in 1948, Andy lost all his enthusiasm for the organization because inevitably it would mean that Serbo-Croatian would replace Slovenian as the language of meetings, correspondence, and publications.

"I really don't like this decision. Our members are simple peasant folk," he told Joe Staresincic. "They have a hard enough time learning English. Who's going to want to learn Serbo-Croatian now just to show solidarity with the homeland? Even now our newspaper *Edinost* is considered too radical for some people. Many Slovenes read it just because it's written in our language.

I'm sure many of them will cancel their subscriptions if they get a Serbo-Croatian paper with only one Slovenian page."

"I'm not in favour of this decision, either," said Joe, "but the majority of the delegates at the national convention decided it would be better that way."

"Better for who? For a few executives who want to get some points back home, or for the people in general?"

"I suppose it would be cheaper to run an organization that way."

"I don't think the comrades in the head office are so concerned about cutting the cost. Look at the financial statement. I think there's some monkey business going on in there. In the last five months there was a huge loss."

"That's probably the reason they want to centralize things."

"Or to hide their corruption. Just look at their expenses. Their travelling expenses are higher than the office rent, not to mention the secretary's pay. In our branch all our members work for nothing, and we pay our own travelling expenses. We donated fity dollars for the publishing cost of *Edinost*, while the comrades in our head office borrowed three hundred dollars from the publisher of the paper to pay themselves such wages."

"How much were the wages?" asked Joe.

"Seven hundred dollars for five months. That's an awful lot of money. When an organization is so deep in debt, you'd think the comrades would forgo their wages, or at least wait until the money's there. For heaven's sake, this is a non-profit organization based on volunteer work. Look, Joe, we told people everything was on a voluntary basis. We promised them all the money would go for poor people in our homeland. And what did the homeless children in Yugoslavia get? Thirty dollars in six months. At the same time the comrades in our head office have spent a hundred dollars just for the propaganda pamphlets distributed in Windsor. It must have been an awful lot of flyers for those few Slovenian families in Windsor. And now, our leaders want to sell us to the Serbs and Croats."

Around this time many League members decided to go back to their homeland; they were full of expectations and enthusiasm. "We'll get good jobs there," one of them said to Andy. "We've done so much for our homeland, they'll receive us with open arms. If you were smart, you'd go with us. You were the organization's secretary: you could get a cosy civil service job—perhaps even in the parliament."

"Don't kid yourself with such foolish expectations. Who do you think you are?" argued Andy. "You're peasants, miners—and you think you can go there and run the country! If this was the only reason you worked for a humanitarian organization you are nothing but opportunists."

"If I were you I wouldn't talk like that. We can make a lot of trouble for you when we get back to Yugoslavia. You'll see. You might not be allowed to return home, not even for a visit, unless we approve."

"Is that a threat?" asked Andy sarcastically. "What a good comrade you are. I bet Yugoslavia really needs people like you, and Canada would be much better off without you." The strife among Yugoslavian nationalist factions in Canada intensifed with the arrival of war refugees antagonistic towards the new regime in their homeland. Andy understood that a person forced to leave his homeland for any reason would have nothing good to say about the system back home, be it capitalist or communist.

The pre-war immigrants who had actively helped Yugoslavia were watched very carefully by the Canadian authorities, as Andy discovered when a detective called on him. "Mr. Staresincic has applied for a government job, and we would like to check some information. We understand he is your personal friend."

"Yes, I have known him for quite some time."

"Is it true that you two attended communist meetings in Toronto?"

"No. That's not true. His father and I went to some meetings in Toronto, but they were about helping our homeland, nothing else."

"Is he a member of the Communist Party?"

"I don't know. I never asked him. But I know he's a good man. For me, it is all the same if a man is a Catholic or a communist, as long as he is honest and righteous, as long as he is a good man."

"Are you a member of the Communist Party?"

"That's a silly question. What does a membership mean? You can judge a man by his actions, not by his membership card. That's why I won't be a member of any party. I want to stay a free man. I want to think and do what I believe is right, not what a party dictates to me. I believe that helping my homeland was the right thing for our people to do in those difficult times, and no one should be penalized because of that. If Mr. Staresincic has all the other qualifications for that job, then I think it is fair that he get it." A few weeks later Joe told Andy that he was moving to Ottawa, where he had been offered an excellent government job. His father had decided to go back to his farm in Slovenia.

New Challenges

With his best friend's departure in 1949, Andy was once again overcome by depression. Work was scarce. Here and there he got a job painting a private house, and occasionally he was asked to decorate a stage for an ethnic community hall, but this scattered work brought in little money.

With time on his hands, Andy began to explore his inner world again. Was he really too rebellious, or were the people around him too indifferent to injustice and corruption? He knew he would be able to get along much better with others if he could swallow his pride and compromise his principles a little. Even his mother had told him to stop fighting the world, to stop dwelling on the past and worrying about the future. But he couldn't help being disturbed by suffering and injustice. And there were so many troubling moral issues. Where could one find goodness? Who spoke for God? Hoping to find answers to such questions, Andy began visiting the library again. Books became his true companions, from which he hoped to learn the secret of true art, the meaning and purpose of artistic creation.

Across the street from the library was an art gallery, where he stopped every time he walked by, to study the paintings in the window. "How do you like our pictures?" the friendly old woman who owned the gallery asked him one day.

"I'm not an art critic. I have no right to criticize these paintings. I look at art differently. I paint differently."

"Oh, you're a painter," she said, smiling. "Are you a member of the Art Club?"

"No. I've only been in Hamilton for a few years and I wasn't much in the mood for painting when I first came. I had more

urgent things to do. Now that I can devote some time to art, I'd love to get in touch with some real artists."

"You can meet them at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. They get together every Tuesday night at the Ontario College of Art."

"I'm only a self-taught artist. I would need to go to some kind of school."

"You can also get lessons there. The president of the Art Club is Mr. Arthur Chrystal. Try to talk to him." Andy thanked the woman and went straight to the gallery to register for classes. Then he waited impatiently for the first session, like a child going to school for the first time.

When the big day came, he packed some of his pictures and his sketch pad into the trunk of his car and headed towards the gallery. He drove around the building a few times to gather enough courage to meet the other art students. But when he walked in, he soon felt at ease in the company of other students. They were working from a live model. Old-fashioned as he was, Andy felt a little awkward about drawing a naked woman. For a while he just looked at the model; then he started to draw. His picture showed a woman reclining at the edge of a vast body of water. The woman, only loosely based on the model's pose, was composed of large rounded shapes suggestive of a landscape. "You are an excellent artist," a fellow student praised Andy. "We've been studying art for years, and none of us could do anything like this. Where did you get this idea? If I were as good as you are, I would take a higher-level course."

The instructor suggested that he take a course given by a Mr. Sloan. On Thursday, Andy met Mr. Sloan, who had already heard of Andy's talent. I would love to see the picture you drew the other day. Everybody is talking about it."

"It wasn't all that good. I worked it up into an oil painting at home."

Mr. Sloan recognized the philosophical dimension of Andy's painting and was eager to teach him the technical aspects. They soon became good friends.

Andy devoted all his free time to painting and reading about art. Though he was very careful about spending money for personal things, he often paid twenty or thirty dollars for a book that was not available in the library, even if he had to go hungry. At this time, he had few friends and kept mostly to himself. When he was not in the mood for painting, he would spend hours in a Greek restaurant, sitting with a glass of beer. One day a young woman came into the restaurant asking for work. "I've just come from Nova Scotia and I need a job badly," she pleaded with the owner of the restaurant. "I've spent all my money to get here and now I'm on the street. I have two small children and we have no food and no place to stay. I would work all day for nothing, if you would only give me room and board."

"Business is very slow lately," the owner said. "Right now, I can't hire anybody." Andy, who had overheard this conversation, begged the owner to give the woman a chance.

"She doesn't want charity, she wants to work. Can't you put her up at your place for a few days at least? I'll help her find work." Andy remembered that Mr. Sloan had mentioned needing new models for the art class. He looked at Nancy's figure and said, "Would you be willing to take off your clothes?"

"I would do anything to support my children, but not prostitution. I wouldn't do that for any money."

"I didn't have that in mind. Modelling for artists is just a job. There's no sex involved at all." She got the modelling work and soon found herself another job as a waitress. Andy helped her find an inexpensive apartment and often visited her there. Her children were always happy to see him, because he took them for rides or walks in the park. Nancy also enjoyed his company, but after a time she grew dissatisfied, for Andy acted like a father to her children, but not like her boyfriend.

One day she announced bluntly, "I am getting married next month."

"Who's the lucky fellow?" Andy asked.

"You wouldn't know him. He's a builder. We met at the restaurant." This news did not affect Andy immediately but

gradually he felt a sense of loss. He had not wanted to marry Nancy, though he knew that she loved him, and in a strange way he loved her. But he missed the family environment. In his loneliness, he pursued art more vigorously. He worked on his painting of the woman, which he now called *Mother Nature*, until he felt he had perfected the expression of his idea. In the finished work the woman's figure fills the foreground of the picture, taking on a monumental quality. The appearance of a landscape suggested by the angles of her arm and curves of her torso is strengthened by the echoing shapes of the cloud, in similar thickly painted warm whites on the opposite side of an intense blue body of water. This image of woman, the bearer of human life, as landscape signified for Andy the interdependence of humanity and its environment. A response to an era in which industrialization was driving people away from nature, it called on them to look at themselves as a part of nature.

Mother Nature was the first Stritof work to be displayed formally in an art show. When it was hung in the Annual Winter Exhibition of the Art Club of Hamilton in 1948, it was much admired by other artists. Andy was especially pleased by praise from Hortense Gordon, who was already one of Hamilton's better-known artists. A few years later she became a member of the influential Painters Eleven. "Andy, you are a natural artist. I've got to work hard to come up with good pictures. And here you are a self-taught artist who can express so much in one single painting." Andy himself was elated, if a little surprised, at the flowering of his creative abilities. His loneliness and the hypersensitivity that made it difficult for him to fit in with people seemed a small price to pay—the value of his art was recognized by his peers.

At the exhibition the following year, Andy displayed the picture *Memento Mori.* This painting was quite different stylistically from the work he had shown the year before. The paint was thinner, the colours restrained. The symbolism had become more overt: a skeletal hand holds an hourglass in front of a bank of cloud. The piece attracted the attention of onlookers, but not of

serious buyers. Perhaps that was not surprising, for the painting was not decorative and did not belong to any popular school of art, and its didacticism and gloomy note of warning did not suit the taste of the time, a period of rapid economic expansion. A mood of confidence and smugness was growing in the United States, which was reaching the height of its power. This mood was also felt in Canada, increasingly under American cultural influence. Death was not a popular subject.

For the eighteenth Annual Winter Exhibition of the Art Club of Hamilton in 1950, Andy wanted to show something special. Ever since his Schumacher days, he had wanted to portray the miners he watched heading drearily to their work deep underground. Though he had made rough sketches while living there before the Second World War, he had not had the technique to develop them on canvas. Now he could apply his knowledge of colour, composition, and style to express his compassion for the men who earned their daily bread in constant danger. He wanted to show how manual labour in the mines, usually reserved for immigrants, unites people of different nationalities, cultures, and religions. In suffering, all the workers were equal, as they were equal in their blackened outside appearance. After several attempts he finally finished the painting to his liking. Self-consciously Andy showed his picture to the artist in charge of the exhibition. "Do you think this is good enough to be displayed?"

"This is great, Andy. Too bad the subject matter is such that nobody is likely to buy it. What price should we put on it?"

"I don't know about that. I've never sold any of my paintings. I usually just give them away, if I find someone who truly appreciates them."

"I know it's worth a lot more, but considering the circumstances, what about forty-five dollars?"

To Andy's surprise, the *Hamilton Spectator*'s art critic singled out Andy's work in his review of the group show:

> As in most exhibitions by Canadian artists, the largest group of works is the landscapes. But there is some

> abstract painting included—notably the work of Hortense M. Gordon and Ray Mead—and a good showing of portraits. Among the more unusual pictures in the show are two by Andy Stritof, whose painting points a social moral. *Miners*, for instance, depicts a shift on its way to work. Streams of men converge on the mine-shaft. All are heavy, muscular figures—but they are without individuality. The miners, one feels, are just so many units of work being assembled to take their place and produce their quotas of effort.

But *Miners* did not sell, nor did *Houses*, the other painting of Andy's in the show. Both works were examples of social realism, a school of art emphasizing the struggles of working people and imbued with a tone of moral indignation that had thrived during the hard years of the 1930s. But times had changed: the economy was buoyant, and the middle class was prospering. If poverty remained, people didn't want to hear about it. In a period of increasing political conservatism, social realism was suspect: it smacked of left-wing agitation. Canadian art buyers, for the most part, would rather have had landscapes.

The avant-garde, on the other hand, considered social realism terribly old-fashioned. Radically new art forms were gaining currency. The abstract expressionist movement was sweeping most prestigious galleries in New York, the emerging world centre of cultural opinion, and was just gaining a foothold among Canadians who considered themselves advanced. Abstract expressionism was big, bold, and exciting. It suited the expansive mood of the times. If some of the paintings did have a dark side, art buyers could nevertheless ignore it; having no overt subject, an abstract painting could be seen however a patron wanted to see it.

Seeing Andy's name in the paper revived old memories for Nancy, who had become accustomed to the life of a middle-class housewife. Her husband was a good provider. There was enough money not only for food and clothing, but also for music lessons for her children, taken less, perhaps, for love of music than to

show the family's status. She phoned Andy to congratulate him on his artistic achievement and to invite him to accompany her to her son's musical performance in Toronto. "Why doesn't your husband go with you?" Andy asked.

"There are going to be a lot of important people there. My husband isn't used to that type of crowd. He doesn't know anything about music and he might feel uncomfortable there." Andy didn't like the idea, but for the boy's sake he agreed. She made a point of introducing Andy to all her friends, and she invited him for dinner afterwards.

"I promised to accompany you to the concert, nothing else," Andy protested.

"It will be my treat. You don't have to pay for the dinner," insisted Nancy.

"It's not the money, for heaven's sake. Can't you see? You can't have it both ways—money and security with your husband, entertainment with me. If you aren't ashamed to live with your husband, you shouldn't be ashamed to go out with him."

"What do you know about married life?" demanded Nancy.

"I know what it should be like. I suppose your marriage was wrong to begin with. It wasn't founded on love, but on convenience. If that was good enough then, it should also be good enough now. If you need a dinner companion, you'll have to find somebody else, because I'm leaving right now. As a matter of fact, I would prefer that you took a bus home. It was a mistake for me to come." He never saw Nancy again, nor did he miss her. This experience confirmed Andy's revulsion from women. He considered them all to be opportunists for whom love was just an empty word. He was disillusioned about women and human love in general. At least he had his art to fall back on when his personal life was not going well.

Andy did not talk much about his philosophy of art. The better his painting became, the more insecure he felt. There was something about Andy that puzzled even Arthur Chrystal, a charter member and first president of Contemporary Artists of Hamilton. Chrystal was the dean of arts at Central Technical School. He and

his wife, Katherine, both well-known artists, had arrived in Hamilton in 1947 from Edinburgh. They taught art classes in Hamilton, and they admired Andy for his natural talent, as well as for his determination to penetrate the mysteries of artistic creativity. Their teacher-student relationship soon developed into an affectionate friendship. During this time of Andy's rapid spiritual growth, when he seemed strange even to himself, the Chrystals offered him moral support, often inviting him to their home for dinner, which was usually followed by long discussions about art. They spent many weekends together, painting in the woods near Georgian Bay.

Andy wanted to make a truly Canadian painting in the tradition of the Group of Seven: something that would be accepted by Canadian art critics. That ambition was achieved when his oil painting, *First Snow*, was selected for the Fourth Annual Winter Exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. This show, at which well-known artists from all over Canada were represented, was considered one of the most important events in the Hamilton art world. Andy was elated that he had achieved a status that allowed him to show with prominent artists.

Having proved his skill as a painter, Andy lost all interest in competing for financial success or critical acclaim. He believed that art had a higher purpose, though he could not put into words what it might be. He was sure that art was not supposed to be a money-making business; that once art becomes a commercial venture it loses its magic. He was not interested in painting landscapes for rich patrons. For him, all art had a human aspect. Even looking at flowers called up comparisons with people. In this he differed from his friend Arthur Chrystal, a realist painter who depicted things as he saw them. Andy, on the other hand, always painted things as he experienced them in his mind.

Not understanding the sources of his work, Andy became frightened by the feeling that he was losing control over his creativity: it, rather, was controlling him. This fear was brought home to him on a painting trip with Arthur and Katherine. After setting up his equipment in the middle of the woods, he was

unable to touch his brush. Though he was overcome by the beauty of the autumn forest, something prevented him from expressing this great beauty. While Arthur and Katherine were concentrating on their work, Andy's mind went blank. He went for a walk to gather his thoughts but instead he picked a bunch of withered wildflowers, which without thinking, he offered to Katherine, who instinctively understood this gesture. A sensitive woman, she saw that Andy was overcome by the natural beauty around him and the painful memories it recalled.

All his life Andy had longed for happiness, hoping he would find it in art. Yet now that he had achieved both skill and more recognition than he had expected, he was still not happy. His youth was gone, and he was still single and poor. He felt like an old man, like a flower in the autumn. The flowers he had picked had once been beautiful and fragrant; now they were dry, without colour or smell. Dead symbols of former beauty, they yet concealed in their petals the seeds of future flowers.

"Thank you for the pretty bouquet," said Katherine. "In exchange, I'm inviting you for lunch tomorrow. Bring along your paraphernalia." Andy gladly accepted her invitation. She was compassionate and understanding, unlike many other women he had met, and she was also knowledgeable about art. After lunch she placed a vase containing the dead flowers in the middle of the table and said, "Let's go to work, guys, if you want to immortalize these flowers."

While Arthur concentrated on the flowers, Andy drifted away into a world of his own. Unaware of his surroundings, he worked with absorption. When the painting was complete, it showed an arrangement of objects on a table, set up like a still life, with some of the flattened spatial characteristics of the cubist world. Of the vase of flowers, some traces remain—a vase or pitcher shape, and two large, abstracted flower shapes. But the dominant object in the painting, posed on top of the table like small statuary, is a small, pudgy child, overshadowed by a black female figure whose hands press against its head. The kitchen in Andy's painting was not the Chrystals' kitchen. When he awakened from his trance, he realized

he had painted his mother's kitchen as he remembered it from his childhood. Was the black figure in the painting his mother? "You should take Hortense Gordon's class," Arthur urged Andy, recognizing his talent for modern painting. Accepting the suggestion, Andy registered for Gordon's day class. It was hard for him to get used to the class of mostly young people, just out of high school, but even harder for him to follow her instructions. One day when she asked the students to draw a model, a boy in scouting uniform, Andy openly defied her. "Why should I draw a boy scout? I would prefer to paint a goat."

"What's the matter, Andy?" asked Mrs. Gordon, surprised at his uncharacteristic outburst.

"I came here to learn modern art, not to paint some aristocrat's son." The other students burst into laughter.

"Why don't you just show us what you can do, instead of making fun of my teaching?" Mrs. Gordon suggested. Andy tried to concentrate, to get some impressions from the boy, but his thoughts were too confused. The image of the scout reminded him of the woods. With part of his mind he wanted to follow the instructions of his teacher, but his habit of rejecting any authority impelled him to act otherwise, as if his rebelliousness were working against his own wishes. He felt like an automaton, unable to switch off the thoughts that were invading his mind and yet unable to collect them into a sensible whole. The picture taking shape on the board reflected his fragmented mind. It didn't look anything like the model. His fellow students thought he was crazy and didn't want to disturb him, hoping he would come out of it by himself. At the end of the class, Mrs. Gordon came around to look at Andy's painting.

"This is great, Andy. What does it express?"

"Can't you see? This is a lumberjack."

"Of course; I should have known," said Mrs. Gordon, looking at the colourful figure. Centred in a framework of angular areas of colour suggesting crosscut logs, landscape elements, and tools, stands a massive figure that appears half human and half machine, with a blank, metallic face, holding tools in wrench-like hands. It

is a memory of lumberjacks in British Columbia cutting down gigantic trees with primitive tools. "This is cubism; where did you learn this new style?"

"From Picasso," Andy said jokingly. Pressed further, he said, "I don't know why I chose this style; it just felt right for the subject and times. I didn't try to imitate anyone, certainly not Picasso, much though I admire him. I've thought about him a lot, trying to understand him. He is an enigma; to some people a genius, to others a madman. Artists imitate him, but they don't penetrate his mind and find out why he paints as he does. He's painting a schizophrenic society. Picasso is a revolutionary. His work demands that all existing art be re-examined."

Andy's painting of the lumberjack was as complex in meaning as in composition. The powerful but ominous figure of the tool-bearing man is rooted in the knowledge that technology is both helpful and harmful to man. The piece can also be seen as a psychological self-portrait. Andy had come to the forests of British Columbia to sell his physical strength to the lumber companies. As an artist, what would he be expected to sell? Would the tools of his art be a double-edged axe? The students present at the birth of that painting urged Andy to show it to Charles Playfair, a Hamilton artist whose modern art was being well received in New York. Mr. Playfair praised the work and encouraged him. Suddenly Andy was receiving plaudits from his friends, his fellow students, and more established artists. He should have been thrilled: he had proved that he had talent; he was being taken seriously; success, he felt, was around the corner. But instead he felt strangely depressed. Perhaps, he thought, it was because all the praise seemed to be for the form of his work, not its content. He felt that no one shared his philosophy of art; no one wanted to accept his work as the social and moral act he felt art should be. With a sense of loneliness, he came to the conclusion that spiritually he had outgrown his teachers, who were excellent technically but not driven by the ideals that drove him and did not share the revelations he was trying to express.

He was receiving advice from various friends. If he handled things properly, he was told, he could make it big: maybe even break into the New York galleries. But he was advised that if he wanted a successful career, he had better concentrate on only one style and develop it fully. After all, in the last few years his work had been all over the artistic map: at least one surrealist painting, several social-realist paintings, some freely brushed landscapes, and some angular, cubist-influenced works. How could a gallery show such a hodgepodge of styles?

Andy was outraged at the idea that he should in any way modify his work to suit the gallery system. He had to make the pictures that came to him: there could be no compromise. He got the impression that no one wanted those paintings that criticized the social system. Well, he would not accept the censorship of commercial acceptability or some arbitrary standard of taste. Where was the freedom that America boasted of if artists were pushed into one mould or another? An artist should be a guardian of social morals, he thought, not a craftsman producing a commodity for sale.

The more people tried to encourage Andy, the more he shrank from their ideas of success. He felt that the capitalist system would not allow him to fulfil his creative mission. Well, if the art world didn't value the paintings he considered most important, it would get none of them. In turmoil and mental anguish, he decided that he would sell none of his work, for to do so would almost be to sell his soul. A few years before he had offered *Miners* for sale for only forty-five dollars, and no one had been interested. Now he was glad the picture remained unsold. Who knows where it would have ended up? Andy felt himself becoming more and more alienated from society. He had to go away from the city, away from other artists, away from the whole world, to be totally alone for a while.

He rented an isolated farmhouse near Bradford. His nearest neighbour was at least a mile away. He didn't want to talk to anybody. In this small kingdom he was free to do anything he pleased. At times he felt like a primitive man, thousands of years

old, who had watched civilization progress from the stone age to the age of machinery, when domesticated animals were replaced by sophisticated machines and man was thinking of going to the moon. At those times he wanted to return to Mother Earth; he felt like a penitent child who had drifted away from what was dearest to him. Sometimes he didn't even feel like dressing. Naked and unshaven, he walked in his own garden of Eden—the farm garden, once planted with beautiful roses, and now reverting to wilderness. If only he hadn't eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he thought. How much easier his life would have been if he had stayed home, married, and had a family instead of immigrating to this promised land where the milk and honey tasted bitter.

Now he was alone. Art, the mysterious mistress who had sustained him in earlier times of personal turmoil, had failed him this time. He spent a great deal of time contemplating life. His body was like the old farmhouse, which was falling apart with no one to tend it. His soul, he fancied, was like the fields that were once a beautiful rose garden. Now, only a few wild rose bushes were left in that fertile ground.

When Andy eventually realized that he would have to turn the farm property to some practical use, instead of replanting the roses he began selling the rich soil by the bushel. It was a profitable business for a time, and after a few years he had completely forgotten about art. Once again he felt like a strong peasant boy, eager to explore the civilized world.

Back in Hamilton

In 1958 Andy returned to Hamilton, feeling like a new man and determined to change his life so that he would have some peace of mind in his old age. He rented a small apartment, from which he conducted a painting and decorating business. He never went to art galleries and rarely saw his old artist friends. Some had left town; the others he simply didn't look up.

His business did well, and with two or three employees he could arrange his schedule to accommodate his moodiness. If he was in good humour, he went to the job site and worked with the boys. When he had other things on his mind, he didn't bother to appear. When asked about it, he made odd excuses: "I went to the library," he would say. "I had to read the newspaper; I went to visit a friend." His helper, Tony Mikolic, who had recently immigrated from Slovenia, found it strange that a businessman would spend his days at the library, but he didn't want to say anything to provoke Andy. "For the next few days we're all going to work for nothing. We have to renovate a man's house so his wife can get around in a wheelchair," Andy announced one day to his workers.

"This reminds me of the volunteer brigade back home," said Tony. "Did you know that the young people of Yugoslavia built the main highway through the country as volunteer work?" Andy was pleased to see a young man willing to do something kind for a fellow human being. Working for nothing was not exactly what Tony and co-workers wanted at a time when they were penniless, but they reported for work anyway. When Andy did not appear until the afternoon, Tony teased him: "Andy, you really behave like a boss. Leave the work to the employees, eh?"

"I prefer to paint other things," Andy said defensively. Tony did not press Andy any further. He worked for him for a few more weeks before he moved to Sudbury to look for a job at International Nickel Corporation (INCO), which was opening a new nickel mine.

Andy no longer fitted into the Slovenian community in Hamilton. The first generation of post-war immigrants lived in their own enclave. The next group, who had come in pursuit of work and a higher standard of living, were contemptuous of Andy, assuming that he could not have been a good artist if he had not made money with his work. In this country, they thought, even a peasant can succeed financially, not to mention an artist. Any splatters could be sold to the rich, naive Americans as modern art. If Andy could not make money, there must be something wrong with him.

Andy felt a stranger to himself as well. Trying to understand the tumultuous feelings that took possession of him from time to time, he searched through medical books, especially those on psychology. He wanted to penetrate the mystery of hypnosis and mysticism, and the psychology of art. One day in the winter of 1969, he was sitting in the library, with a stack of biographies of famous painters in front of him, when a young man approached him. "Are you an artist?"

"I think I am. Why are you interested?"

"I am an artist, too."

"What do you paint?"

"Whatever I am asked to do. Whatever they pay me to do."

"Then you are not an artist at all," Andy retorted, raising his voice enough to draw stares. Just then a young Japanese man came up to Andy's table.

"I don't remember seeing you in art circles," he said.

"I exhibited at the Art Gallery of Hamilton ten years ago."

"Really? I would love to see some of your work. I am an art student at McMaster. My name is Bill Hatanaka." Andy invited Bill to his apartment. They talked a lot about art, and the conversation awakened in Andy the old feelings for painting, especially

when his new friend invited him to meet other young artists at a student society called the House of Azollo. The group, comprising mostly students and a few young art teachers, was nothing like Andy's old crowd. The young people gave the impression of being lost, like chicks without a hen. In the spirit of the hippie era, they wanted to do something real: they wanted to make art that counted, but they didn't know how to go about it.

"I am very happy to be invited here," said Andy. "I can see you are all firm idealists. Today's society needs people like you. Right now, all the mistakes of your predecessors have fallen on your shoulders. You will have to find a way to correct art, which has been terribly corrupted by this capitalist system. You are the builders of the future, and you should never forget that." Andy had started to speak in a conversational tone, a little shyly. But now, as he saw the eager young faces around him, he was gripped by a kind of evangelical fervour, and he launched into an impassioned sermon.

"Artistic creativity is the most sacred duty in the service of humanity. An artist has to be the most righteous man on earth. He must not compromise his principles, nor may he exalt himself above others. The artist who expresses only his own idiosyncrasy is not an artist at all, but a neurotic who is transferring his madness to other people. The artist has to be an individualist, but at the same time he has to grasp and express universality. And at the centre of both universality and individuality is God. God reigns through art. At least He should always be present in art." By the end of his speech, everyone was cheering.

That evening Andy met Bill Powell, a talkative young man in his mid-twenties who was teaching art. "Congratulations, Andy," Bill said. "I'm impressed by your ideas about art. Can we talk some more about it? Perhaps you can look at my paintings some time and give me an honest opinion."

"I'd be glad to," said Andy, "but I'm not an art critic." A few days later Bill walked into Andy's apartment with a few recent paintings. "Why did you paint a naked woman? Why did you use these depressing, dark colours?"

"This is in fashion now. Picasso uses a lot of blue and black."

"You are not Picasso. You should paint what's right for you, not what's in fashion. You've got to project your own feelings onto the canvas. You can't imitate someone else's feelings and ideas. You have to create out of your own imaginative consciousness. You have to understand yourself in relation to the world in order to paint something significant. The aim of modern art is to question what is normally accepted as reality. Things are not necessarily always the way our objective intellect sees them. It's quite easy for the fixed and familiar shape and arrangement of things to get lost with changes in the state of our consciousness. We have come to a point when we no longer need to fall fast asleep in order for our normal view of the world to dissolve in a dream. It can happen in our waking state, while we're daydreaming. There has always been a purpose in art. In primitive times man made masks and other objects for a sacred purpose, to be used as a source of magic power: to mediate between people and hostile forces, to help people overcome fear, and to give them some direction for the future. Painting is not an aesthetic action: it is a form of magic, of giving form to our feelings and our desires." It was long past midnight, but Andy could not stop talking.

"If you want to be a good painter, you cannot strive to imitate Picasso, but rather to understand him, to receive the message he transmitted to us with his paintings, and to respond by conveying to others what you have learned from him. Every creative image is a statement embodying the artist's comprehension of reality as he experiences the events of the world in his own consciousness. The visual arts involve the full imaginative life of a man as he confronts the external realities of the world. If the resulting image is good, it acts as a bridge between the heart and mind of the artist and the heart and mind of the viewer, who gains new insight into the nature of things by looking at the work of art.

"Art is harmony. Harmony is the reconciliation of contraries. There is a difference between the study of technique and learning how to be creative. Technical training is offered in all schools of art, while creativity is ignored." Andy was well launched on his

subject by now. He had assumed the air of a lecturer on a podium. It was almost morning when he concluded his monologue and looked at Bill's painting again. "Technically, this picture is not bad, but the message is lacking. You have to know *why* and *how* you paint. You'll never be a good artist unless you can answer those two questions. There is a long and lonely road that leads toward an understanding of artistic mysteries. I would not recommend it to you. You are young and healthy. You are compassionate and understanding. You are good with people. Use your talent to help people in another way."

He had dropped his lecturing air now, and was speaking directly and earnestly to Bill, as a father would speak to his son. "I can't explain it to you, but believe me, in the long run you would be much better off buying and selling someone else's paintings."

Bill did not understand what Andy was saying. At first he was disappointed, but when he thought over what Andy had said about the artistic struggle, he realized that Andy only wanted to protect him from the journey toward self-destruction. Was the pursuit of perfection—to know everything, to understand everything, to try to change everything—really worth risking his personal health and happiness? He realized that, much as he admired Andy, he did not want to be like him. He did not want to chase the stars for the rest of his life. He wanted to enjoy what he was doing. With his optimism and his sense of humour, he wanted to help people to enjoy the present, instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

In the fall of 1969 Bill rented an old house on Augusta Avenue, which he transformed into Bill Powell's Canvas Gallery. Andy helped him with renovations; in return, Bill invited him to display some of his old paintings. Though Andy still refused to sell his paintings, he did want them to be seen. In this atmosphere his creative drive reawakened. He found himself a bright, spacious apartment over a cheap restaurant on King Street, using it as a studio as well.

One hot summer day Andy was putting a coat of paint on the woodwork around the large living room window overlooking the street. On stuffy, humid days like this, he usually wore only a red bath skirt, but today he had taken even that off to avoid splattering it with paint. He was working with absorption when he heard a knock at the door. "Just a moment," called Andy, pulling on a pair of pants.

"You are under arrest for indecent exposure," said a policeman gruffly when Andy opened the door.

"Am I not dressed properly?"

"Now you are, but..."

"When I am alone in my own place, I can walk around naked if I wish. I have enough decency to know when I have to be dressed properly. You don't have to spy on me."

"I wasn't spying on you. I was called because you were showing your naked body through the window. People walking by were disgusted and offended."

"I wasn't doing anything indecent. I didn't mean to offend anybody. I was busy painting the woodwork. I'm an artist, an honest, hard-working man, not some sex pervert!" The policeman looked around the apartment to try to establish Andy's character. Andy seemed perfectly harmless to him, if a little unconventional, but then again, he thought, you never know.

"You say you are an artist?" the policeman asked, testing Andy's sanity. "Is there anyone who can confirm this?"

"Of course. Bill Powell, the son of the mayor, can tell you that I am not a pervert." The officer phoned Bill Powell and asked him what kind of person Andy was.

"He is an extraordinarily good man. He is perfectly normal, except at times he forgets he isn't alone in the world, mainly when he's deeply absorbed in his work, especially painting. At those times, he doesn't see anybody around him, and I suppose, he is not aware that others can see him." After talking to Bill, the policeman let Andy off with a warning.

"But if anything like this happens again, I will have to take you in. The law is the law, you know," he said before leaving.

Although this incident had no further direct consequences, it dealt a severe blow to Andy's self-esteem. He felt robbed of privacy and freedom. He had thought that in the privacy of his own apartment he could do as he liked. He was overcome by shame at the thought that strangers on the street were pitying him for being mentally deranged. He should have realized how low the studio window was. He should have noticed the people on the street staring at him before the policeman was called. The realization that he could not trust himself any more pushed him into deep depression. By now Andy had developed a habit of drowning his self-pity in scotch when he felt he was losing control over himself. He felt he had nowhere else to turn, because no one would understand him.

A Visit to His Native Land

With the late 1960s a new awareness of, and interest in, multiculturalism developed in Canada. In the Trudeau era, the cultural mosaic became a model for Canadian society. No longer were immigrants called DPs or greenhorns; instead they were coming to be accepted as citizens. Canada did its best to help them learn a new language and new ways while preserving their own culture. But for Andy, these changes came too late.

In forty years of struggling to adjust to the way of life in Canada, he had accumulated so much bitterness that he had lost all hope for the future. The more he resented the western capitalist system, the more he idealized his homeland. Whenever he felt that his creative achievements were rejected and ridiculed in Canada, he imagined how happy Slovenian galleries would be to display his works. After all, wasn't the whole socialist system there devised according to the philosophy of artists, especially poets and writers? He was sure that his principles of art would be understood and appreciated in his homeland.

Though Andy longed to see his homeland, he was hesitant to return after such a long absence, and he might never have gathered the courage to take the trip if it had not been for his friend Joe Staresincic, who was planning a trip and urged Andy to go with him. "I don't feel like a Slovenian any more," Andy demurred. "I hardly get a chance to speak Slovenian here. I wouldn't know how to behave there. Everything would be strange to me, including my own brother. I wouldn't want to embarrass him."

"Don't be such a perfectionist, Andy," Joe argued. "You'll do just fine. I'm sure your brother will be very proud of you. Make sure you take some of your paintings with you."

"I would like to go there dressed as an Indian," said Andy, "to show them that I'm also a Canadian."

"Why not?" Joe laughed.

When Andy stepped off the plane at Zagreb airport on June 25, 1970, it was forty-five years since he had left Yugoslavia. Franc, who was eighteen when Andy left, was now in his sixties, though he looked much younger. Walking through customs, Andy spotted Franc immediately but was too shy to approach him in case he was mistaken. It was Franc who made the first move. From the picture Andy had sent him, he would have recognized his brother anywhere. "Greetings, Franc!" cried Andy, embracing him and clapping him on the shoulder. "This is your little Andrejček," he added, turning to the ten-year old boy. "What a nice-looking boy you are!" Andrejček shyly handed him a red carnation and recited a few welcoming words he had been taught to say to his uncle. Then Andy shook hands with Ana, his sister-in-law, and gave her a warm hug. "You are much prettier than in the photograph," he said. Both brothers shed tears of joy.

Driving toward Ljubljana, Andy was surprised at all the new houses being built in the villages along the highway. It was wheat harvesting time, and yet there were hardly any horses or oxen in the fields, and no women stooped over tying stooks or drying hay. The hard manual labour traditionally done in Slovenian fields and meadows had been taken over by machines. "I can see you've modernized," said Andy in amazement.

"We're trying to catch up with technology." They talked about the good old days and the changes brought about by the new socialist system. At first Andy talked slowly, because he had to translate his thoughts from English, but after a few days he was able to think in his native language again, though he still used English words for things that had not existed fifty years earlier.

"So, what have you been doing all these years?" asked Franc one day, while Andy showed him photographs of his paintings.

"I've mostly been involved with art. I did other jobs here and there to support myself, but painting occupied most of my time."

"I paint a little, too," said Franc, a little shyly. "Landscapes, mostly."

"I didn't know you painted!" exclaimed Andy. "Show me some of your work!"

"Another day," Franc laughed. "It's not so interesting. Of course I'm not a real artist like you." Silence fell for a moment. Franc seemed to be following his own thoughts. Then he asked abruptly, "How come you changed your mind about coming to visit us right after the war? Mother wanted to see you so badly."

"Don't ask me that. I can't talk about it."

"She really loved you, you know. She was asking for you just before she died."

"I don't want to be reminded of her."

"As you wish. I just thought if you knew how much she cared about you, you could be at peace with her memory. Now that she is gone, you should at least forgive her, for your own sake."

"I've suffered too much to forgive and forget. God knows how different my life would have been if..."

"But you're happy when you suffer! You enjoy being mentally tortured, don't you?" Franc retorted acidly.

"Don't you understand that? How can you paint, if you don't feel that way?"

"I paint for fun," said Franc. "Painting relaxes me when I'm tense."

"What do you know about art? Art isn't a way to relax. To be truly creative, you have to dig into your inner mind, your past."

"I don't want to know more. I don't want that kind of creativity. The last thing I want is to dig up bad memories. It's hard enough when they pop up uninvited." Andy looked at his brother, who was a stranger to him, and regained his composure.

"How selfish of me to talk only about my problems, Franc. Let me hear about your life. I heard you were wounded during the war."

"The physical wounds weren't so bad. The worst agony was the times I looked death in the eye, thinking 'if I don't kill him, he is going to kill me.' That is the true agony of war. Sure, they say

now how bravely the soldiers fought and died. You do all sorts of bold things when you have no choice: but you're scared to death the whole time."

While strolling through Ljubljana the next day, Andy marvelled at the Americanized appearance of the city. Teenagers walked around in tight jeans or miniskirts, carrying portable radios and tape recorders; young lovers caressed one another in the park while listening to tunes of the Beatles or Rolling Stones. There were Slovenian companies with English names, foreign magazines at the newsstands and plenty of imported articles in the stores. Ljubljana was now a curious mixture of old and new, European and international.

On July 1, Andy and his friend Joe Staresincic celebrated Dominion Day at the famous Hotel Lev in Ljubljana. After a delightful dinner with their relatives, Andy decided to enliven the evening by putting on his Indian costume. He soon became the centre of attention in the busy dining room, and when the whole group walked to the castle, his outfit drew many stares. "Come to our place on Sunday," Joe invited him before they parted. "My father is looking forward to seeing you. He still remembers you from the war years."

"I'll be there if Franc can give me a ride," said Andy.

"We'll be expecting you. And don't forget your costume."

On Sunday Joe's relatives in Metlika set up tables outside under the hay rack and served their guests a feast of roast suckling pig, fried chicken, a variety of salads, home-made bread, and walnut *potica*. Tongues were loosened by the home-made red wine, and soon the gathering was filled with the old Slovenian spirit. Everyone joined in singing traditional folk songs. Toast after toast was proposed, as a filled glass was handed from guest to guest. Toward evening, Joe invited Andy to accompany him to another party. "A distant relative of mine has just been ordained and is celebrating his first mass. I ought to show him my respect by making an appearance at this party, just for half an hour. Would you go with me?"

I'm hardly dressed for the occasion," protested Andy. "You want me to go wearing this Indian attire?"

"Why not?" said Joe seriously. Andy had drunk enough wine to agree.

At the second party Andy was soon surrounded by children: to their rapt eyes it was as if Pierre Brice, the good Indian in the popular movie series *Winetou*, had appeared in front of them. Even the new priest was delighted.

"Is this what the Indians described by Bishop Baraga looked like?" he asked Andy. "Do you also have connections with the Indians?"

"I am not that close to them," said Andy. "I live quite near to one of their reserves, but they don't associate much with the outside world. I got this outfit from an Indian princess, Alma Green. I met her by chance when she was autographing her book *Forbidden Voice* at the local book store. It's a sad story of an Indian medicine woman and her struggle to express the Indian's disillusionment with the white man's culture, which was forcibly imposed on the Indians. In her book she explained Indian customs, myths, and beliefs."

"Have you heard of Bishop Baraga?" asked a young priest. "He was a priest here at Metlika, and later he worked as a missionary in America. He wrote a book about the life and manners of Indians. He also wrote a dictionary and a grammar of Chippewa and Ottawa languages."

"I have heard there is a process for his beatification, but I never had a chance to read any of his books or visit Sault Ste. Marie, which was the centre of his missionary activity. When I was younger, living in northern Ontario, I didn't know about Baraga. Now, I am old and I don't like to drive that far. A lot has changed for the Indians since Baraga's days. White men introduced the Indians to alcohol, as well as other unhealthy habits. Alcoholism is now one of their greatest problems. Alma Green told me that many Indians who abandoned their own faith and embraced the faith of the newcomers were disappointed at the way Christians live their religion in practice. I myself am ashamed of the way

Indians are treated in Canada. They are worse than second-class citizens. The average Canadian knows more about Italians, Portuguese, Jews, or Poles than about Indians."

Andy was surprised at the relaxed way the priests and seminarians were talking to him. The whole atmosphere was entirely different from the solemn hush of sixty-three years earlier, when his uncle Anton had celebrated his first mass. "What happened to Uncle Anton?" Andy asked his brother as they drove back to Ljubljana.

"I heard he was good priest. People really liked him. He wasn't arrogant or authoritarian. He lived like the rest of the villagers, not like a lord."

Franc took two weeks off work to show Andy around the country. They visited numerous museums and galleries. There was so much that Andy wanted to see and learn about his homeland: things that would probably never have interested him if he had not emigrated to Canada. At a tavern in Ljubljana Franc met an old friend and proudly introduced his brother, the artist from Canada. "Andy, this is my friend Borut. We've known each other since the war. We fought in the woods together."

"What shall we drink?" asked Franc's friend. "I know, we should celebrate this occasion with Canadian whisky. Three times Canadian Club," he shouted at the waitress. They were served promptly, while other guests waited for an hour to pay the bill. "At times it is really good to know people," remarked Borut smugly. When the glasses were empty, Andy offered to buy a litre of wine. "Wine is for peasants, isn't it, Franc?" said Borut arrogantly. "Let's have another whisky." Andy's thoughts wandered as Franc and Borut discussed people he knew nothing of. Then Borut turned to him. "Franc told me you are a recognized artist in Canada. How are your paintings selling? You have your own agent?"

"I don't sell my paintings," answered Andy. "That's prostitution. American art is the greatest prostitute. Agents are producing artists with the speed of a conveyor belt." Once started, Andy could not stop. He continued to develop his theme as if he had been invited to deliver a lecture on art to the guests at the tavern.

Franc squirmed as he listened to his brother's speech about God, in the presence of his friend. It was a tenet of Yugoslavian communism that there was no God. Borut finally managed to break into Andy's impassioned speech.

"Andy, how do you like it here?" he asked, seeking a neutral topic.

"I cannot really say. I haven't seen much. From what I've seen, I think people here have become too greedy and arrogant. You live like Americans, not realizing that one day you will have to pay for this. You've sold yourselves to America, and you believe that you can become like Americans overnight. It doesn't work that way."

"We haven't sold ourselves to anybody. Our country is neutral. We would not give up the freedom we won through great sacrifices," Franc said defensively.

"You don't even know what freedom is. Economically, you are so dependent on America that she could wipe you off the map of Europe with her little finger. Have you ever thought what your freedom would be like without American loans? America is not as altruistic as you think. You fell into her mousetrap. As long as there is any cheese in it, you don't care about the future. When all the cheese is gone, you'll realize what a stupid mistake you have made. It will be too late then. The Slovenes have overreached themselves. Everyone wants an easy job. Nobody wants to stay on the farms any more, and peasant life is belittled. Fields are uncultivated, while Slovenian women bake their bread from imported American flour. A pickaxe is feared by Slovenians as a crucifix is feared by the Devil. Even waitresses and sales clerks are looked down upon."

"That shows that we are a civilized European nation," remarked Borut. "Unlike our 'southern brothers,' who fight among themselves over who can go to Slovenia to dig the trenches. Why shouldn't we let them do that hard manual labour? Our people prefer to go to Germany where physical labour is better paid."

"This economic policy will come back to haunt you some day."

"Let's go home," said Franc, visibly embarrassed. At home he was unable to control his anger. "You seemed to be enjoying making trouble for me. You have no respect for me and my friends, and even less for our social system. I thought you were different. All your letters of praise for the new regime here—I suppose that was all phoney. Nothing is right for you, not here and not there. You behave as if only you know everything: the rest of us are all just naive idiots. If you ever shame and humiliate me in front of my friends again, I'll kill you."

For the next few days Franc avoided his brother as much as he could. "Don't take it too personally, Andy," said Ana. "Franc has had these moods from time to time ever since his war years." Andy tried to imagine how terrible his brother must be feeling. First, Franc had lost his Catholic faith after seeing so-called Christians slaughter people in the name of God. How could he believe in God after everything he had witnessed during the war? He had willingly embraced a new faith, the faith in Man, convinced that people were civilized enough to live according to the principles of brotherhood and equality without God's help. Andy's words must have awakened his conscience. In a society in which everyone and no one was responsible, Franc had no one to vent his frustration on but Andy, who had forced him to examine this society from a different perspective.

While picking wild mushrooms by himself, Franc thought about exactly the same thing. He knew that Andy was right, but he resented him for having the courage to say such things. When he came back, he apologized to Andy. "Here, take this to defend yourself against the American gangsters. Maybe life there isn't really as beautiful as I thought."

"What is this?" asked Andy, shocked.

"It's a gun: the real thing. I took it from a German soldier."

"This gun is from the man you killed?"

"I didn't kill him. I had a chance to, but I couldn't do it. Since there was nobody around, I let him go when he begged me for his life."

"Did you ever see him again?"

"He visited me with his family a few years ago. I showed him the gun. I don't know why I kept it all those years. Now I'm sure I can let go of it. Take it with you to Canada."

"Franc, I don't fight with guns. My pictures are my weapons: that's why rich people don't appreciate them. With my paintings, I am fighting for the poor and underprivileged. As long as I stay poor like them, I am in no danger. Gangsters only attack the rich and those who gain their wealth dishonestly. Believe me, there are a lot of those in America. The same thing will happen here, if you follow the American way. People will come to hate the communists because of those who abuse their positions of power and cast a bad light on all Party members. I believe workers' self-management would be the best system in the world if only all people were honest. The principle of equality is on paper only, while in practice communists are becoming capitalists, changing the laws to suit their purpose as they go along."

Franc had to agree with Andy. He was an honest communist, but that didn't mean that all Party members were honest. He had never bothered to look at them with a critical eye. As a former freedom fighter, Franc had managed to climb the corporate ladder to the highest position in a small state-owned firm, but he was still living in a rented apartment in Ljubljana, while those who chose to exploit their positions had private chauffeurs and villas on the Adriatic.

Andy was bitterly disillusioned by what he saw of Slovenian art and artists. Over the years he had maintained a belief in a uniquely pure Slovenian art. But from what he could see, most of the current work had no moral foundation. Artists produced according to the demands of the market, within the limits set by the country's ideological system. The more ambitious young artists embraced the principles of modern American art in order to gain world recognition. For years Andy had dreamed of how his art would be welcomed and acclaimed in his homeland. Yet nobody had shown much interest. Though he had been interviewed at

length by the daily newspaper *Delo*, the reporter had not wished to hear about Andy's painting, but rather about his adventures in Canada. After only four weeks, Andy returned to Canada.

DISILLUSIONED

It was not until Andy was back in Canada that he was hit by the full force of his depression. His house of glass, built on an idealized notion of socialism, had shattered. There was no other refuge for his creative imagination. When he had seen how religion, art, and politics were susceptible to corruption, he had lost the hope of heaven on earth. He felt alone and helpless to change anything. There was so much injustice in the world, and no one seemed to give a damn! People went about their own business thinking only of today.

Scientists worked vigorously to find ways to produce more goods, more energy, more weapons. Modern technology was becoming ever more elaborate, pervasive, and dangerous. Everywhere were the scars of machinery: in once-unspoiled forests and lakes; on farmland disappearing under pavement; on the animals, the rivers, the air itself. Worst of all was the constant threat of nuclear warfare that could instantly destroy the whole earth. What could an unknown artist like Andy do in such times? He felt that to speak against science and technology would be seen almost as speaking against God.

Andy expressed his anger and his disillusionment with science and technology in an abstract painting that represented a strange beast attacking a horse. The painting is executed in a geometric, fragmented style showing the influence of cubism and is dominated by sombre greys and lurid oranges. A totemic face grins maniacally; the horse's head, reminiscent of those in Picasso's *Guernica*, screams. The full magic of this painting was not revealed to Andy until much later, when it was hung upside down at an art show and people admired the image of a genie. Andy himself was amazed that he was thus able to express the opposing images of good art

and technology and bad art and technology at the same time. A beast is an upside-down genie, just as a genius is the inverse of a beast.

At that time, Andy considered *The Stumping Bull* his best painting, because it represented his last attempt to rebel against society and a whole world ruled by false moral principles. Having immortalized his statement on canvas, he no longer cared what happened to him, or to the world for that matter. In his despair he often reached for the whisky bottle. He withdrew even from the few friends he had in Hamilton. Television became his only companion. Often, he would lie on the couch all day, watching television, a bottle in his hand. He was hardly aware of the passage of time. He lost interest in painting. He could not read the art and history books he had brought from Yugoslavia. He wanted to die, but death wouldn't come. His outbursts of anger were now directed at the television set. After hearing bad news, he often attacked the set with an empty bottle.

On July 1, 1972, a full-page article about Andy, appeared in the Hamilton paper *Arts and Facts*. The writer, Michael Gowling, described Andy as the kind of artist the rebellious youth of the seventies would love to look up to. In the article, Gowling explained Andy's distrust of art schools and commercial art, as well as his admiration for true artists whose aim is to break established traditions that corrupt art. The article praised his revolutionary artistic spirit and his philosophy of art. An instant friendship sprang up between Andy and Michael, which touched Andy deeply. Unfortunately, Michael left soon after for South America.

Andy felt he was needed to guide and inspire young artists who found themselves cut off from their roots, searching desperately for meaning and purpose in their lives. But there was now a small movement of young artists interested in social change and open to views of art like Andy's. He finally felt his art was needed. He still had so much to tell the world and he did not want to waste any more time.

On August 4 1974, an article about Andy by David McFadden, one of the leading modern poets of Hamilton, was published in the *Spectator* under the heading "Good-bye Picasso, Hello Stritof." Among other things, McFadden wrote:

> Now that he's 70, Andy Stritof is getting all his energy together to make one last bid for fame. Up until April of this year he had just about given up. He was drinking heavily and watching too much TV in his small apartment over a King Street hamburger joint.
>
> But for the past few months he's had no time for booze or TV. With a fiery vigor that would be the envy of a man half his age, he's been turning out some of the best paintings of his long, lonely and strange life.
>
> Stritof had just celebrated his 70th birthday in April when the news came that his beloved hero, Pablo Picasso, had died.
>
> Stritof doesn't answer questions directly and its hard to determine just what Picasso's death meant to him.
>
> But one of Stritof's few friends reports receiving an excited phone call a few days after Picasso's death. "Picasso is not dead. His spirit has visited me. I've got one hell of a painting for you to see. Come over right away," the friend quotes Stritof as saying. Since then he's been turning out a stream of wild landscapes, surrealistic still-lifes and haunting imaginary portraits. Perhaps he feels the world wasn't big enough for Picasso and him both. And now that Picasso is dead, he can take over.

Andy did not mind the personal revelations in the article, but he was angry at McFadden's speculation on why he refused to sell his works. It was not the big money Andy was after, nor earthly fame, as McFadden seemed to suggest, misapplying Andy's quoted words: "If a man lives the ideals of the suffering artist and doesn't do any harm, does good if he can, turns his back on money and doesn't get too involved in this materialistic world, then maybe his

paintings will have some significance for future generations. They will become a national treasure, more valuable than gold."

That summer, Andy was invited to exhibit at Hamilton's Gore Park as part of the annual Festival of Friends. There he met a Mrs. Zonta, a Slovenian art lover living in Hamilton. "I am so glad I finally have a chance to meet you," she said. "I've heard so much about you and I am eager to see your paintings."

"I've got just a few here today, but if you are really interested, come to my place and I will show you my whole collection." A few weeks later Mrs. Zonta visited Andy at his apartment in a new pensioners' building on Hamilton Mountain. A simple, compassionate woman, she listened patiently for hours while Andy explained his complicated theories of art. "This is my best picture so far," he said, pointing to a portrait combining elements of a woman and a flower. "It's called *Metamorphosis*. This will be worth a fortune some day. Critics compare it to Picasso's work."

"Can I buy it? How much do you want for it?"

"You have no money to buy this painting." Mrs. Zonta was disappointed. Could the painting really be worth that much? Andy would not even allow her to make an offer: he simply told her he did not sell his paintings. "The way I see it, selling my paintings would be like prostitution. Would you sell your children? My pictures are the only thing I have. They are my children."

Mrs. Zonta felt sorry for him, living alone with no friends or relatives to visit him. He was an old man now, unable to drive. Seeing how excited he was to have somebody to talk to, she promised to visit him again; eventually she became his only Slovenian friend in Hamilton. Every time she visited him, she brought him home-made chicken soup and *potica*. Andy was touched by her generosity and appreciated her motherly concern.

He was still in good health but he missed Slovenian company more and more as he grew older and old age also brought his childhood memories to the surface. Now however, he had found a person with whom he was comfortable enough to share them. One moment he would weep like a child and the next he would scream and curse, as if the whole world were his enemy. Mrs. Zonta felt

a bond with him because he was her countryman. She made it a habit it to visit him several times a year, and at Thanksgiving she usually invited him to dinner. Andy reciprocated by giving her some of his paintings. He felt she was worthy to receive them.

A Supreme Creative Experience

Late in 1974 Andy's spirits were lifted by meeting an art critic and historian whose views of painting resonated with his own. Barry Lord, *Toronto Star* art critic, education director for the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and former editor of *Arts Canada*, was visiting his native Hamilton to promote his new book, *The History of Painting in Canada*. Andy found both the book and the eager young man's conversation refreshing.

Lord saw art not as an aesthetic or decorative pursuit, but as a social and political act. A member of the Canadian Liberation Movement, he railed against paintings that served the interests of the art-buying bourgeoisie, and especially against colonial dependency in Canadian thinking. His book distinguished between truly Canadian art and art that slavishly followed that of the colonial masters: France, England and, in the twentieth century, the United States. For him, the best Canadian art reflected the struggle of the Canadian working people for freedom and dignity. He championed Emily Carr for her courage and her vigorous depiction of a living native culture. Among living artists, he discussed seriously not only such well-known painters as Greg Curnow and John Boyle, but also unknowns like Jan Wyers and William Panko, who portrayed working-class life from the inside. "I wish I had known of you before I produced this book," he told Andy when he saw paintings like *Miners*.

Andy had long felt that his belief in a moral imperative for art put him on the outside. And now here was someone with academic credentials who dismissed art for art's sake and insisted on the role of art in day-to-day life. Their views were not identical: Lord did not recognize the spiritual aspects of art that were so important to

Andy. But they found so much common ground that Andy's hopes for Canadian art soared.

After an article about Andy appeared in *Rodna gruda*, a magazine published in Ljubljana for Slovenes abroad, he was visited by a young woman, eager to see his work. From the pile of his sketches, a few woodcuts caught her attention. "When did you do this?" she asked, pointing to a small portrait of Tito.

"During the war, I knew he would become a great man some day. Unlike King Peter, who escaped to London, Tito stayed with his own people. He was an intelligent and independent thinker. He stood up to the Russians and after the war, to the Americans. Look at him now: the whole world respects him. He travels around the world as an ambassador of peace. He has managed to unite the third world countries so that their voice is finally heard by the superpowers."

"This is strange. Most of the people I met in Canada are afraid to speak favourably of Tito. I personally respect him very much. Having been born after the war, I cannot really judge who was at fault for splitting up our nation. All I know is that life in Yugoslavia is much better now than before the war, especially for poor people. At least they have decent housing, free medical care, free schools, old age pensions... . As long as Tito is alive, people feel safe and secure."

"He is a very charismatic leader. Even anti-communists admire him."

"It is very interesting that you sensed this about him thirty years ago. I think he would be very pleased if you gave him this picture when he comes to visit Canada," suggested the young woman.

"It's a state visit. Nobody will be able to get near him with all those political immigrants protesting. The Canadian police will be very strict. There's no way I can get near him."

"I didn't mean it that way. The Yugoslav consulate in Toronto can arrange it."

"I'm an old man and I can't move around. I can't even go to the consulate to get a visa."

"If you want, I will see to it that he gets this picture. Leave it up to me." There was no time to arrange for the presentation of Andy's gift to Tito at the time of his visit to Canada. Andy had almost forgotten about it when he received an official letter from the president's office in Belgrade, thanking him on Tito's behalf for the thoughtful birthday present.

Andy's only companions in his lonely apartment were television and books. He preferred reading to playing cards and bingo with his fellow pensioners. He had brought some history books back from Yugoslavia and was now eagerly reading them in search of his roots. He wandered back through thousands of years of history, past two world wars, past the beginning of Christianity and into the pre-Christian era. Along the way he stopped at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Napoleon had attempted to re-create the Illyrian Provinces in what was to become Yugoslavia. He read how the Protestant Reformation had led to the first book written in the Slovenian language and to the first Slovenian translation of the Bible. He was moved by descriptions of the old Slavic rituals practised as far back as the sixth century among Slovenes when they installed three dukes at Carinthia, and he was proud to learn that these dukes had not held hereditary office, but had been chosen by the peasantry in one of the earliest known systems of democracy in the world. Andy read of St. Cyril and St. Methodius of Thessalonica, missionaries to the Slavs, who in the ninth century laid the foundations for the Slavic alphabet, *Glagolica.*

Andy was also fascinated with mythology and linguistics. In the rich Slovenian religious traditions he recognized the influence of old Celtic customs and beliefs: the worship of heroes, the admiration for trees, hymns in the form of folk ballads. Established Christian rituals also hid strong Slavic influences. In the intense devotion of Slovenes to Mary, Mother of God, Andy recognized the ancient worship of Ziva, the goddess of love, and Vesna, the goddess of spring.

With all this knowledge fresh in his mind, Andy turned to an analysis of modern art. As he saw it, art had developed so far

along its complex paths that there was no farther to go. The only way to renew it was to turn back to simplicity: to reverse things. This reminded him that Michael Gowling, in his letter from Colombia had described a work of art consisting of a lighted sign with lettering that could be read forward or backward. He remembered something from the Bible about the sign of the beast. Playing with English words, he came to a strange combination: "God-dog." "This is it," he said to himself: "this is the sign of the beast." Words seemed to him to embody a mystery, like his picture of the beast that was an upside-down genie. He grew even more ecstatic when, playing with English and Slovenian words, he realized that the Slovenian word for "God" is pronounced like the English word "book." It says in the Bible that God is the word, and the word was with God. Continuing his plays on words, he realized that the word "Jesus" is composed of two words: the first part—"jes" (dialect for jazz)—means "I" in Slovenian; and the plural of "I" is "us" in English.

Exhilarated by these discoveries, Andy felt as if he had been raised to a new plane of existence where everything is known and understood. Passages in the Bible, illuminated by new information, seemed to acquire a new meaning. The names of Ljubljana and of Slovenia itself suddenly took on profound significance, as if the whole biblical message were centred on them. Ljubljana, which means beloved city, was built as the Roman city Aemona in the year AD 14 by the Emperor Augustus for retired Roman soldiers. In a frenzy of free-associating thoughts, Andy heard a passage from the Bible: "And I will give these people a city, and the city will be called Beloved city...and even unto them I will give my name." God's name is "Love," and this word is hidden in the word "Slovenia," as well as in the word "človekčlovek," the Slovenian word for man. It was the magic of words and rituals, thought Andy, that made religion so powerful and mysterious.

Alone in his apartment, Andy's head buzzed with unbidden thoughts and associations. Though longing for a drink to calm himself, he realized he should avoid alcohol in this volatile state of mind. This was a new experience for him, quite different from

the creative trances he had experienced in the past. He felt like Adam after eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. He would have given anything to return to a simpler state of mind, to regain calm.

Then a strange vibration passed through his whole body and he lost all awareness of himself. He felt possessed of a terrible intelligence. He was spiritually united with Cankar, Preseren, Van Gogh, Picasso. He was able to understand completely all those geniuses and their works, not in a way that he could explain to anybody, but internally. He saw all of the stories of the greatest Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar in pictures, and the thought passed through his mind that he had neglected Cankar, that he should have enlightened Canadian Slovenes, and Canadians at large, with Cankar's spirit of infinite love for his mother, for his homeland, for God. He felt the presence of God, His goodness and righteousness, as if God were sitting opposite him looking into his soul.

Taking his pencil, he started to draw. He felt that he was drawing the whole of humanity, the whole universe, that his drawing captured God himself. When he woke from his trance, a drawing lay in front of him. A few clean lines and flat areas of black composed a simple outline of a woman holding her baby in her arms—no fancy clothes, no colours.

The drawing seemed to him an image of God, who is maternal love, the essence of life. He realized that his hand must have drawn that picture on the piece of paper but felt he could take no credit for it. It had not been his mind that conceived that sublime image. That was Andy's last original drawing. In the years to come he had neither the need nor the desire to paint anything else.

New Friends

On the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Ivan Cankar, Andy had a showing of his art work at the Bled Slovenian Mutual Benefit Society in Beamsville, Ontario. At the opening, a man approached him and said, with a grin, "I see, this is the type of painting you like to do."

"Do I know you from somewhere?"

"I used to work for you two decades ago. You haven't changed a bit. You still look the same."

"Tony, is that really you? Where have you been all these years?"

"All over the States. In Chicago, most of the time."

"What brought you back?"

"I just couldn't stand it any more. People are much nicer here; the air isn't as polluted, the streets are safer and cleaner. Besides, all my relatives are here. It gets lonely living all alone in a foreign country."

"You don't have to tell me about that. Come and visit me on the Mountain sometime."

After Tony moved to the village of Fenwick, near Niagara Falls, he often visited Andy. Many times he took him to Slovenian dances and concerts, especially when guests from Slovenia were performing. Andy was surprised at the success of Slovenian immigrants, for when he had first come to Canada, Slovenes in British Columbia met like lone birds at Slavic taverns. Now they were gathering at their own community centres, which were mushrooming all over Canada, and at Slovenian churches in Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, and Winnipeg. Slovenian immigrants and their descendants in Canada now numbered over sixty thousand. Quite a number from such a small nation!

In 1981, a few weeks before Christmas, I was in charge of an exhibition of Slovene-Canadian artists organized by Radio Club Slovene Evening in Toronto. At the suggestion of my brother Tony, we invited Andy Stritof to display his paintings. That was my first opportunity to meet Andy. A day before the show he came to stay with us in Toronto for a few days. He was taller than I expected, and through daily exercises, had managed to retain his athletic figure even in old age. His bushy hair and short moustache were snow white. He reminded me of a wise old man from a fairy tale.

At first he was very quiet and almost too polite. He tried very hard not to mix English with Slovenian. But as soon as we broached the subject of art, he took over the conversation, as if he had become a totally different man. Before going to bed, he took his paintings from a box and spread them around his room, as if he were afraid to sleep by himself in a strange place.

Andy's pictures were completely different from those of the two other Slovenian artists in the exhibition, Zora Forlani and Janko Cadez, and they did not attract much attention, except for the colourful *Musicians*, which in spite of their mask-like faces appealed to our music-loving people. Andy was overjoyed that he had a chance to show his paintings to Slovenes in Toronto. That night he was too excited to sleep.

"God reigns through art," he said to me when we were sitting in the living room late at night. "If you are a poet, you should know that all Slovenian poets talked about God. Aškerc wrote, 'Don't believe in false prophets who preach about God in heaven: God is your conscience, your mind, your understanding.' God is the creative power that transcends and re-creates. I searched for God and I did not find Him in some theological dogma, nor in universities. He doesn't hang on the walls of the churches, and He doesn't teach at art colleges. God is the creative intuition that each man possesses. Those religious paintings from the past are no good for today's time. Those old portraits of saints and martyrs were anything but the images of suffering people. They all looked as if

they just came from the beauty salon. This was in direct contradiction to biblical teachings, which praise the beauty of the soul.

"What is beauty? Beauty is sublime. The artist should not paint beautiful things: his art ought to be a beautiful thing that will arouse in people the feelings of inner beauty. Artists today look for the essence of things. Today's artists try to express a psychological mood—the suffering of Christ and martyrs. All that trumpery in the churches is a thing of the past."

I listened attentively when Andy tried to explain modern art, which had never interested me before. He laid out the photographs of his paintings on the table as though he were playing solitaire. "These are my most important works," he said, indicating the top row. "This is *First Snow*." He pointed to a photograph of a large painting reminiscent of the style of the Group of Seven, showing rough brown and green brush strokes, with patches of white here and there.

"Is that your best picture?"

"I don't think so, but the art critics say it is. They judge by Canadian standards, and this picture satisfies the taste cultivated by the Group of Seven. It captures the magnitude of the Canadian forests as well as movement in nature."

"This one reminds me of the works of Emily Carr, because of its simplicity."

"The works of the Group of Seven are too simple, if you ask me. They don't say much. Look at *The Lumberjack*. There are a lot of messages in this picture. This captures psychology as well as history." His eyes were fixed on a photograph of one of his largest oil paintings. Brightly coloured geometric forms formed the shape of a man holding a saw, a hook, and an axe.

"I guess you have to have some imagination to understand this painting."

"This is cubism, but it's not as fragmented and complicated as some of Picasso's works. You see how the man, his tools, and the space around him are all handled in a similar way, because the man has become somewhat mechanical, the tools somewhat human, and the space as real and solid as the objects in it."

"I like more realistic paintings, like *The Indian. The Lumberjack* looks strange to me."

"My friend, Mrs. Zonta, likes this one best," said Andy, pointing to a picture that was half flower and half woman. "She fell in love with it the first time she saw it."

"What does it represent?"

"This is surrealism. I call the picture *Metamorphosis*."

"But what is the metamorphosis?"

"I cannot say exactly. It represents some kind of transformation."

"What kind of transformation?"

"Do they still sing that song, "Beautiful, Beautiful Flower Mary" in Slovenian churches?"

"Yes. I don't think that song will ever die. But what does that have to do with this painting?"

"St. Theresa, one of the greatest Christian mystics, was nicknamed Little Flower. I supposed you know that."

"Of course. I am named after her."

"Why is it that you can accept without question a woman being called a flower, but you find it so strange for me to paint a woman as a flower?"

"I guess it's harder for me to imagine visually. If you suggested to somebody that this is Mary or St. Theresa, they would think you were crazy. Maybe you can sell this image as Vesna, the Slavic goddess of spring. I supposed it's in human nature to reduce everything in the natural world to human form: we paint flowers with eyes and mouths, we make animals talk in human voices. But it doesn't work the same the other way round. I guess that's the price we pay for higher civilization. We're moving away from the animal and vegetable worlds. The comparison with vegetables is reserved only for those terminally ill, who are tied to tubes and life-support machines."

"And you said there wasn't much meaning for you in this painting," Andy interrupted me. "What an interesting conversation it has generated!"

"I didn't say the picture wasn't nice or interesting. I just said I wouldn't want it in my home. It belongs in a gallery, where the right people can see it."

"Now you're talking!"

"I mean it. Most of your pictures are too powerful for home decoration. I wouldn't want to look at *Miners* all day long. It would make me terribly depressed thinking about the suffering of people. Staring at *The Stumping Bull* all day would drive me crazy. These pictures are impressed into the mind even after a brief viewing. Many of your pictures have the power to provoke the viewer to contemplate them, to work out the mystery, to try to figure out the secret message. But maybe there has to be some common interest for that to happen. I might be interested in buying *The Lumberjack*, because the subject has deep meaning for my husband. He works with wood and he could hang the picture in his office, where people with similar interests would see it. However, I wouldn't want to hang it in my living room even if you gave it to me."

"I admire your honesty."

"Well, what to you intend to do with your paintings?"

"They are my children. They are the only thing I have. I need to have them with me. They are my afterlife."

"Your children are now almost thirty, forty years old—and they haven't done much for you. They should at least make their father proud of them. They can't do that as long as they are hidden in your apartment. What will happen to them if you should die?"

"The people from Ottawa will search for my paintings. It usually happens that way. After an artist's death everybody searches for his paintings. Look at Emily Carr, or Picasso."

"You aren't Emily Carr, or Picasso. You haven't sold any of your paintings, you haven't made any effort to get your paintings in the right places where people could see them. How can you expect that somebody else will do that for you after your death?"

"Because I am a recognized Canadian painter and my pictures are national treasures."

"That's what you think. You might just as well take your pictures to the grave with you—nobody will miss them. You should have exposed them to the Canadian public, even if it meant selling some of them." This brought Andy back to reality.

"My honest and righteous God did not give me millions of dollars, but he gave me enough pride and independence to live a decent life and fulfil my purpose. I am convinced that I will still be around by the year 2000. It doesn't matter where my bones are buried, what is important for me is where my soul is going to hang."

"It will be great if you can live another twenty years, but you never know when you are called to say good-bye to this beautiful earth. At your age, you should make some arrangements in case you get sick."

"I have the instructions in my will."

"Did you make special arrangements for your paintings?"

"Not really."

"I think you should. How else could anybody know what to do with them? Have you ever thought of donating them to an art gallery? Bozidar Jakac donated the whole collection of his work to a gallery in Slovenia. At least that way you could be assured that they would get into the right hands."

"Thank you for the suggestion. I'll write to Ana, my sister-in-law, and ask if she could find out what can be done about my paintings." The memory of his homeland brought tears to Andy's eyes. He cried like a child when he told me about his mother, who sold their homestead, about his father, who died when Andy was only five years old, and about Franc, who had been buried at the Žale Cemetery just over a year before.

Seeing this side of Andy's personality made me realize how painful it can be to be all alone in a foreign country. From then on, I often invited Andy to our home. Even my relatives included him in their family gatherings. He was happy to be in our company. He felt a new interest in life and he even started to think about

painting again, but his trembling hands and his bad eyesight made this impossible. Convinced that he would be able to arrange a solo exhibit in Slovenia, he looked forward to a visit to his homeland.

Old Age

By 1984, when Andy visited his homeland for the second time, his brother had been dead for several years. His nephew Andrej was in his late teens, playing the guitar in a rock band. Ana, who was still as friendly and affectionate as Andy remembered her from his previous visit, arranged with a friend, a retired policeman, to drive Andy around. Together they visited museums, galleries, and other interesting places. However, Andy wasn't able to make any arrangements for his paintings. Whenever he tried to talk to somebody about them, the subject was swiftly changed. Nobody had enough courage to tell him that art galleries in Slovenia were not interested in the works of an emigrant painter who had never had a solo exhibition in a major gallery and whose paintings were not selling. There were plenty of artists in Slovenia whose fame reached all the way to New York. Why should they bother with some stubborn old man whose work had never been shown outside that lunch-pail Canadian town?

With mixed feelings, Andy returned to Canada, where his trip to Yugoslavia faded to a pleasant memory, something he could think about when he was depressed about the disturbing world news he heard on television. When Andy spent Easter with my brothers, my husband and me, he brought up the subject of the future of his paintings. "I would like to donate them to Canadian Slovenes. I don't want any money for them, just a guarantee that they will not be sold. I don't want anybody to sell my paintings, not ever. I'd like to give them to somebody honest, somebody who will keep them for future generations."

"You can try some Slovenian clubs, or the church," Tony suggested.

"Nobody there cares about my paintings. They prefer to hang posters on their walls. How can I entrust my paintings to them?"

"I've worked with many clubs, but I can't say that anyone is interested in your type of art," said Louie, my husband. "I can try to use my connections to see if some Slovenian gallery would take them."

"Ana has already inquired there, and she told me to sell the pictures and bring the money if I decide to move to Slovenia permanently. No one there wants them, and she has no room to keep them at her place."

"Have you decided to move back home?" Louie asked.

"I can't go anywhere until I settle things about my paintings. I've got to make some kind of arrangement for my pictures. The way I see it, I might just fall asleep one day and never wake up. I want to make sure my paintings won't be sold at some garage sale or flea market. People here are so stupid, they might even throw the pictures away and sell the frames."

"I thought Mrs. Zonta was responsible for your pictures, if something should happen to you."

"She is only responsible for removing my things from the apartment, in case I die. She wouldn't know what to do with them. I want my work to stay together for future generations of Canadian Slovenes. Maybe some day someone will appreciate what I did. These pictures represent fifty years of my hard labour, my life struggle. They represent all my knowledge about life and about the world. They are the expression of my Slovenian and Canadian mind. They are a national treasure that no money can buy."

"I know you value your paintings a lot, but that's not the way the rest of the world judges them," I tried to tell him gently. "It's the same with my poems. I can get the bad ones published, but my best poems get rejected. I know they're good, but I cannot convince anybody of their greatness. It's frustrating. It makes me so angry at times. The only consolation is the fact that it has always been that way."

"This is what I mean by a 'struggling artist.' All great artists had a hard time getting their ideas across."

"How many artists in the past had good ideas but did not succeed?" I mused. "I guess you have to be at the right place at the right time and you have to have good connections as well. Today, good connections are most important, more than the quality of the art."

Andy started to cry. He realized he had missed his life's opportunity. He felt like the man in the *Bible* who had buried his talent in the ground. There was so much he wanted to tell people with his paintings, but there were no viewers to receive the message. No gallery wanted his paintings, not even as gifts. He had spent almost half a century in the company of artists and had got nowhere with his paintings. How could he expect someone else to make him famous after his death? "Would you take care of my paintings?" he asked me plaintively. "I can't stand the thought that my children will become orphans."

"I can't just take your paintings. What would I do with them?"

"You have children. They can keep them for future generations."

"But I don't know anything about painting."

"You are the only person who really understands me. You can learn to understand my pictures as well."

"What makes you sure?"

"I can feel it and my feelings are never wrong. Besides, I am sure you would not sell my pictures, since you don't need money. You are an artist and you will know what to do with them."

"I can't take this responsibility."

"You have many relatives. Together I am sure you can handle it. If you find time and money for other things; surely you can take the responsibility for preserving these paintings for the future generations of Canadian Slovenes."

I had now come to care deeply for Andy. When he put his cause so movingly, I felt that I could not turn him down. We had several family meetings and decided we would do what we could to help realize the old man's dream. According to Andy's wish, the Andy Stritof Trust Fund was established, with me and some of my relatives as trustees. Andy set only one condition: we were to

preserve his paintings as if they were our own, and we were to make them available to all clubs and organizations that wished to exhibit them. It was Andy's wish that somewhere along the road the trust fund would be incorporated as a charitable organization to serve the needs of Slovenian Canadian painters. He even hoped that some day Slovenes would have their own art gallery in Toronto.

So in the fall of 1985, Andy decided to give most of his paintings to the Andy Stritof Trust Fund. It was hard for him to part from his paintings. After he had taken them down from the walls, light patches were left to remind him of the pictures he had displayed in his apartment for decades. We all knew how painful the renunciation was for him. So Louie and I invited Andy to spend some time at our house helping us sort the paintings and preparing them for an exhibition in Ljubljana at which Slovenian emigrant painters from all over the world were to display their work. As he left his apartment, he told us he felt like a father who was taking his children on a long trip.

"There is one picture I would like to give you," he said, as he looked at the city from Hamilton Mountain. "It's the painting that was most highly praised by Canadian critics. Bill Powell is keeping it at his gallery. Can we stop at his place first?"

"Hi, Maestro!" Bill exclaimed when he saw his old friend at the door. When Andy explained the arrangements, Bill generously offered us help and encouragement. He seemed delighted that someone was trying to help Andy achieve recognition. Turning to Louie, Bill said, "Andy is like a father to me." The friendship that radiated from the way they embraced and the way they talked confirmed Bill's statement.

Andy stayed in Toronto for a week to help me sort his paintings. Some of them were framed in cheap wooden frames impregnated with an odour of cigarette smoke that could not be washed away. Some of his wooden boards were painted on both sides; I needed Andy's advice in deciding which side to frame. Many of his pictures had no titles, and some were not even signed. He was glad when he finally put these last touches on his works.

"We also have to talk about the philosophy of my paintings," Andy said, after we had taken the paintings to be framed.

"Philosophy is not my area of interest," I told him. "That's for intellectuals."

"My philosophy is very simple, like my picture *Mother Nature*. The Earth is the Mother of everything. The Sun is like a Father. When the Sun kissed the Earth, a child was conceived. And this child is everything. Without the Sun, there would be no life on the Earth. This is poetic mystery. A fantasy. Life itself is a mystery.

"Art is a lie that explains the truth, as Picasso put it. Art is harmony, and this harmony is God. God is a man and woman creating a new being. God is the feeling of love, of perfect unity. God is not an instinctual sex drive, just as true art is not self-gratification, but serves some higher principle. The love of God is the joy of creativity. Man is creative when he is filled with the love of God, when he is totally united with God. In that state of mind, a man is not even aware whether he is a man or woman: he is not aware of himself. In this unconscious state of mind, an artist tries to understand the mysteries of life. God guides him through his mysteries, revealing to him the things that are hidden from other people. I can paint those secrets as long as I am in that state of mind. When I wake up, I cannot correct or add anything, even if I am consciously aware that something is missing. That's how I painted the picture *The Light of the World*."

"That's the abstract that looks like a lantern, isn't it? There's an hourglass on top of a funny looking grey face, where the light ought to be, and a split globe on top of the hourglass. That could be an excellent picture if you had finished it."

"I realized the picture was unfinished, yet I wasn't able to finish it. The picture is finished when it is unfinished. This is a paradox, then, as all knowledge is a paradox. We know that the potential for our human knowledge is unlimited, yet we have to live as if we already had the knowledge that God is gradually revealing to us, yet we don't know where, when, or how it will be revealed. Like pilgrims we travel in dim light. Like the night owl, the artist waits in the darkness for a spark of new wisdom with

which to augment the light of the world." Andy rambled on from one association to the other, but always with the same deep earnestness. I listened in amazement as he continued his monologue.

"Art is not the pursuit of some ideal canon of beauty. An artist struggles to realize the spiritual value innate in himself in relation to the world in which he lives. His purpose is to create form that embodies the psychological content of what he perceives and of his emotions in response to the world he lives in. Idea for an artist is form. His emotional life turns into form: tenderness, nostalgia, desire, anger are in him, and so are many other impulses, more fluid, more secretive, often more colourful and subtle than those of other men.

"As the ancient Pythagoreans said, harmony is the unity of variety and the agreement of contrasts. The principal law of art and life is equilibrium, which results from the balancing of opposing forces. The artist describes the experiencing of these forces as emotional tension. The artist's mind is a turbulent sea full of all kinds of expressions, responses, and experiences, as well as feelings and emotions. The artist might not have more of these feelings and emotions than an ordinary man, but in an artist these feelings and emotions are in a more agitated state. He is more concerned with them, and the urge to express them is more intense in him. That's why an artist's mind is more troubled than the mind of another. In the artist, the demand for continuity is more intense. He realizes that the human mind is not limited to a single life span. It is impossible for a man to sever his connection with the past, just as it is impossible for him to prevent his own influence on the future.

"The spiritual life to which art belongs is a complex movement above and beyond. The causes of the need to move forward and upward are obscure. The path often seems blocked and destroyed. But someone always comes to the rescue; someone like ourselves in everything, but with the secretly implanted power of vision."

"So are you now talking about prophetic art?" I interrupted. "This really interests me. But can you explain in it simpler terms?"

"Prophetic vision is God's gift, which is often felt by an artist as a heavy burden he would gladly relinquish. Scorned and disliked, he drags the heavy weight of resisting humanity."

"I don't understand," I said. "If prophetic talent is God's gift, then it must be something beautiful, something joyful."

"It is, in a way. The feeling that you follow Christ, that you are disliked and rejected because you follow His way, can be uplifting: a sweet kind of suffering. As Cankar said, 'The humble man and our nation and the entire human race will have to shed bloody tears in its Gethsemane before it will achieve its final emancipation. And like Him, humanity will be mocked, scourged, betrayed, and crowned with the crown of thorns by the Pharisees of the world. It will have to blunder through doubt, confusion, and despair before it attains its final salvation, for despair is the mother of the deepest faith and the greatest courage.' This is how he explained the meaning of suffering."

"I guess this self-sacrificial attitude is our common Slovenian heritage," I said. "This striving for perfection is both our blessing and our curse. I suppose this is the reason that you cannot accept the capitalist way of life. It goes against everything we ever believed in. This accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few goes against our Christian principles." I said.

"I cannot sell my principles. I would rather starve."

"In true art, there are no compromises, because the creative image is a statement embodying the artist's apprehension of reality as he experiences the world in his consciousness. If the resulting image is good, it acts as a bridge between the heart and mind of the artist and the heart and mind of the viewer, who gains new insight into the nature of things.

"My aim is always to get hold of the magic of reality and transfer this reality into painting. To make the invisible visible through reality. This might sound paradoxical, but it is in fact reality that forms the mystery of our existence. One of my problems is to find the self, which has only one form and is immortal—to find it in animals and man, in the heaven and the hell that together form the world in which we live. In art, intuition

becomes more and more conscious, and instinct more and more purified. They together become an intelligence which is not simply of the brain, which does not calculate, but which feels and thinks."

"What you're saying reminds me of Jung's writings on self and collective unconscious," I interjected when Andy paused for breath. "Perhaps you were misunderstood here because you hold on so stubbornly to our Slovenian cultural heritage. We were trained to believe that self-consciousness was a virtue. The striving for material success was considered wrong. Yet we were also trained to be individualists and independent thinkers, at no matter what price. The examples held up to us were so lofty that we could never measure up to them. We are part of that determined Slovenian nation that refuses to succumb to foreign domination. Slovenian immigrants have refused to disappear in the American melting pot. I guess this Slovenian treasure is our pride and our sorrow at the same time."

"We have every right to be proud of our national identity. I am convinced that our nation has an important historical mission in the world: to build a bridge between the east and the west. We, the Slovenian artists, have a historical obligation to guide people towards truth and righteousness," Andy replied.

"I guess many Slovenian artists of today have relinquished this historical obligation. Slovenian prophets have fallen asleep, just like those knights of King Mathias," I noted.

"Artists will never die out. God made sure of that. Believe me, those knights of the round table will wake up one day and defend the dignity of their people."

HOME AT LAST

By now Andy was over eighty years old. He was no longer able to paint. His hands were unsteady and his eyesight was deteriorating. But he was still alert, and he loved to talk about art. For the first time in his life he was truly happy, as if he had received affirmation of his spiritual afterlife. Now he had much to live for. He wanted to see his paintings hung in a suitable place where people could see them. Two of his paintings, *The Lumberjack* and *The Stumping Bull*, had been accepted by the Exhibition of Emigrant Artists, organized by the Slovenian Emigrant Association, which was to be held in Slovenia in October 1985. Andy was looking forward to his trip to Slovenia and wished he could take his entire collection, but since other Slovenian artists from all over the world were participating in the show, the number of works per artist was limited to two. It was the first show of this kind, and Andy was glad to be invited. He insisted on going himself so that he could meet other artists and possibly make arrangements for returning permanently to his native country. He returned from Slovenia somewhat disappointed, but his pride prevented him from telling anyone what had happened there.

Around Thanksgiving, he had a serious argument with Mrs. Zonta about the disposition of his paintings. "You could get a lot of money for your paintings," she protested, "and you just gave them away to those people for nothing. You don't even know those people. Can't you see they're just taking advantage of you?"

"I don't need your advice," Andy answered, "or your protection. I'm not a baby. I'm old enough to know what I am doing. And I'm not that senile yet: I just made a trip by myself to Yugoslavia. Thanks to those people in Toronto, I have seen my pictures hung in the biggest cultural centre in Slovenia. Thousands

of Slovenian people have seen my pictures at Cankarjevdom. I know I can trust those people. Believe me, I know good people when I meet them."

"Before you know it, they're going to sell your paintings. You should have sold them yourself," she replied. But when she saw how hurt and defensive Andy was, Mrs. Zonta apologized and tried to soothe him. "I'm sorry, Andy. I just want what's best for you."

In the winter of 1985 Andy's health started to deteriorate. Seeing how other tenants of the building died almost unnoticed, he became depressed and restless. The fear of death was in the forefront of his mind. He had difficulty taking care of himself. It was harder and harder for him to do his shopping and cooking. To ease his loneliness, my brother and I often took him to our homes for the weekend, but we realized that he needed more help than we could provide. We lived too far away to see on him every day. We often tried to suggest that he make arrangements so that he wouldn't have to worry about daily chores, but he was too proud to admit that he could not take care of himself. One day he called Tony at eleven o'clock at night. He sounded so distraught that Tony could hardly understand his speech. "Can you please come over? I don't think I am going to make it through this night," he pleaded.

"What's happened, Andy? Are you sick? Should I call an ambulance?"

"I don't need an ambulance. I need a friend. I need somebody to talk to. I'm going out of my mind." When Tony got there, he found Andy in great despair. "Everything is going wrong for me," Andy said to him. "I've lost all my life's savings. I've lost my bank book. I can't remember where I put it. What's happening to me?"

"You're getting old, Andy. That's nothing to be ashamed of. It's perfectly normal for an old man to become forgetful—and worried and lonely. You should be proud of the way you've handled your life until now. I only hope I reach eighty in such good health as you. But once you pass that mark, it's time to make

some better arrangements for the future, to let other people worry about things that you shouldn't have to deal with."

"It's not just the money. Your bank book will turn up somewhere, and even if you don't find it, they still have records at the bank. It's your whole way of life that you can't handle any more, and that's why you get frustrated. At your age, you shouldn't be carrying groceries all the way to the tenth floor. You shouldn't be doing your own cooking and washing. All those chores are draining your strength. You are physically and emotionally exhausted. You ought to make some better living arrangements for yourself. You can do that now when you still can, or you can wait until you get really sick, at which time the government will make the decisions for you. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but I think I ought to be honest with you, because you are my friend. It is not shameful to admit that you need help. You still have a choice about your future. You can spend these last years of your life cooped up in this lonely place, or else you can move to an old age home. Or you are still well enough to go to Slovenia and stay there with your sister-in-law."

"I don't want to go to Ana. I don't want to be a burden to anybody."

"If you don't want to stay at her place, you can go to an old age home there. At least you will be among your own people. In old age, a man likes to speak his native language. It might be a friendlier environment for you in Slovenia. Besides, with your Canadian old age pension, you can afford to go to the best nursing home there." Now that Andy's worst fears were out in the open, he felt much better. He realized that Tony cared for him enough to tell him the truth. He did not have to pretend to Tony any more.

"I am helpless. I can't just pack up and go. I can't arrange for my documents, and I can't get this junk out of my apartment. I'm stuck in this place."

"You're not stuck here. You have friends who can help you, but you have to tell us what you want. We can tell you what your options are, but you have to make your own decision."

"I can't stay by myself in this place another winter. My legs are sore, and my mind isn't as clear as it used to be. I can remember everything from my childhood, but I can't remember where I put my bank book a few days ago."

It did not take Tony long to find Andy's bank book, hidden between the pages of an old *Bible*. After carefully considering what Tony had said, Andy decided to move back to his native land. Tony helped Andy obtain the necessary documents at the Yugoslav consulate and helped him with all the other arrangements. By the end of the summer Andy was prepared for a new beginning in his homeland, where Ana had arranged for him to be accepted into the best old age home in Ljubljana.

In Toronto, a farewell party was given for him in the suite that had served as a temporary gallery for his paintings. Since Andy did not have many friends to invite, he was surprised to find the rooms filled with people who showed great respect for his paintings. Most of the Slovenian-Canadian painters and art lovers were there, and even two priests from the Slovenian church in Hamilton attended. His drawing *Mother and Child*, the product of his last intense creative experience, attracted the most attention, much to his satisfaction. "This is Mary!" Andy exclaimed. "This Mary has no crown, no rings on her fingers, no elegant clothes. She could be white, black, red, or yellow. This is our universal Mother, who can be imagined according to each person's fancy. God himself made this picture. By myself I wouldn't have been able to draw a picture like this so simply."

"The more I look at this picture, the more magical it seems to me," I told him. "If I focus my eyes on the centre of the picture, I see a fetus in the womb. If I look at the outside of the picture, I see a mother with a baby." Andy smiled faintly: his mind drifted away. For a moment, perhaps, he retreated to that perfect place, where motherly love reigns, where the Creator unceasingly cares for all his children, even for the unborn babies.

Andy cried like a child when it came time to say good-bye to his paintings—his children. He was comforted by the thought that he was leaving them in good hands. As a reminder of his paint-

ings, he took with him an album of photographs so that he could show them to the people back home. Parting from Canada was even harder than parting from his pictures. After sixty years, it was very difficult to leave, for he was bound to the land by a lifetime of memories, happy and sad. Over the course of six decades, Andy had watched Canada develop into one of the greatest industrial nations in the world. Together with other Canadians, he had rejoiced as Canada severed its colonial ties with Britain and became an independent member of the British Commonwealth. As a naturalized British citizen, Andy had automatically become a Canadian citizen and had proudly seen the maple leaf flag replace the Union Jack and *O Canada* become the country's national anthem. Together with other Canadians, he had feared for the future of this land when the Quebec separatist movement of the 1970s threatened to pull it apart.

Andy was proud of the small part he had been able to play in building this country. He was especially glad that his pictures, which represented six decades of his life in Canada, were going to stay here to remind future generations of Canadian Slovenes of the history of immigration. To the collection of his paintings, Andy added his extensive book collection. In his time, he had spent many hundreds of dollars on books—books on art, philosophy, politics. He had thought of donating them to a library back in Slovenia, but nobody there was really interested in old books. His furniture was in such bad condition that not even the Salvation Army would take it. The rest of his belongings were packed in a single suitcase, which he took with him to Slovenija.

Andy left Canada almost as he had arrived: with a bag of clothes and some personal necessities. The voyage was different, though. He was flying aboard a Yugoslavian plane full of Canadian pilgrims travelling to Medjugorje. "Are you with the group, too?" the woman sitting next to Andy asked.

"Which group?"

"I thought you were travelling to Medjugorje."

"I've never heard of that place," replied Andy.

"You know, the place where Mary is appearing to six farm children."

"Mary appeared to me once, and nobody made pilgrimages to see my place. I drew her with little Jesus in her arms." From his travelling bag he pulled out a photograph of his drawing *Mother and Child* and handed it to the woman. "This is how Mary appeared to me. I hope you will find healing for your soul in my homeland." The woman gave Andy and his picture a quick, half-embarrassed glance, then started to say her rosary.

Andy sat thinking of heaven, where poets, writers, painters, philosophers, theologians, scientists, and all good people are seated at a round table like the knights of King Mathias. Later he clumsily positioned the earphones on his head to listen to his native music. More than half a century before, when he was on his way to Canada, the Slovenian boys had entertained themselves by singing folk songs. The memory of their eager young voices blended with the music of Slak's Orchestra on the headset. Their song, *Over the Clouds*, seemed like a new anthem for the returning emigrants.

I felt the pain for many years,
I had to hide my tears,
I wish to go back home again
To see my youth-time peers.

Tears filled Andy's eyes as he listened.

The series Ethnocultural Voices presents the experiences of individual immigrants and members of ethnic groups. Usually the experiences narrated are those lived by their narrator. *Unhappy Rebel: The Life and Art of Andy Stritof,* however, is told by a fellow Slovenian who, through a fortuitous meeting with Stritof, became interested in both his life and his art.

Andy Stritof was no typical immigrant. As his biographer relates, he was one of the many young men who came to Canada in the 1920s and had not had time to establish themselves before the onset of the Depression. But he was unusual in that he became an artist in a country not then hospitable to the arts, and that he responded to rebuffs by refusing to sell his paintings. He was probably also unusual in developing a strong if idiosyncratic attachment to an adopted country in which his experiences were so often bitter.

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