

ANTANAS MAZILIAUSKAS

FAMILY HONOR

*A Lithuanian family saga across generations of fathers
and sons, mothers and daughters*

First published by Antanas Maziliauskas 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Antanas Maziliauskas

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

Antanas Maziliauskas asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Translated from Lithuanian and expanded by Antanas Maziliauskas, assisted by DeepL Translate

Translated and expanded from:

Antanas Maziliauskas. Šeimos garbė. Published: Kaunas, Antanas Maziliauskas, 2025

ISBN 978-609-08-0766-8

Bibliographic information is available on the portal of the Lithuanian Integral Library Information System (LIBIS) ibiblioteka.lt

Second edition

*Advisor: Kęstutis Maziliauskas
Editing by Eglė Pupkevičiūtė*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.
Find out more at reedsy.com*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	v
1 A WARRIOR'S LEGEND AND FAMILY ROOTS	1
2 RELOCATION FROM DOKIAI TO PAALU- ONYS. FIRST FAMILY EMIGRANTS	22
3 FIRST STEPS ON NEW LAND	39
4 A HAPPY BUT TRAGIC BEGINNING	50
5 THE STEPMOTHER	59
6 BIG FAMILY NEEDS	67
7 A CHILD'S DREAMS AND FIRST LESSONS	73
8 FIRST TIME IN KAUNAS	79
9 CONSTRUCTION OF THE SAMOGITIAN HIGHWAY	87
10 BY STEAMER ON THE NEVĖŽIS RIVER	91
11 LIVING WITH THE LAND: SWEAT, BREAD, AND HOPE	95
12 THE ROMANCE OF A NIGHT ON THE HAY	104
13 VILLAGE OUTING AND FIRST FEELINGS	107
14 WHEN THE HEARTH FIRST STIRS	115
15 THE DARKENING SKY OF 1940	122
16 THE TRIALS OF WAR FOR FAMILIES	128
17 THE POST-WAR WAVE OF EMIGRATION	138
18 POST-WAR HARD TIMES. NEW RULES	144
19 PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF LAND AND FREEDOM	150
20 THE PRICE OF LOVE AND SURVIVAL	159

21	A FATEFUL MEETING	164
22	HOW FAMILY AND WORK MATTERED A GIRL	169
23	THE START OF A TWO-PEOPLE'S JOUR- NEY TOGETHER	180
24	A HOME FULL OF JOY AND HOPE	190
25	JUSTICE OR PUNISHMENT? THE HARD- EST FIGHT	195
26	BACK BUT A STRANGER	209
27	STRENGTH AND TRAGEDY IN ONE	215
28	FULL PROMISES, EMPTY PLATES	220
29	PROFESSIONAL BREAKTHROUGH	226
30	THE FLAMES THAT STOLE THE PEACE	233
31	HOMES RISING AGAIN AND NEW DREAMS	237
32	WHEN CHANGE BEGAN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE	242
33	POSTMEN	248
34	A GHOST OF THE PAST	252
35	SINGERS	256
36	MEMORIES COME FLOODING BACK	260
37	EDUCATION - HOPE OR COMPROMISE?	267
38	THE FAITH THAT UNITES: THE FEAST OF ST IGNATIUS	270
39	A CHANGED VILLAGE BUT THE SAME HEART	275
40	FAMILY TREE: NEW LEAVES BUT THE SAME ROOTS	280
41	LOOKING TO THE PAST, WAITING FOR THE FUTURE	285
42	THE JOY OF FREEDOM AND A RETURN TO THE EARTH	288
43	THE END OF LIFE - PEACE OR UNFUL- FILLED HOPES?	292
44	LONELINESS LEFT BEHIND	295

45	Epilogue	298
46	About the Author	300
	<i>Notes</i>	303

Preface

“FAMILY HONOR” is a Lithuanian family saga based on the real Maziliauskas family. This English edition adds chapters about family members who emigrated, showing how the family’s legacy has grown across borders and generations.

While this novel is a work of fiction, the names and key dates of the family are authentic. Some names of those interacting with the main characters have been changed for privacy or narrative reasons. Residents of Paaluonys village may still recognize many familiar names.

The idea to publish an English translation, expanded with historical context and new chapters on the family’s emigrants, followed the strong reception of the original Lithuanian edition of “ŠEIMOS GARBĖ”. This English edition directly addresses requests from readers abroad whose descendants no longer speak Lithuanian, allowing them to explore their family history and culture. It also gives international readers a straightforward way to discover Lithuanian traditions, heritage, and the universal themes of resilience, honor, and family bonds.

I aimed to keep the family’s story authentic and accessible to English readers. Themes of migration, heritage, and perseverance may resonate with readers of all backgrounds.

This edition honors the spirit of all families whose stories shape history, culture, and memory.

A WARRIOR'S LEGEND AND FAMILY ROOTS

A deep, windless night settled over the forests and maples. The sky was clear, with a few stars glimmering between slow-moving clouds. No road could be seen—only narrow paths winding through the woods, traced by wild animals and the rare wandering traveler. The wind whipped through the tops of the trees, occasionally shaking and swinging the majestic firs, tearing off their cones, which rattled softly on the forest's moss floor.

In the distance, where a stream meandered along the edge of the valley, mysterious fog banks lurked. The water trickled quietly between the stones, occasionally stirring the surface and echoing the hoots of owls far away.

Suddenly, a horse neighed in the stillness—a low, strained sound that carried both exhaustion and pain. From the shadow of the trees, a rider appeared—a young man swinging in the saddle, his chest covered in blood, sticking to his uneasy horse. His eyes glowed with fever, his legs barely steady in the stirrups. Every breath he took was heavy, but he still had

a purpose—to find shelter, to find salvation. But his eyes dimmed, the world merged, and the last of his strength left his body. With a breathless sigh, he fell from the horse straight onto the moss, spreading his arms as if to reach for fate itself.

The night shrouded the forest in mystery. Only the horse, as if sensing its master's fate, snorted, anxiously pounding the ground with its hooves. But there was neither movement nor response. Only the distant hoot of an owl and the breath of the wind caress the endless field of the unknown.

The morning was crisp, the river's waters shone with silver reflections, and the meadow was still foggy from the night. Morta, a young girl from the village of Dokiai, went to the stream to wash her clothes. But suddenly she stopped. By the river, a little further on, behind a large stone, stood a horse—big, powerful, with a bridle shining in the morning sun, but restless. His eyes were wild, his nostrils flared, and his feet dug at the ground.

The girl's heart began to beat harder. She took a step closer. And then she saw a young man lying there—covered in blood, tired but breathing softly. His hands were bloody and earthy. The sword, still pressed in his palm, testified to a recent battle. But who is he? From where? Why is he here?

"Who are you?" Morta whispered, unable to take her eyes off the young warrior.

His face was tired and bruised, but even through the injuries, she could see his strong, bold features.

She knelt down and gently touched his shoulder. The warrior barely flinched, but didn't look away. Morta listened carefully—she heard quiet but heavy breathing.

Morta looked around to see if she could see anybody else, and then quickly made up her mind. She could not leave him to

his fate. Morta quickly called her father and brother. The two men came running, picked up the wounded man, and carried him into the hut.

He was feverish and cursing, but didn't say a word. Two weeks passed before the young man was back on his feet. But one thing was clear—he had no memory of who he was. Not his name, not his past.

Only the horse and the weapon indicated his origins. The stranger had strong hands and a sharp mind.

Although he was injured, he gradually recovered, began to help with farm work, and became involved in family life. Morta's father allowed him to bring logs from the forest, and soon he built his own hut nearby.

The young man's industriousness was admired by the locals, and his eyes were increasingly drawn to Morta.

At that time, rumors began to circulate in the village that the young man had arrived with a destiny. Who is he? Is he from the royal army? How did he come to be here?

Morta and her father gave him a name that has always symbolized the bravery of a warrior—Martynas.

One day, when he was tidying his horse's saddle, he noticed a word scratched into it that was barely legible. Carefully arranging the frayed individual letters, he read "Mazilewski." "Could this be my family name?" he whispered, running his fingers over the saddle leather. And so a new surname appeared in the village—Maziliauskas.

And that was just the beginning... Martynas made a life for himself in the Dokiai, and in time, Morta's heart responded to his courage and tenderness. Their love was simple but strong, like the land itself, on which they lived happily ever after, raising children and enjoying grandchildren.

* * *

“It’s a beautiful legend, grandson,” said Kazimieras with a sigh to Jonas, who, although only four years old, listened empathetically and seemed to be deeply moved by the young soldier’s life. Kazimieras moved closer to the stove, where the fire crackled, warming the cozy hut. Jonas, curled up next to him, listened to the story he was hearing for the first time.

“He may have been my great-grandfather, who didn’t know who he was, but he was the beginning of our family,” said Kazimieras, cuddling his little grandson close to him. “He came with destiny, and our family continues the story he started.”

“Grandpa, do you think he was a prince?” Little Jonas asked curiously, looking at Kazimieras with sparkling eyes.

“It may be, grandson,” the old man smiled. “But does it matter who he was before that? What matters is what he became. He built a home, a family, left us his name, and a great honor.”

“But if he was a knight, why did he stay here? Why didn’t he go in search of his kingdom?” Jonas moved closer.

Kazimieras looked at his grandson and whispered, “For the true kingdom is where your heart is. Where your family, your people, and your land are. And, grandson, always remember—you may lose your name, but never your honor.”

“Grandpa, what is honor?” asked Jonas after a short silence, tilting his head and looking at Kazimieras with curious, wide eyes.

Kazimieras smiled, sighed deeply, and tapped his fingers on his old but sturdy oak stick.

“Honor, my grandson, is more than a word. It is more than

your name, your actions, the promise you make, and how you keep it. It is your conscience that follows you every step of the way.”

He paused for a moment, as if trying to find the right words for a small child to understand a big concept.

“Honor is what people will remember about you even when you are gone. It’s how you treat others, how you stand up for others if you need to. Honor is also your blood, which flows from one generation to the next, passed down as your greatest asset.”

Jonas moved even closer to Kazimieras, his forehead furrowed with fine lines of thought.

“But, Grandpa, can honor be lost? Can it be exchanged?” There was anxiety in his voice.

Kazimieras slowly nodded his head.

“A man can lose everything—his wealth, his land, even his name. But if he doesn’t give up his honor himself, no one will take it from him. Do you know why our family has lasted so many years? Because we have always lived with honor. That’s why we are here now, Jonas, and you are growing up with our name. And you will one day have the honor of carrying on this story.”

Jonas lowered his eyes, trying to make sense of these big words. After a moment, he looked up and nodded thoughtfully.

“I will keep my promise, too, Grandpa. And I will defend everyone. Like that knight!” He thrust his small chest forward, as if he were ready to enter the battle.

Kazimieras laughed softly and took Jonas by the shoulders.

“That’s the way it has to be, my child, that’s the way it has to be. For we are all knights of our own destiny.”



It was a message that Kazimieras heard from his father Vincen-tas, which he told to his five sons Konstantinas, Vladislovas, Kazimieras, Zenonas, and Vincentas, and his only daughter Pranciška, and which he is now trying to pass on to his grandchildren. And Jonas, who is only four years old, may not have understood everything, but his little heart felt that this story was important to his grandfather, whom he loved very much, and it is important to him, too.

The fire crackled in the fireplace, casting warm shadows on the faces of the grandfather and grandson. And the moon gazed silently through the window, as if it had heard their conversation and blessedly sent light into centuries of history.

When Jonas ran outside, Kazimieras, lulled by the romantic crackle of the stove, was lost in memories...

Kazimieras's own life in Dokiai was like a small seedling, planted in the fertile soil where generations of his parents and grandparents had lived honestly and prosperously since the warrior Martynas, who probably started a new line of honorable family here over a century ago.

Located next to Vilkija and Čekiškė, Dokiai was an extremely picturesque place. Life in the village flowed quietly but with vigor, as did the nearby rivers: the Lazduona, which flows into the Dubysa, and the Dubysa, which has its majestic slopes just outside of Čekiškė, and which meanders picturesquely and flows down to the Nemunas at Seredžius.

A chain of high hills stretched towards Vilkija, right here from Daugėliškės, whose verdant slopes were filled with the warmth of the sun in summer and the beauty of white snow in winter. On the other side, above the fields and meadows,

was the Liučiūnai hill, on which the farmhouses of the village seemed to watch over the surroundings. Nearby was the great Karalگیرis, a forest that stretched endlessly and was said to have been the hunting ground of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and the Polish kings. If you went for a walk here, you were bound to come across hares, foxes, roe deer, elk, and wild boar, but you could also hear wolves howling, or even a bear crashing through the branches of a tree. And you can't count the number of birds.

Close to the village of Dokiai, like a brother next to his brother, was the small village of Dokeliai, nestled among lush trees and fertile fields. Nature was bountiful here—the scenery was flattering to the eye, and the land nourished and enriched the people.

* * *

Kazimieras's father, Vincentas, was one of the wealthy farmers of Dokiai, whose homestead was always surrounded by order and diligence. Vincentas's wealth was not luxurious, but his land, neat buildings, and hard work allowed the family to live in dignity. He was respected in Dokiai for his wisdom and fortitude. From an early age, Kazimieras often watched his father guiding the horses through the fields, tending the land, and caring for the animals, while his mother, Marijona, kept the home alive—raising the children and guarding the warmth of the family hearth. Those everyday scenes left a deep mark on him, teaching him the quiet dignity of honest work.

"Father, how do you know the land is ready for sowing?" young Kazimieras once asked as he watched Vincentas plow the field.

“You see, my son, when the earth is soft as bread and does not break into pieces, it is ready to produce a harvest,” Vincentas replied, waving his hand at the well-trodden furrow.

These lessons from his father shaped Kazimieras’s attitude to life. Working honestly and confidently were the cornerstones of his life.

Kazimieras recalled how he used to help his father not only in the fields but also in the care of the livestock. The farm had many animals: cows, pigs, horses, and chickens. These jobs instilled a sense of responsibility and diligence. His father always encouraged his son to learn and improve.

“Know, my son, that land is not just work. It is our livelihood and our honor,” his father used to say when Kazimieras helped to till the rye or pick apples from the abundant garden.

The garden was a special place. The apple and pear trees, whose fruit scented the whole farmhouse in autumn, were like a living treasure passed down from generation to generation. Here, Kazimieras learned from his father not only the secrets of farming but also the wisdom of life.

* * *

The village of Dokiai was where Kazimieras’s and Julijona’s own family built their lives and futures. The hilly fields, fertile gardens, and the sound of the forests were part of their daily life. Kazimieras’s homestead was the true center of farm life — a large courtyard surrounded by wooden buildings, including a barn for animals, a shed, and a granary. Their five sons—Konstantinas, Vladislovas, Kazimieras Jr, Zenonas, and Vincentas—and their daughter Pranciška were born and raised here.

The warmest memories flooded Kazimieras as he recalled how his and Julijona's life in the village of Dokiai took on a new rhythm when their home was filled with children's laughter.

The first son, Vladislovas, was born in 1875. This was a time when the village of Dokiai was still full of peace, and the traditional village order was the basis of every family's daily life. The birth of a baby was a special event. Julijona held the baby gently close to her heart and looked at Kazimieras with affection:

"Here's our first one—Vladislovas. He will be strong and wise like you," she said, smiling.

Kazimieras was already dreaming of the days when he would be able to teach his son the secrets of farming. But the firstborn soon fell ill and did not survive. The family's loss was heartbreaking, but life went on.

In 1876, his second son, Konstantinas, was born. From an early age, the lively and inquisitive child followed his father wherever he could. He became the first child in the family to fill the void left by bereavement.

"Konstantinas, have you seen how to cut hay?" Kazimieras once asked, showing his son the intricacies of the work.

"I've seen it, Dad, but will you let me try it too?" said little Konstantinas timidly, grabbing the scythe.

Konstantinas loved being close to his father and brothers, watching their hands and minds work.

In 1882, another son was born, and his parents named him Vladislovas in honor of their lost firstborn. This boy was calm and observant. He loved watching his parents work in the fields and listening to his father explain the secrets of farming.

"Dad, why do peas grow faster than wheat?" young Vladislovas once asked.

“Everything has its time, my son,” said Kazimieras. “Peas are like our daily routine—fast and necessary. Wheat is a symbol of patience; it bears grain only after a long wait.”

In 1883, Kazimieras was born, named after his father. This boy was creative and a dreamer, often indulging in fantasies about how to change his environment.

A year later, the family had a daughter, Pranciška. She was a quiet and hard-working girl, often spending time near her mother, learning farm work.

“Mum, let me milk the cow,” she would offer to help. Julijona was happy of such daughter’s attitude towards daily work and willingness to give a hand.

In 1889, his fourth son, Zenonas, was born. Agile and creative, he loved drawing in the sand or building hay huts.

“Zenonas, what are you building here?” Julijona asked, watching him work.

“A big mansion, Mum!” replied the boy, telling her about his plans with great enthusiasm.

Finally, in 1891, Vincentas, the youngest son, joined the family. He became the darling of the family and was happily looked after by all his older brothers and sisters.

“If Vincentas had been born first, he would have driven us all crazy!” joked Kazimieras, observing the youngster’s lively manner.

Vincentas’s pranks quickly became a source of joy for the family.

Kazimieras and Julijona tried to raise their children with love and responsibility. Each of them had their own responsibilities—some helped their father in the fields, others learned from their mother how to manage the house. Family life was simple but full of warmth, unity, and

interconnectedness, shaping their personalities and values.

* * *

At the end of the 19th century, the preservation of Lithuanian identity was not only a challenge but also a vital necessity. After the final, third partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, Lithuania and Poland ceased to exist, and Lithuania was taken into the Russian Empire. This occupation, which lasted for more than a century—up to the outbreak of World War I—had a profound impact on the national identity, language, and cultural life of the Lithuanian people.

Previously, from the 14th to the 18th centuries, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was an independent and powerful state with its own language, laws, military, and government. However, a series of wars, internal disputes among the nobility, and increasing pressure from neighboring empires—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—gradually weakened its foundations. By the time of the third partition in 1795, nearly all of present-day Lithuania was annexed by the Russian Empire.

From that point on, a deliberate campaign of Russification began. The tsarist regime set out to erase the Lithuanian language, the Catholic faith, and national identity. Lithuanian-language schools were shut down, and the printing of books in Latin script was banned. From 1864 onward, following the failed 1863 Uprising against Russian rule, the restrictions intensified. All books, newspapers, and even prayer books in Lithuanian, written in Latin characters, were strictly prohibited. Only texts published in Cyrillic were allowed.

Despite this oppression, Lithuanians found ways to resist. A movement of book smugglers (known as “knygnešiai”) emerged—

brave men and women who risked imprisonment, exile, or death by secretly carrying banned Lithuanian books from neighboring Prussia and distributing them among the people. These individuals played an important role in keeping the Lithuanian language and national spirit alive during the darkest decades of foreign domination.

In this suppression, the Lithuanian language became more than just a means of communication—it became a symbol of resistance. Families like that of Kazimieras made a tremendous effort to preserve their language, teaching it to their children in secret, at home, away from the watchful eyes of the Russian authorities. Passing down the language became not only a practical necessity but also an act of defiance and cultural preservation.

When the Russian imperial government closed Lithuanian schools and prohibited instruction in the native language, a quiet resistance began to grow in the countryside. At the heart of it were the daraktoriai—humble, self-taught teachers who traveled from village to village, bringing education to children in secret.

These were often ordinary people—farmers, former seminarians, and literate young men and women—who were moved by a sense of duty to preserve their language and culture. They would stay with local families, sometimes for days, sometimes just for a night, teaching children to read and write in Lithuanian. Their tools were hand-copied texts, smuggled prayer books, or grammar primers printed in East Prussia—where Lithuanian-language printing was still allowed.

Lessons took place in barns, in kitchens after dark, or in attic corners—anywhere that prying eyes wouldn't notice. Payments were modest, often in the form of food, eggs, firewood, or shelter.

But their work was dangerous. Teaching Lithuanian in the Latin script was illegal. If caught, daraktoriai could face fines, exile to

Siberia, or imprisonment. Despite the risks, their commitment never wavered. Each child they taught represented another soul who could read, pray, and think in Lithuanian—another voice in the national resistance.

Like the knygnešiai (book smugglers), daraktoriai became quiet heroes of Lithuanian history. Though not always mentioned in official chronicles, they were vital to the survival of the Lithuanian identity. They carried more than books—they carried hope.

* * *

Kazimieras's commitment to teaching his children Lithuanian is a telling example of this quiet resistance. Through everyday life, songs, stories, and prayer, the language was kept alive within the family—even when public expression of it was outlawed. For Kazimieras, raising Lithuanian-speaking children was a declaration: "We are still here. We will not forget who we are."

This period shaped a generation of families who were forced to find new ways to preserve their identity. These families sowed the seeds of future independence. Lithuania's eventual regaining of independence at the beginning of the 20th century—in 1918—owes much to the resilience of people like Kazimieras—ordinary individuals who understood the value of language, heritage, and dignity. Growing up in a Lithuanian environment and inheriting his parents' love for his native language and culture, Kazimieras was well aware of the threat to this identity posed by the Russification imposed by the tsarist government. In schools, children were taught only in Russian; Lithuanian books and newspapers were banned, and speaking Lithuanian in public was dangerous.

However, Kazimieras, believing in the significance of his country's culture, did everything to ensure that his sons grew up understanding their roots.

* * *

One late autumn evening, when a cold wind was hitting the windows, Kazimieras brought his children to the table and said quietly:

"A special guest will arrive today. Listen, learn, because what he has to say is the greatest asset we can have."

A daraktorius—a traveling teacher—came to the homestead, whose job was not only to educate the children but also to maintain the Lithuanian spirit. The older children — Konstantinas and Vladislovas—sat at the table, while the younger ones, including little Vincentas, huddled close to the stove to keep warm.

The daraktorius took out a tattered but carefully maintained Lithuanian prayer book from his bag and started the lesson. He showed the letters, explained their meanings, and encouraged the children to repeat them.

"There's an 'a' for angel," he said, and the children watched with awe as his finger traced the paper.

Kazimieras stood nearby, running his hands through his hair and watching his sons and daughter with pride. He knew that these lessons were not only about language, but also about identity.

"Remember," he said one evening, when the daraktorius had already left, "a Lithuanian book is like a key to our past and future. He who knows his language knows his way."

Learning was neither easy nor safe. Children had to learn in

silence, often slightly whispering the letters so that no one in the neighboring villages would hear. After the 1863 uprising, the village was still living under the shadow of the tsarist government's repression, so every word of the Lithuanian press was precious.

Once, when the daraktorius was teaching Konstantinas to read the Prayer Book, the sound of a horse's hooves came from outside. Kazimieras, quickly realizing that it could be tsarist officials, told the children to hide everything. The daraktorius disappeared behind the stove, and the books were quickly hidden under the hay bales.

"Is the whole family home?" asked a uniformed tsarist gendarme as he entered.

Kazimieras, looking him calmly in the eye, replied:

"Yes, everyone here. Now, can we help you in any way?"

After inquiring about the farm and seeing nothing suspicious, the official left.

The family sighed. Kazimieras, turning to the daraktorius, said quietly:

"We have a lot to lose, but not the language. Thank you for helping us preserve it."

* * *

Evening hours at the homestead were dedicated not only to work but also to family history. Kazimieras would sit the children around the table with a kerosene lamp burning and tell them the story of his family. The children were most moved by the story of the soldier Martynas, and, like his grandson Jonas, they would ask their father questions at length. These stories were more than simple evening conversations—they

were lessons that instilled in the children a respect for their roots and a love of Lithuania.

“Our roots go back to the glorious times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,” Kazimieras began, his voice sounding solemn. “It was a time when Lithuania was strong and great, when it was one of the largest countries in Europe.”

The children listened attentively, and their eyes shone with curiosity. Even the youngest, Vincentas, although he did not yet understand the story’s importance, felt it was something special.

Kazimieras often recalled the 1863 uprising, which took place nearby. People around Dokiai told stories about the battles and the brave rebels who fought for Lithuania. Although he was only a nine-year-old child when it happened, he heard from his father about the brave men who sacrificed themselves to defend their country for future generations.

Kazimieras not only imparted historical knowledge to his children but also taught them the most important values: work, honor, and love of country. He urged them to be united and to rely on each other because only in this way would they be able to overcome life’s difficulties. This had a continuing effect: his sons grew up hard-working, respectful of their origins, and ready to continue the family line that Kazimieras had started. Their life in Dokiai was not only a job but also a living fortress of Lithuanian culture that survived even the most difficult times.

* * *

After breakfast, Jonas was eager to run to his sisters, Antanina and Kazė, who were already teenagers, but loved listening

to all kinds of stories—especially if they were told with the youngster's eyes burning with enthusiasm. Nearby, Vladas, just two years old, was playing with a toy, while the one-year-old twins, Michalina and Stanislova, who had just learned to stand up, were chewing their little fists and squawking as if they already understood that something interesting was about to be told.

Jonas stood proudly in front of them, held out his hands, and began to tell them his improved version:

"It was like this! The warrior Martynas was very strong and brave, and he returned from the battle but was wounded. His horse carried him through the forest, but then a terrible wolf came!"

"A wolf?! Grandpa didn't mention any wolf," Antanina questioned, intrigued by her little brother's story.

"Well, maybe he didn't mention it, but he certainly did!" Jonas continued enthusiastically. "But Martynas's horse was very clever and neighed so loudly that the wolf got scared and ran away! Then he saw Morta and realized he had to show her the master. If it hadn't been for that grunt, she wouldn't have noticed him!"

Kazė started giggling:

"Jonas, is this a story about the exploits of a warrior or about a clever horse?"

Jonas wrinkled his nose in exasperation:

"It's about everything! But the story wouldn't end well without the horse."

Antanina nodded:

"So what happened next?"

Feeling like the family's most important storyteller, Jonas even put his hands on his hips and continued:

“Morta was a very good girl and nursed Martynas, and then they fell in love. Then they built a big castle and had lots of children!”

Kazė started laughing:

“Jonas, when did your Martynas manage to build a castle?”

“Well...” Jonas thought for a moment, but then suddenly jerked his finger upwards. “Grandpa promised to tell me more today! Shall we go and see him together? He knows everything!”

His enthusiasm was infectious—even Antanina and Kazė, who already felt they had outgrown their childhood fairy tales, winked at each other and felt curious.

Little Vladas, who still didn’t quite understand what Jonas was talking about, just took his wooden horse and, satisfied, pulled it by the rope, as if in agreement with Jonas. And the little twins only started to squeal more happily, feeling that their elders were already organizing something.

“So, what to wait?” Jonas shouted and ran towards his grandfather’s hut.

Kazė and Antanina smiled, waved to each other, and followed, while little Vladas, pulling his toy horse, also galloped along.

Even little Michalina and Stanislova, barely holding each other’s hands, took a few steps forward—as if they wanted to be part of history themselves. But their mother stopped them, smiling and saying:

“For you beauties, everything is still ahead of you. Let them go.”

The grandfather had already been settled here in Paaluonys for almost two decades, and he lived with his son, who was also called Kazimieras, not far from the homestead of Vladislovas,

Jonas's father. So the children soon came to him. When the children ran inside the hut, Kazimieras was already sitting by the stove, his face gently illuminated by the crackling flames.

"So, Grandpa, what happened next?" Martynas built a hut, started a family, and then what? What happened after that?

Kazimieras smiled, stroked his grandson's hair, and, leaning back in his chair, began his story.

* * *

"Martynas was the beginning of our family," he said, looking into the children's eyes. "But his story is just one chapter in the big book of our family. His son Andrius, my grandfather, was born around 1770. There were two other brothers of Andrius—Laurynas and Pranas. They also lived in Dokiai, like Martynas, in a beautiful place, among hills and fields, where everyone knew that hard work was the way to honor."

Antanina raised her head in interest.

"Grandpa, was Andrius as brave as Martynas?"

Kazimieras laughed.

"He had a different kind of bravery than Martynas. Not in battle, but in his life. Andrius married Rozalija, a woman who not only took care of the house but also served as the village's wisdom. People used to say that when the men of the village argued about how and when best to sow the rye, she would have the last word."

"And what did Rozalija look like?" Kazė wondered, running her fingers through her hair.

"Strong as an oak tree, but with a heart as soft as a lime tree," said Kazimieras, squinting his eyes as if trying to remember her. "She had fair hair, which she always tied in a long ponytail,

and eyes full of wisdom. She and Andrius were one soul. He worked the land, she took care of the house, but the two of them couldn't do without each other."

"And their children?" asked Jonas eagerly.

"One of his sons, Vincentas, was my father," Kazimieras continued. "He inherited not only the land, but also the family values."

"Vincentas?" Jonas asked, "Is this our uncle, where he lives outside Aluona?"

Kazimieras smiled, patted his head, and said:

"No, Jonas, my son, who has the same name as my dad, lives behind Aluona. And my father, Vincentas, was a strong man, the likes of which are rare nowadays. He was born in 1820 and devoted his whole life to his family and to the land."

"And what did he do?" Kazė asked curiously.

"He worked the land, grew the farm, and always said that a man without work is like a tree without roots." Kazimieras sighed. "His wife, my mother Marijona, as everyone called her, was a quiet but very wise woman. Her eyes were as green as summer meadows, and when she spoke, even a harsh word sounded gentle. She was very good."

Antanina and Kazė looked at each other, as if trying to imagine Marijona.

The children were silent. Even little Vladas, as if sensing the importance of the moment, put his horse on the ground and cuddled up to Antanina.

Kazimieras stared at the fireplace for another moment, as if seeing before his eyes all the generations that had formed his family.

"Remember, children," he finally said, looking at his grandchildren, "our family has never gone against the enemy and

has never forgotten its roots. Martynas, Andrius, Vincentas—they were all honorable and decent people. And I, and your dad, and my son Vladislovas—continue this tradition. And your turn will come. Honor is not money or wealth. Honor is your name, your deeds, and your heart.”

Jonas clung to his grandfather's hand.

“Grandpa, as you said, what happens if a person loses his name? Can he get it back?”

Kazimieras thought about it, then replied with a smile:

“It's good that you already care. As I said yesterday, you can lose your name, but never your honor. If your deeds are good, your heart is pure, your family is strong—you will never be forgotten.”

The children were silent. Even the teenage sisters, who had already finished primary school and understood a lot themselves, watched Grandpa with big eyes. It was not just a story—it was their story to carry forward.

A FATEFUL MEETING

In the summer of 1950, Jonas came to Sakuonėliai on business. It was a village about four kilometers away from Paaluonys, famous for its former manor house and its youth outings. Jonas, who was already the main owner of his father's farm and took care of the family's affairs, rarely had a chance to relax, but when he heard about the outing at Sakuonėliai Manor, he decided to come and have a look.

The evening was warm and full of life. The air smelled of lilacs and hay, the music rang out across the neighborhood, and the young people milled around in pairs, laughing and chatting happily. Jonas was not one to be easily drawn into such merriment. He was already in his thirties, a man with eyes that had seen much, and a heart that still carried an old grudge. He had once lost his head over a girl, but she had married another. And since then, he had avoided getting too involved in such feelings. But this time, something stopped him.

Jonas was standing at a distance, watching the dancers, when he spotted her—Mikasė. Mikasė was young, twenty-

five, with chestnut hair that fell loosely to her shoulders. Her face was open, full of life, and her laughter sounded light and carefree. She stood with her friends at the edge of the meadow, watching the dancers, sometimes joking or laughing. Jonas felt something strange. Not a heartbeat at first sight—no, it was something calmer. He just felt that she was different.

Mikasé also noticed Jonas—a strong, stocky man who stood a little lost, not like all the other men who were either already in the swirl of the dance or at least talking loudly to each other. She took her time to approach. In fact, she thought for just a moment that it would be interesting to know who he was. But Jonas did not come. He just stood there, his eyes following the dancers, and seemed to be somewhere else in his mind. So the first evening passed without words between them. But not the last.

A week later, there was another outing. Jonas, already back to his daily routine, still occasionally remembered that strange girl with a slight smile. He wondered to himself why her face popped up so easily in his memory.

This time, Mikasé noticed Jonas even earlier—again standing off to the side. This time, she did not resist. She walked closer and pretended to stop just to listen to the music, but after a few minutes, she took another step—this time straight towards him.

“Want to dance?” she asked suddenly, surprised at her own courage.

Jonas didn’t even answer right away. She wasn’t the first girl who had ever asked him to dance. But she was the first one in years that he looked at and... couldn’t think of a reason to refuse.

“Sure, but I can be a bit clumsy,” he said, a little embar-

rassed.

Mikasè smiled.

“No such thing. I will learn to cope.”

And they started dancing.

The first steps were clumsy. He still wasn't sure he was doing the right thing. Not with the dance steps—with the feelings. But the longer they spun to the rhythm of the dance, the easier it became. After the first dance, Jonas was sure it would end here—as such episodes always did. But Mikasè didn't think so. When she went back to her friends, she looked back and saw Jonas still standing where he had left her. But this time he wasn't looking at the other dancers—he was looking at her. And in that moment, she knew—this man wasn't going to flirt easily. If he felt anything, it would be serious. And for some reason, she felt it was right for her.

* * *

When Jonas set off on his bicycle to meet Mikasè, his thoughts were filled with both hope and anxiety. The road between Paaluonys and Vainikonys was not long—just a few kilometers—but the rough dirt track, with its potholes and stones, made the ride more difficult than he had imagined. His heart seemed to beat faster than the wheels were turning, and his mind spun with anticipation of what their first date might bring.

“I hope she doesn't think I'm a bad conversationalist,” he muttered under his breath as he pedaled.

But the journey suddenly turned into an adventure. Just before reaching his destination, Jonas saw a carriage pulling out ahead. As he swerved to avoid it, he failed to notice a large

stone in the road. Losing his balance, he toppled over, the bike crashing into the cart's wheel. The impact sent him sprawling onto the roadside, his trousers—the only “party” trousers he owned—ripped wide open at the knee.

“Damn it!” Jonas laughed, sitting up and inspecting the gaping hole. “What will I look like now?”

For a moment, he sat there, torn between turning back or carrying on. At last, he decided to continue. With nothing else at hand, he tied his handkerchief around the tear, leaned the bent bicycle against a birch tree, and set off on foot—planning to collect the broken bike on his way home.

When Jonas showed up at the agreed pond, Mikasé was already waiting. She stood there wearing a simple but neat dress and a smile on her face. From a distance, she noticed Jonas's confused look and slightly dirty face.

“What happened to you?” she asked, as Jonas approached her, carefully hiding the split knee of his trousers.

“Let's say my bike doesn't agree with this Crown Road,” he replied, trying to keep his humor. “And... sorry about my appearance.”

Mikasé barely suppressed her laughter when she saw the hole in his trousers, which was tied with a handkerchief.

“Well, at least you came,” she smiled. “That says a lot about your determination.”

They spent the evening chatting and joking. Jonas was sincere, and Mikasé felt that his simplicity and warmth made him special. When the date was over, Jonas offered to walk Mikasé home. However, the handkerchief didn't keep the hole hidden for long, and just before saying goodbye, Mikasé noticed that his trousers looked pretty bad.

“Listen,” she said, hiding her smile behind her hand, “why

don't you bring those trousers over to me and fix them? I have a good pair of scissors I won at school, needles, and thread."

Jonas was reluctant at first, but when he saw how serious she was, he agreed.

"OK, but don't laugh when you see them up close," he said.

The next day, Jonas brought the trousers to Mikasé, who quickly got to work. Her fingers moved deftly, the threads filling in the torn fabric beautifully. When Jonas returned to pick them up after the walk, he was surprised.

"Looks like new!" he exclaimed. "You really have golden hands!"

Mikasé just smiled.

"Well, now you won't have any excuse to visit me again," she replied, her eyes sparkling softly.

Jonas felt that their relationship was not just one of casual acquaintance, but one of mutual respect and sincerity. He continued to visit Mikasé, passing between Vainikonys and Paaluonys more and more frequently. The trousers that Mikasé fixed became a symbol of their history, a witness to a beginning full of warm moments and smiles. This complication only strengthened their bond, and although the road to love was still long, they both felt that the foundation of their relationship—sincerity, laughter, and mutual support—was very solid.