

It was 5am on a balmy January morning when the round mechanical clock began its daily clanging to alert Mikel to rise and shine. A massive hand from him comes down hard on the top of the clock to quiet the noise.

“Why does this sound have to be so obnoxious?” muttered Mikel.

Without answering Bella pulled up the covers over her head and rolled over.

Mikel begins his morning ritual the same way his father did and his grandfather before that. Feet into boots. Heavy coat put on. A trip to the outhouse. Every morning Mikel wishes he had the money to convert to indoor plumbing. It will have to wait yet another year because he has other plans for now. But Mikel’s thoughts this morning are on birds. He is looking forward to the arrival of spring for it will also bring the migrating crane (*grus grus*) back from Africa. Sometimes he can look out across the fields and see one of the long legged creatures scavenging for insects, seeds, or grass. Their dirty white and grey bodies always seemed to Mikel as needing a bath. He once told some friends that he saw one swooping into a field and it had a wingspan of 9-10 feet. None of them believed that cranes can get that large. They were probably correct. Anyway, Mikel liked these birds.

The winter cold abruptly awakens Mikel as he steps outside. The moisture from the Lyna River and the easterly wind adds to his discomfort. Business has been taken care of and Mikel goes back into the clapboard house. The door is securely tightened but the cold still penetrates into the room.

Mikel is the third generation Kohanow dairyman on this land and is now 43 years old. His parents were Elijah and Rebecca. They had four children, two boys and two girls. The oldest child was Benjamin and it was his right to inherit the farm but there was some sort of falling out between he and his father, Elijah. Benjamin packed his bags and was never heard from again. Rumor had it that he moved to Turkey. Mikel did not want to receive the farm in this manner but he does his best, which actually has been quite good.

Elijah was the oldest of three boys born from Noah and Deborah Kohanow. Noah labored 57 years on the dairy farm. He worked as a laborer for 9 years, before he bought the property. Mikel was told by Elijah that there are no known living ancestors. It was fortunate for Mikel that Bella was able to bare Jozef, since it was a tough pregnancy. She could not conceive again.

As Mikel creeps back into his bedroom Bella is beginning to stir. She will get up and have a nice fire going by the time Mikel returns from the morning milking. After fully dressing for the task at hand Mikel goes to fifteen year old Jozef’s room to rouse him. The sun will not appear for another hour.

Father and son make their way out to the barn where the 11 cows are waiting. Two cows are tied to a rail and the milkmen pull up their stools and buckets. Little conversation between the two of them occurs at that hour. Udders are emptied and the process gets repeated for the next bovine in line. Mikel begins to pour the milk from the buckets into the large milk cans through a strainer. Four cans were filled. Mikel smiles and ponders the bounty and mumbles to himself, “More than normal.” Jozef doesn’t respond, but then at this early hour, words are a premium. Mikel transfers the milk into the bottles while Jozef goes about feeding the chickens. An expected warmth greets them as they enter the house and the smell of bread brings smiles to both.