

Chapter 1

“Anna! Anna!”

Anna heard Mama’s soft voice calling from the house.

“I don’t want to hear,” Anna whispered. “If I can’t hear Mama call, I won’t know she called,” she reasoned aloud. Covering her ears with her hands, Anna sat still. “Anyway,” she went on to herself, “last night Tatus [the word Polish children used for Daddy] said he had a hard time listening when others tell him what he should do, and I’m like Tatus!” She sighed as she thought about her Seventh-day Adventist preacher daddy, Michael B. Czechowski.

Anna didn’t hear her mother’s second call. Time passed. Anna took her hands from her ears and listened. She could hear the breeze swishing around in the top of the evergreen trees; she could hear the brook babbling as it went around rocks; she could hear a squirrel complaining above her; but Anna did not want to hear her mother calling her. She picked up a sharp stick and started writing. She forgot all about the call. The wobbly letters which she wrote read Anna Czechowski.

People pronounced her long Polish name funny ways. Some people called it ChaCOWski, and Anna would smile. The C-O-W in the middle reminded her of the cow Tatus bought for \$28. She and Ludomir, her brother, had to feed her each morning. Some people pronounced her name with a “Z” - Zachofsky - and that sounded funny too. Tatus told her to say Cha-HOF-sky, and that sounded just right to Anna.

She didn’t hear Mama until she saw a shadow on the ground in front of her. Anna looked up quickly. Trying to forget the faint call she heard a few minutes before, she asked sweetly, “Oh, Mama, did you want something?” Mama’s face did not look happy.

“Anna, you heard me call, didn’t you?” her mother asked.

Anna looked at the ground.

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Mama spoke sternly, "Anna, you must learn to listen, or someday not listening will get you into trouble. Right now you must come to the house. We have company, and it is almost time to eat."

Anna looked around. She hated to leave the breeze blowing through the trees. She hated to leave the singing water. She hated to leave the squirrel, but when her mother spoke in that tone of voice, Anna obeyed.

The path back to the cabin seemed much farther than when Anna had gone outdoors to play. Anna questioned why it was all right for Tatus not to listen and she had to. It didn't seem fair to her eight-year-old mind. Maybe Tatus could help her understand.

Mama sat her on a stool facing the wall. This was punishment because she had not listened. She sat, her hands folded in her lap, her bare feet swinging back and forth. Tatus and a man that Anna recognized, Elder Loughborough, came in from outside. They did not seem to notice Anna as they talked.

"Michael," John Loughborough said to Tatus "you told me it has always been hard for you to take advice. Please listen to me now. Remember when your parents didn't want you to become a priest and you convinced them to let you enter the monastery anyway? You didn't listen to them."

"I did well as a priest," Michael Czechowski interrupted.

"You told me you wouldn't listen to your friend who tried to convince you not to go to your parents that Christmastime when you were surrounded by Russian soldiers. You were almost captured. Again you wouldn't listen to your friend."

"God protected me from the dogs and the soldiers," Czechowski interrupted again. Then he added slowly, "That was the last time I saw my parents."

"Michael, you are not listening to what I am saying. You got the letter from Mrs. White telling you that coming to New York was wrong. You let me read the letter. I know you moved then to the

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Champlain Valley, but you are now planning to go back to New York. Are you not listening again?"

"I'm not made to live in the country. I'm not a farmer. Besides, that letter was written two years ago." Czechowski answered.

"I know what it is to get advice from Mrs. White, Michael," Elder Loughborough went on. "I know because I ran away from what God wanted me to do once. My wife and I went to Iowa for a while, and I worked as a carpenter because times were so hard. I'll never forget Mrs. White's question when she came across the river to where I was. She asked me, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' I didn't want to hear what she had to say either, at least not then, for I knew I was doing wrong. I will never again turn from what God asks me to do. Never!" John Loughborough spoke with quiet determination. "Michael, her advice is right. Listen. I beg of you."

"No one understands about Europe, John. Not even you. You haven't been there." Tatus spoke up quickly. "The Good Book says, 'Go ... into all the world.' That includes Europe. The General Conference could send me."

"I know what that letter from Mrs. White said. Be patient here, Michael. God wants you to wait until you are called by the church to go. Wait until the church calls you, Michael. Wait."

Anna sat on her stool. Her feet had quit swinging back and forth. She wished she could see Tatus' face, but she was facing the wall. "Did Tatus need to learn to listen too?" Anna wondered silently.

Just then Mama called, "Time to eat." And Anna jumped down from her stool and ran to the table. She heard her mother very well this time.

One Sabbath Tatus suggested, "Let's all go to Perry Mills today." Anna jumped up and down with happiness. During winter Mama, Ludomir, and Anna had to stay home, but now it was summer. Today they would all go with Tatus, where he was to preach.

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Tatus quickly harnessed their horse to the wagon and drew up in front of the house. "Everyone in. We want to be there in time for Sabbath School," he called as they hurried out of the front door.

Anna's eyes darted from one thing to another. Everything looked beautiful - the woods, the violet-colored fireweeds, even the dusty, twisting road. Anna didn't want to close her eyes for a second for fear she might miss something.

Mama held year-old baby Michael and let Anna sit on the outside of the seat. She could reach out and touch the soft ferns and flowers as the wagon went by. The soft leaves felt good on her hand.

Once a mother partridge and her family walked into the road in front of them. Anna watched mother partridge fly to the side of the road and one after another of the little balls of down flew after her and landed in the low branches, listening for the "all-is-clear" signal. One little ball stood defiantly at the side of the road in plain sight, as if he didn't hear his mother's call. The horses' hooves drew close, splashing mud on the little bird. Anna gasped. "Please listen, little fellow, to your mother."

Mama didn't say a word about not listening, but Anna saw her look at the little partridge and then back at her. Anna squirmed a little wishing her mother didn't remember what had happened.

They finally came to Brother Whipple's house at Perry Mills, where the meeting was to be held. Anna had learned to sit quietly during the preaching, which sometimes lasted two hours.

Tatus spoke in French to those gathered, and Anna listened. "Jesus is coming again," he began. "He has promised!" Anna's round eyes followed Tatus as he spoke. He reached into his "preaching box" and brought out a picture of an idol. "God has a plan, and that plan is working." Anna watched as Tatus pointed to the idol's head of gold, chest and arms of silver, thighs of brass, and legs of iron, and finally to the feet of iron and clay.

After they had lunch another meeting started. This time Anna slept, her head in Mama's lap. Then it was time to go home.

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“We’d better hurry, or the rain will beat us home.” Tatus pointed to the dark clouds.

“Maybe you should stay here until the rain passes,” Mr. Whipple urged.

“No, thanks, Brother Whipple,” Tatus answered. “Probably won’t be more than a few sprinkles.”

“I’ve lived here all my life, Brother Czechowski, and sometimes that rain falls like a waterfall from the sky. If I were you, I would wait at least an hour until the storm passes,” Mr. Whipple suggested.

“I’m not afraid of a few sprinkles.” Tatus smiled as he shook the old farmer’s hand. “Thanks for the advice anyway.”

“I hope we all get wet, really wet,” Anna whispered to herself as they all climbed into the wagon. The rumble of thunder almost guaranteed her wish coming true. The horse pricked his ears forward; then the wagon swayed as he trotted down the bumpy road.

Anna looked ahead. As far as she could see, the two ribbons where the wagon wheels went kept going uphill. Overhead the sky grew even darker. The thunder warning rumbled more often. Anna covered her ears to shut out the loud noise.

Mama handed her a scarf to cover her long braids as the first drops of rain fell. The tree leaves kept the rain from hitting them for a while, but when they came to a clearing, huge bucketsful of water seemed to pour from the sky just as Mr. Whipple had warned. Anna squinted to keep the rain out of her eyes. Tatus’ hat brim drooped. Ludomir’s hair made little points on his forehead. Anna’s and Mama’s scarves dripped.

Anna put out her hand and caught the cold raindrops in the little cup her palm made. She wasn’t really thirsty, but she took a sip of water from her hand anyway. She stuck out her tongue and caught the raindrops on it. They tickled as they hit her tongue and slid down her throat.

Mama laughed. “Don’t we make a droopy-looking family?”

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Anna and Ludomir laughed at that. By now the horse's mane lay in pointed little bunches as the rain traveled down his neck and back. His hooves kicked up little balls of mud that fell along the road behind him at each step.

Tatus started singing a French hymn to help them forget the cold rain and the wind. One by one Mama, Anna, and Ludomir joined him. The cold rain and the breeze that now blew in gusts made them all shiver.

Anna sat up straight when she heard the loud clap of thunder far off in the distance. As suddenly as the rain started it stopped. She shook her head, and little droplets of water sprinkled on her mother and Ludomir. She rubbed her eyes with her fists to get the drops off her lashes.

Anna reached out and touched a wet flower and watched the droplets fall to the ground.

Soon their little home came into view. Anna knew that she would have to put on dry clothes when they got there. If Tatus would have listened to Mr. Whipples' advice, she would not be cold and shivering now. For the first time Anna wished that Tatus would have listened to the advice given him.

Tatus pulled back on the reins as they reached the door. "Whoa, boy," he called to the horse. The family climbed down. Little Michael, who had slept all the way home under a warm blanket, woke up and looked around. Tatus took the horse to the barn. Anna watched him go.

"Come in, Anna. You must get out of those wet clothes." Mama's voice reminded Anna that she was wet and very cold. She shivered as she walked into the house.

"I hope you won't catch a cold from getting so cold," her mother worried as she pulled off Anna's wet dress.

Anna tried not to sneeze but couldn't keep it in, "Ker-chew, ker-chew."