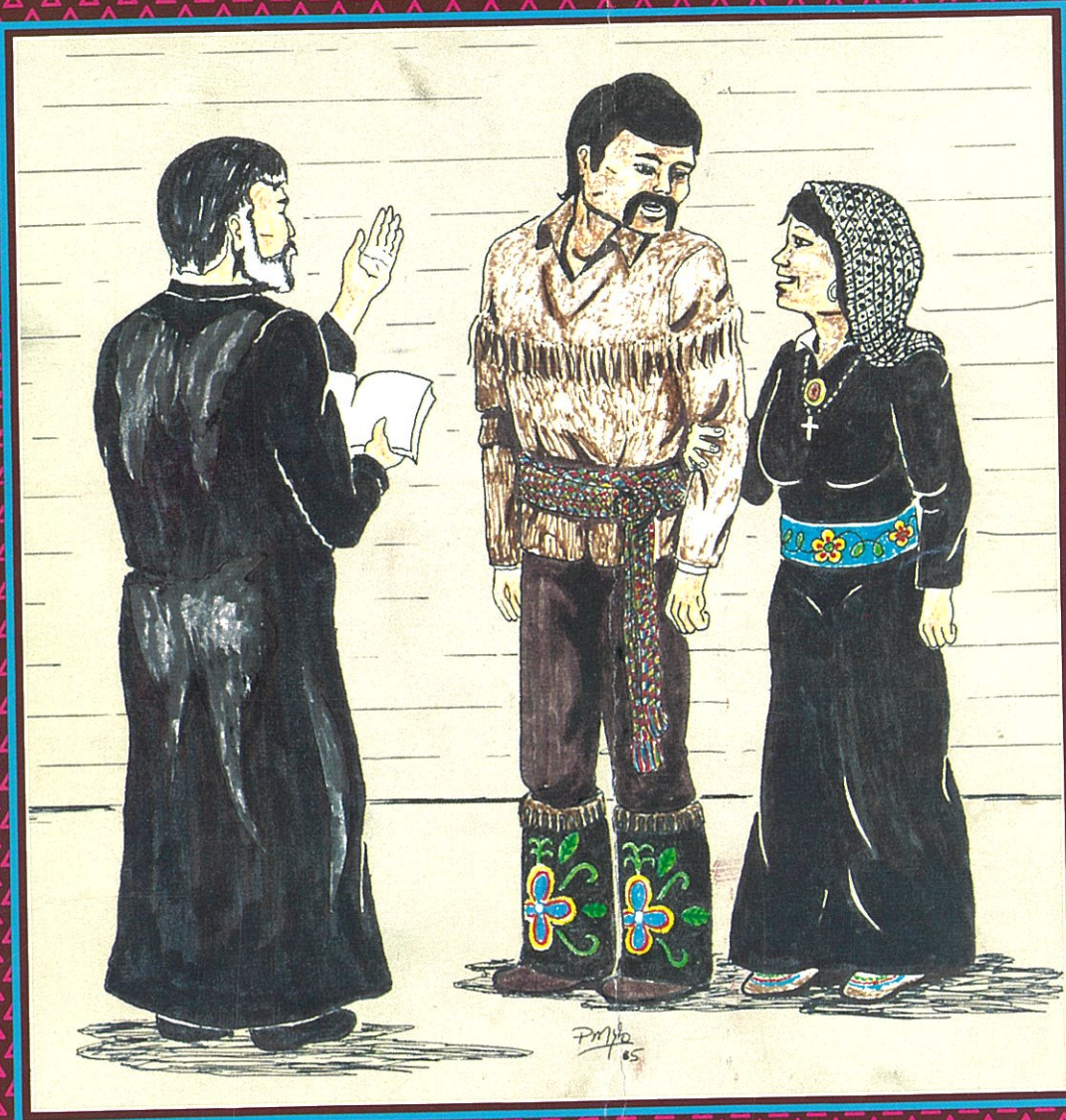


A MÉTIS WEDDING



*Written by Christel Barber Illustrated by Peter Myo
for Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research*

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FOREWORD

The word Métis means mixture. The Métis people have both Indian and European ancestors.

Marguerite is Métis because her grandmother was a Cree Indian and her grandfather a European trader. Their daughter became Marguerite's mother. Marguerite's father and all the other people in her village are also Métis.

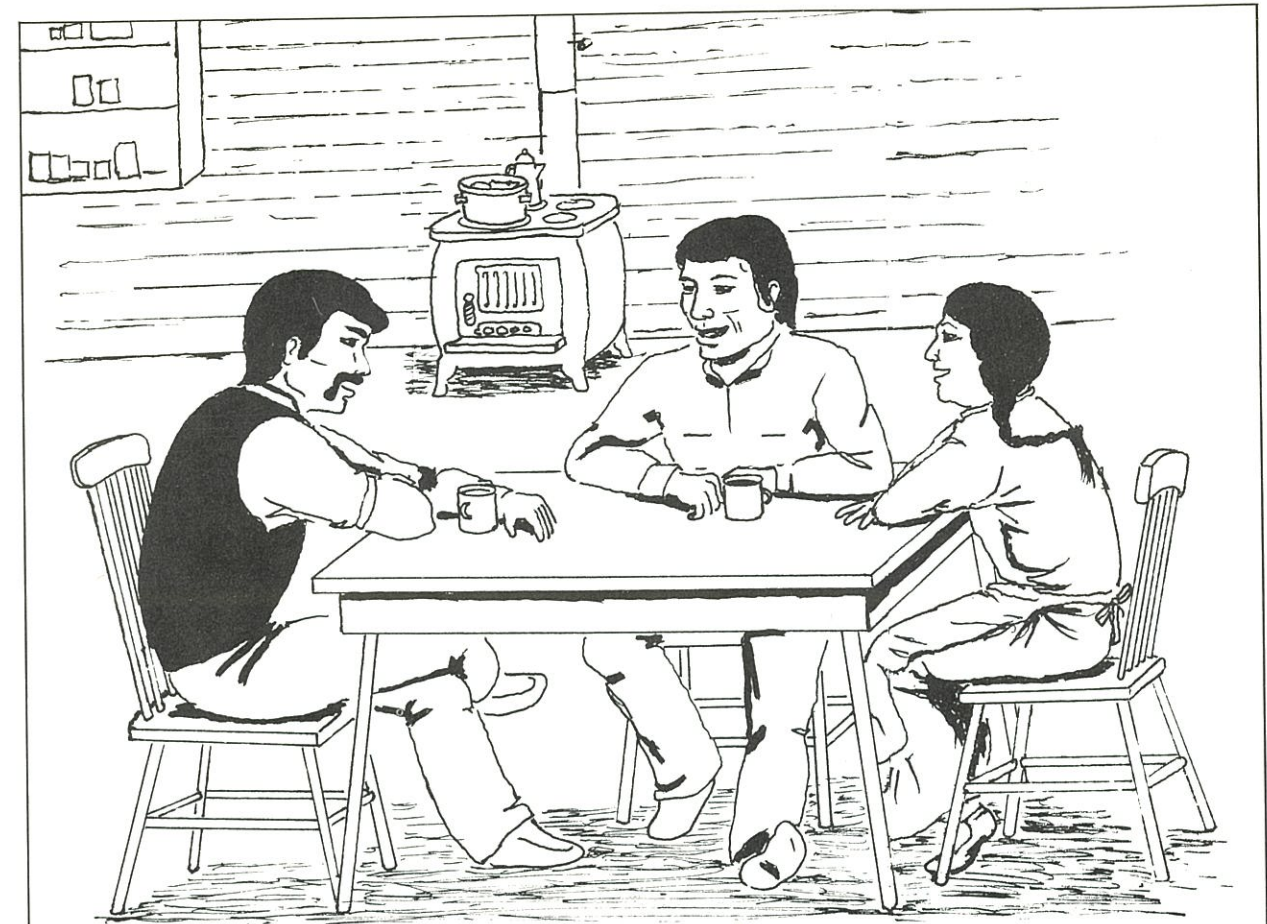
This story of Marguerite, Baptiste and the Métis people takes place over a century ago, between 1850 and 1875.

For most of the year the people live in Baptiste and Marguerite's small village, but every spring and fall they go on the buffalo hunt.

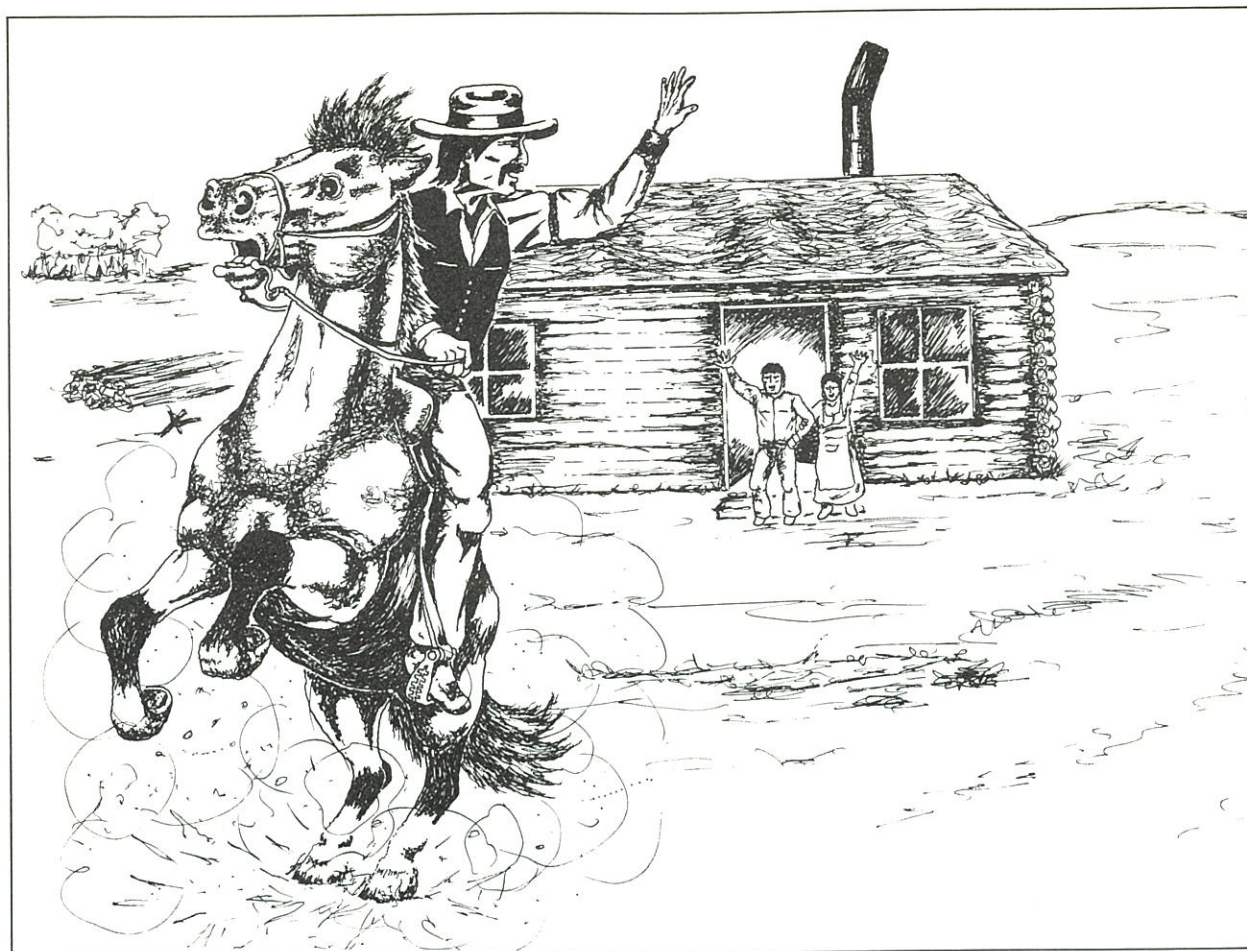
Fathers, mothers, children and elders all take part, loading their carts to ride across the prairie. When they find buffalo, the men hunt them. Then the women cut up the buffalo meat and dry it and scrape the hides. The children help them.

After the hunt the families return to their homes in the village.

Weddings are also special events for these people. Friends and relatives come from miles away and they often celebrate for a week or more.



Baptiste visits Marguerite's mother and father. They have known Baptiste since he was a baby. He tells them he wants to marry Marguerite. Her parents gladly say yes.



Now Baptiste will visit his friends and tell them he's going to be married. He'll also meet with the parish priest. Then he and Marguerite's father and the priest will set a time for the wedding.



Preparing for the wedding will keep Marguerite's mother and father very busy.

"I'll call on each family and let them know our good news," says Marguerite's father.

"I'll tell my friends," says Marguerite's mother. "And I'll ask the women to help me cook and bake for the wedding supper. Kohkum will be in charge of the meals."

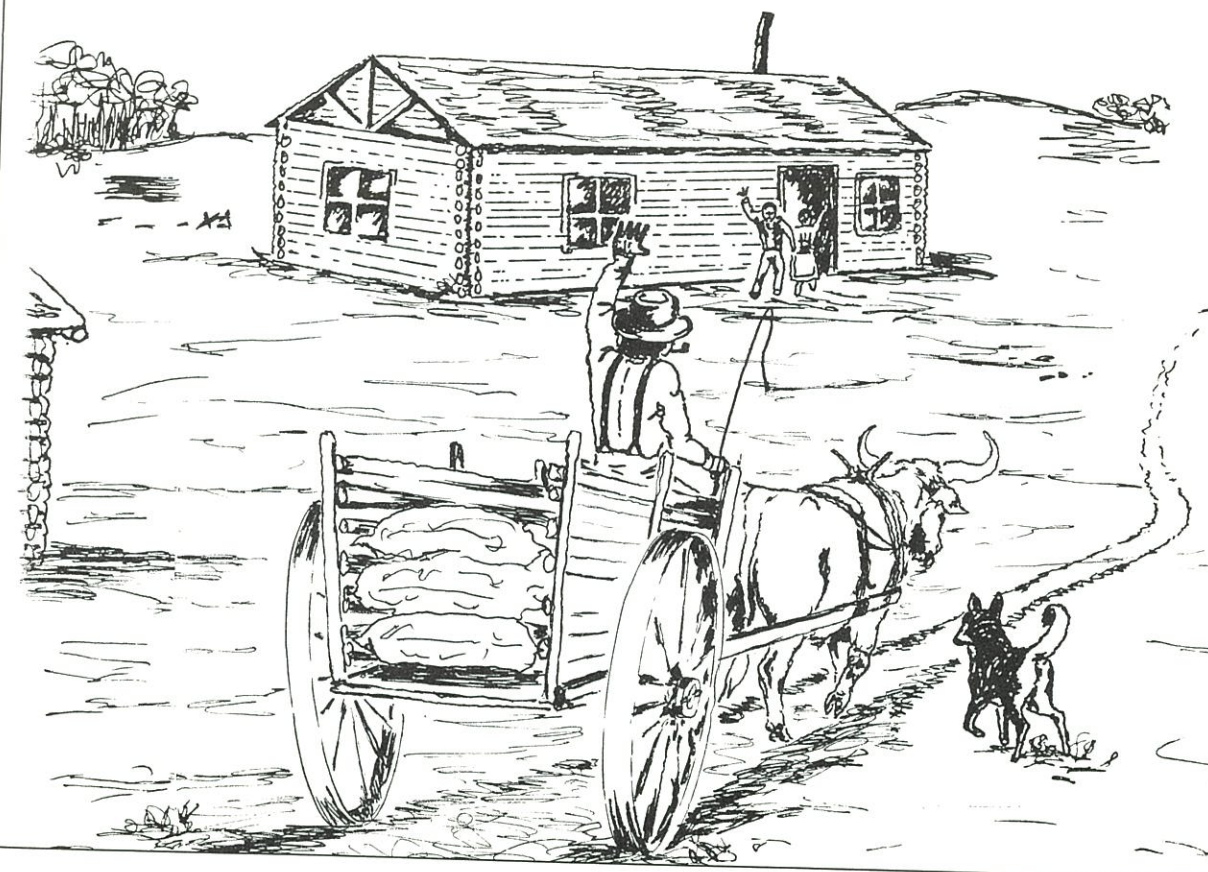


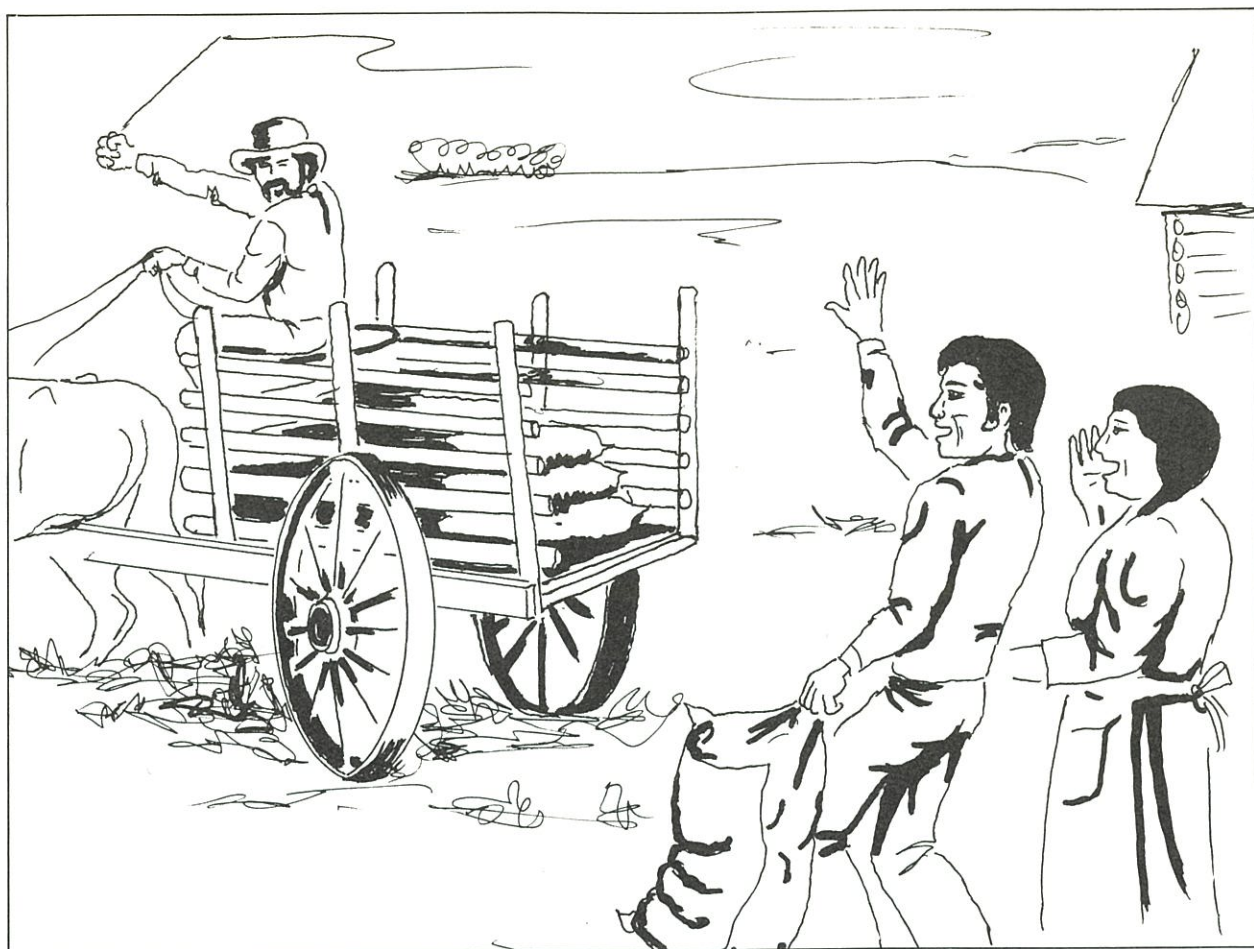
Marguerite is very fond of Kohkum, her Cree grandmother. Next day, when she visits her grandmother, Marguerite brings some freshly baked bannock, tobacco and tea as a gift.

"Baptiste and I are to be married," she tells Kohkum.

"I'm so happy for you," Kohkum says. "I helped to bring both you and Baptiste into the world. I will make sure that you have a very fine supper."

News of the wedding spreads far and wide. It reaches Baptiste's uncle MacAuley, who is trading some of his vegetables with his neighbours. They tell him about the wedding.

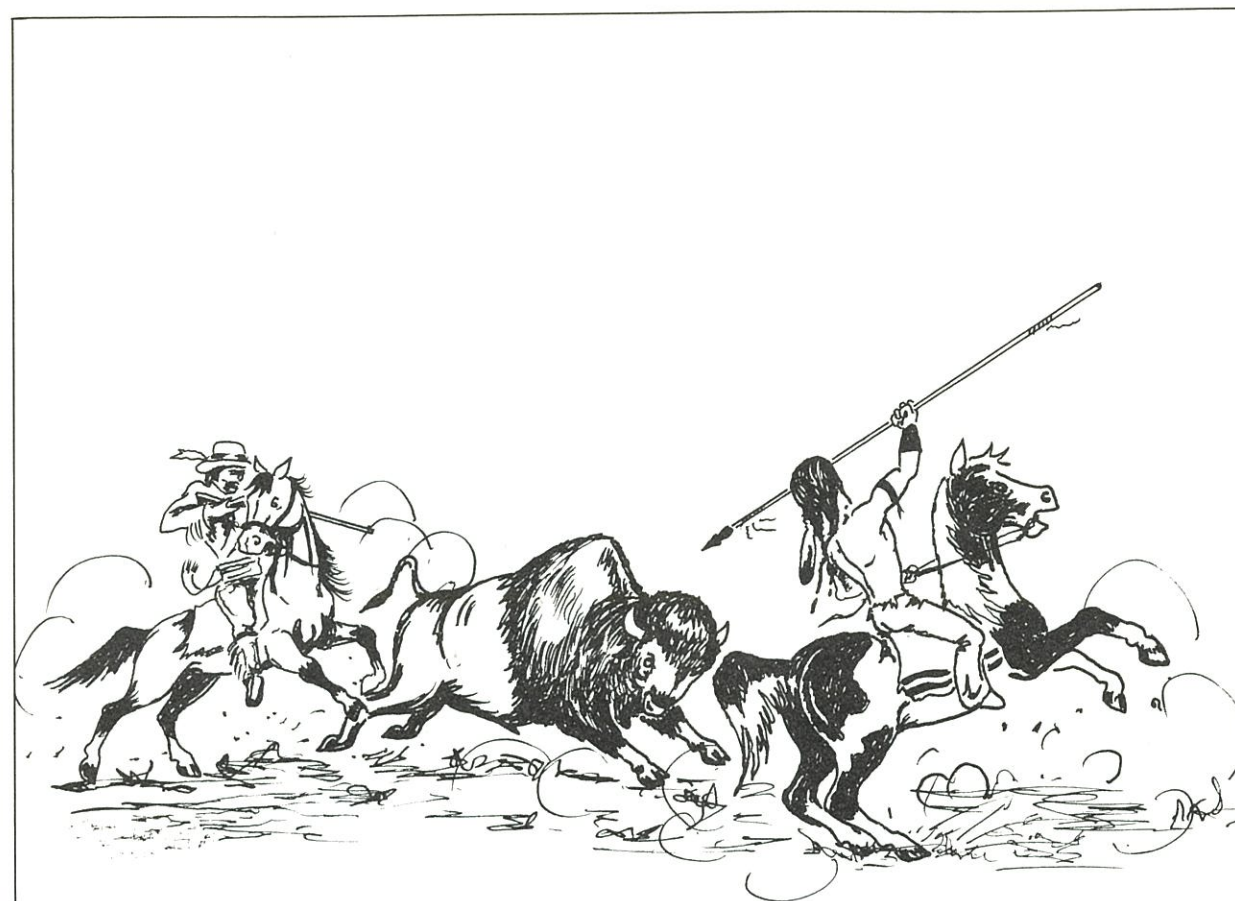




"I'll be there with my fiddle," MacAuley tells them. He chuckles to himself as he prepares to leave.

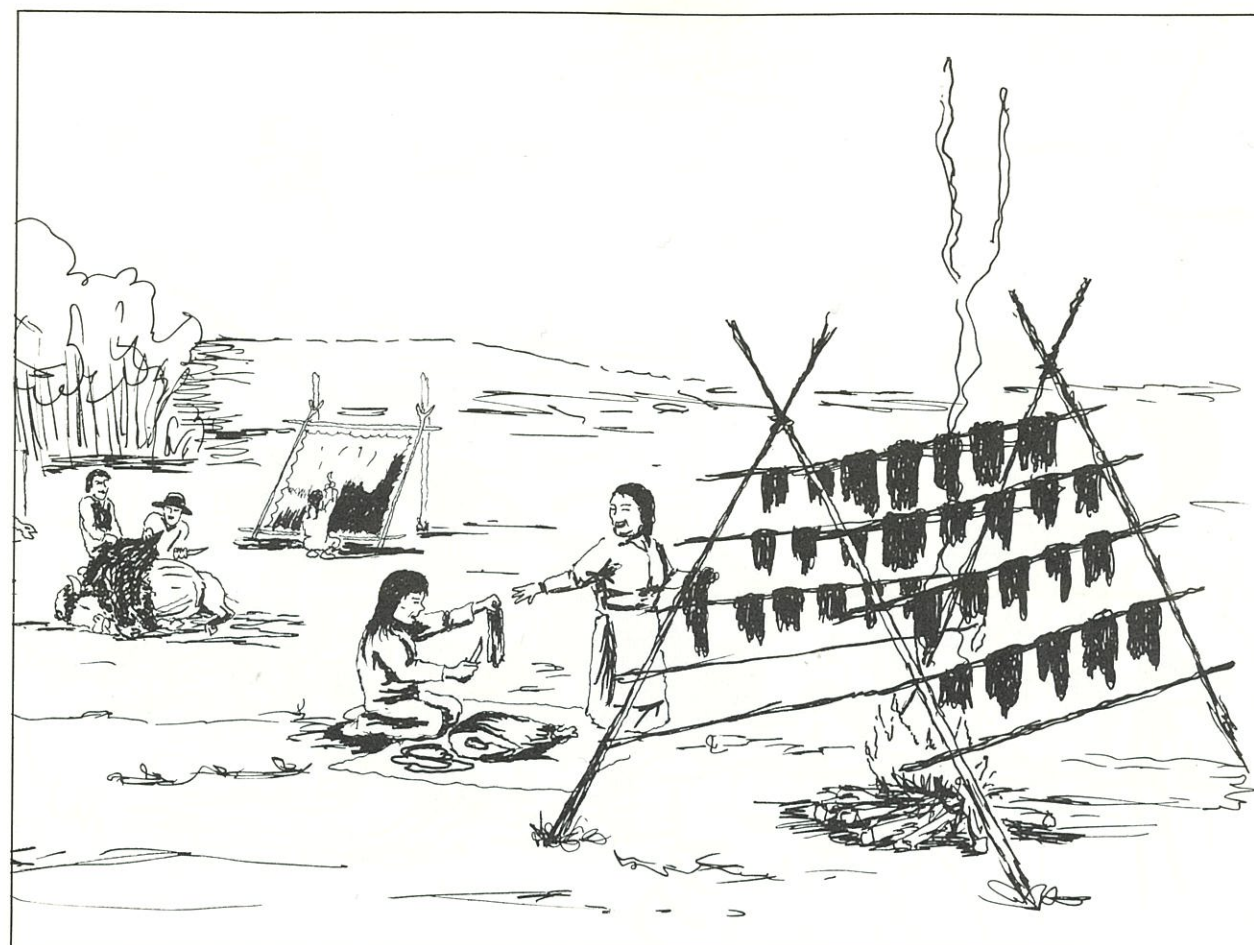
"MacAuley!" the neighbour's wife calls as the cart pulls away. "Bring the buffalo robes Claudette made last spring."

MacAuley nods and waves. "Yes, those robes will be needed," he thinks. "Some guests will stay a week or longer. They won't want to leave until the merrymaking is done."



Last spring MacAuley joined the buffalo hunt and killed four young animals.

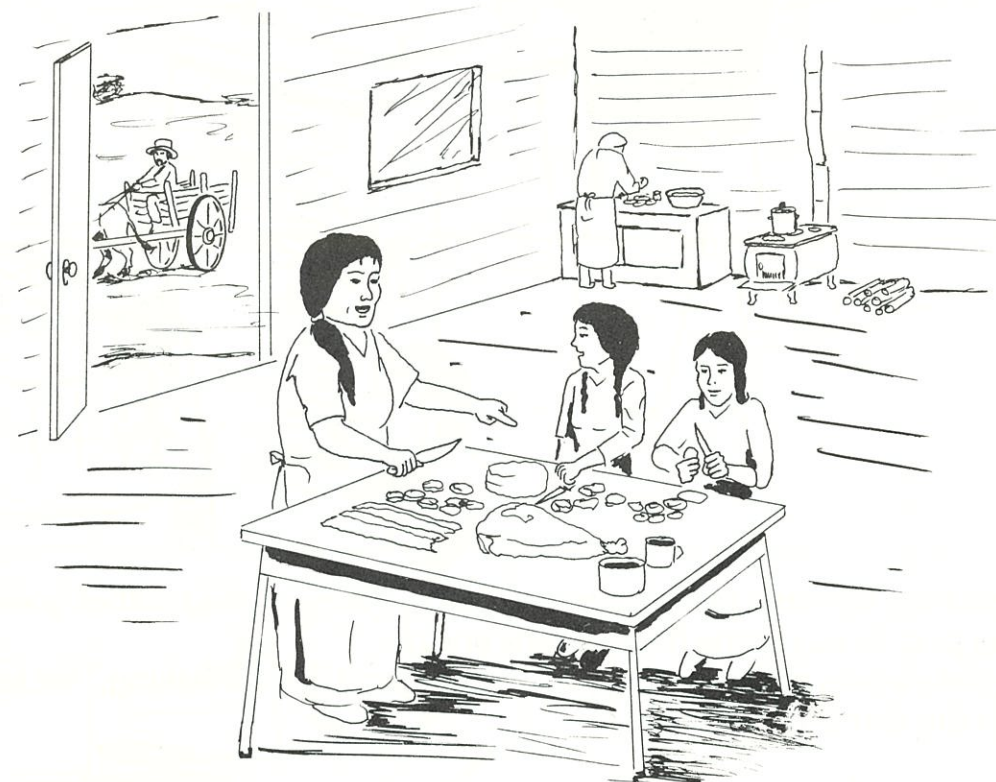
"I was very lucky," MacAuley remembers. "Every year there are fewer buffalo. Every year the hunters have less meat to give to the people."

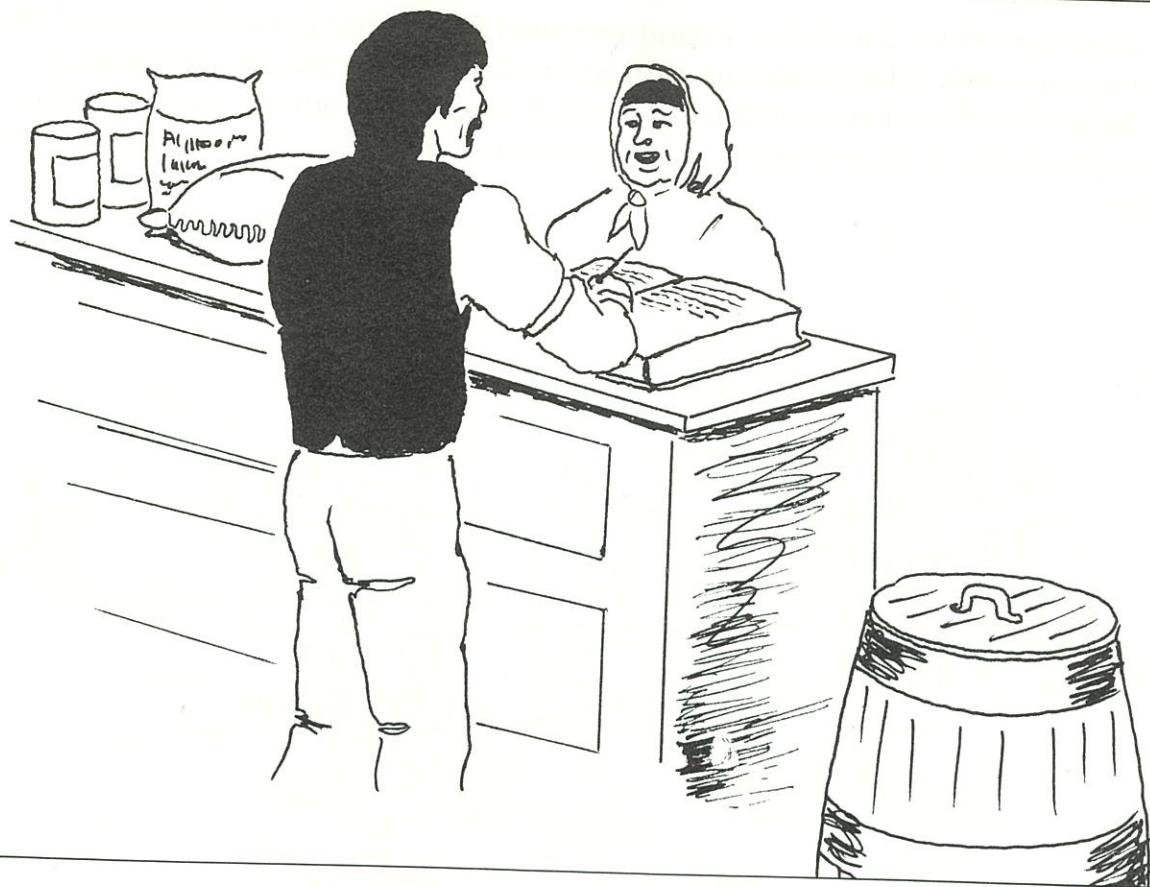


Thinking of his wife, Claudette, MacAuley smiles. Claudette worked very hard after the hunt. She and the other women worked together, cutting up the buffalo meat to make pemmican and then scraping and curing the hides. Later, at home, Claudette made warm robes from the buffalo hides.

Everyone likes Claudette. Young women often come to her for advice. She always answers their questions, and shows them what they need to know.

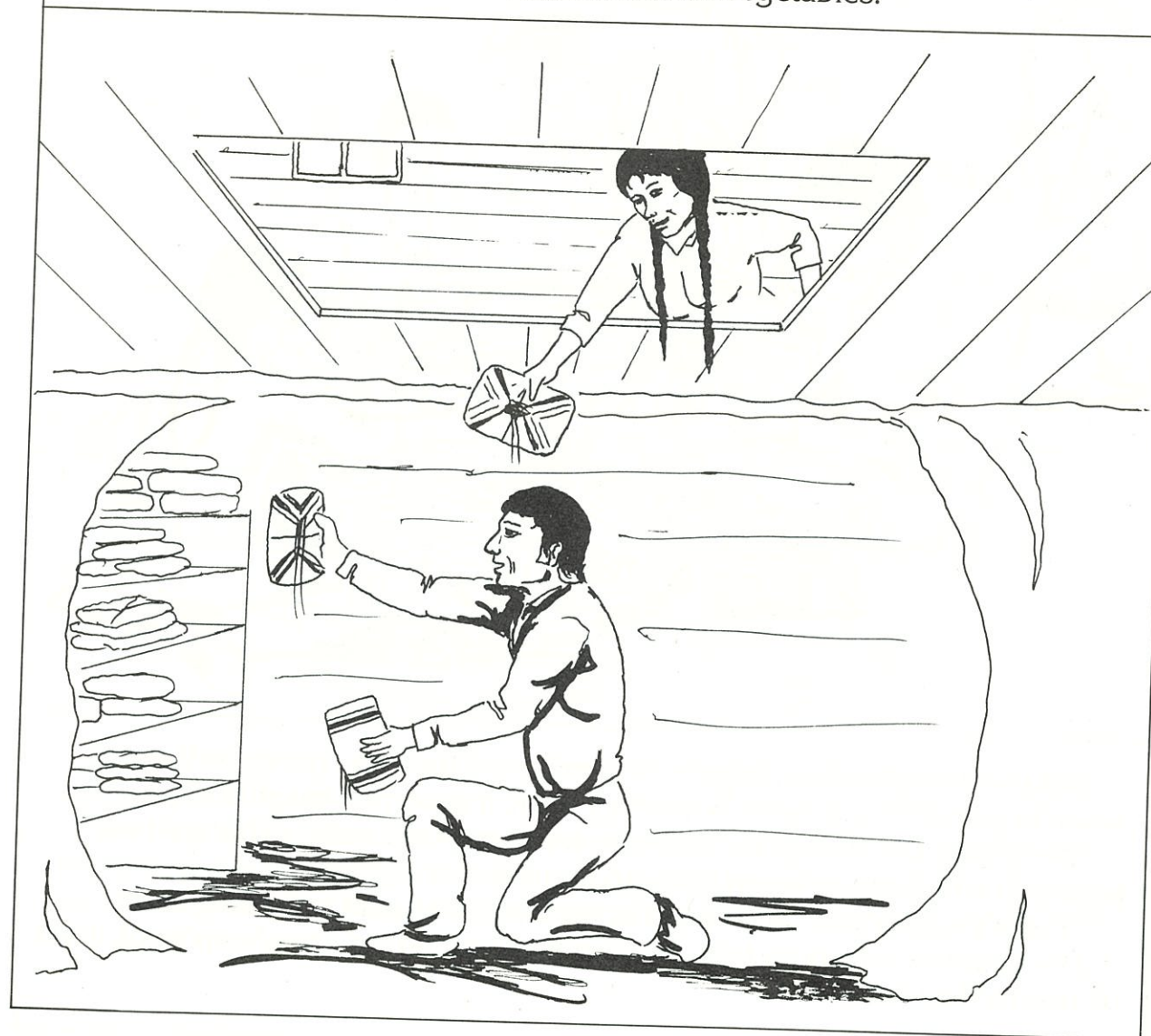
When MacAuley arrives home, he tells Claudette about the wedding. She quickly thinks of a special gift. "Let's give them one of our buffalo robes," she says.

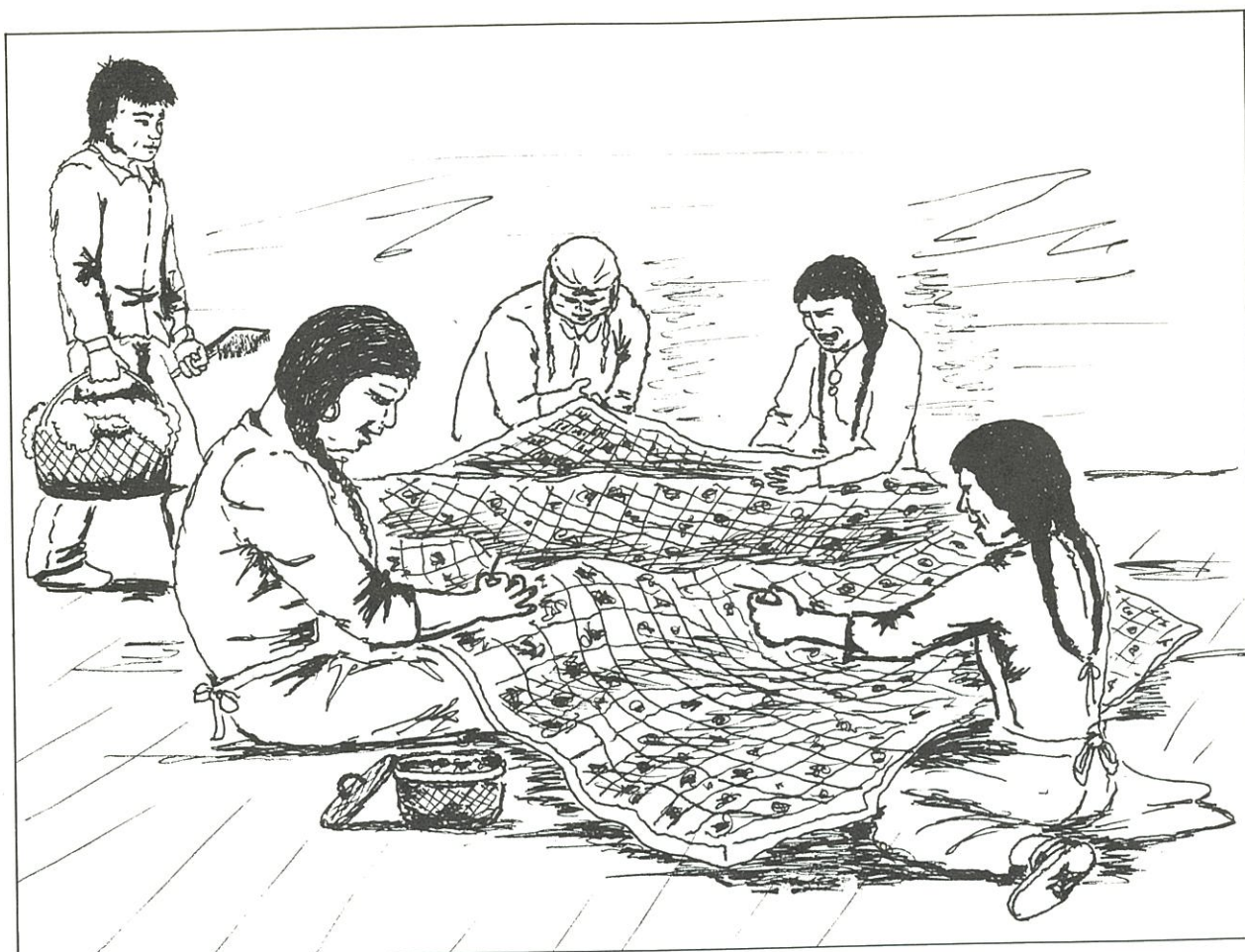




Beginning to make plans for the wedding, Marguerite's mother goes to the trading post to buy some flour, raisins and tea. Baptiste works at the trading post. "It's a good day for baking," he says, as he lists the items in the ledger.

Many people in the community have already brought food for the wedding. In the root cellar of their home, Marguerite's father has built extra shelves. Here the family will store the meat, berries and vegetables.

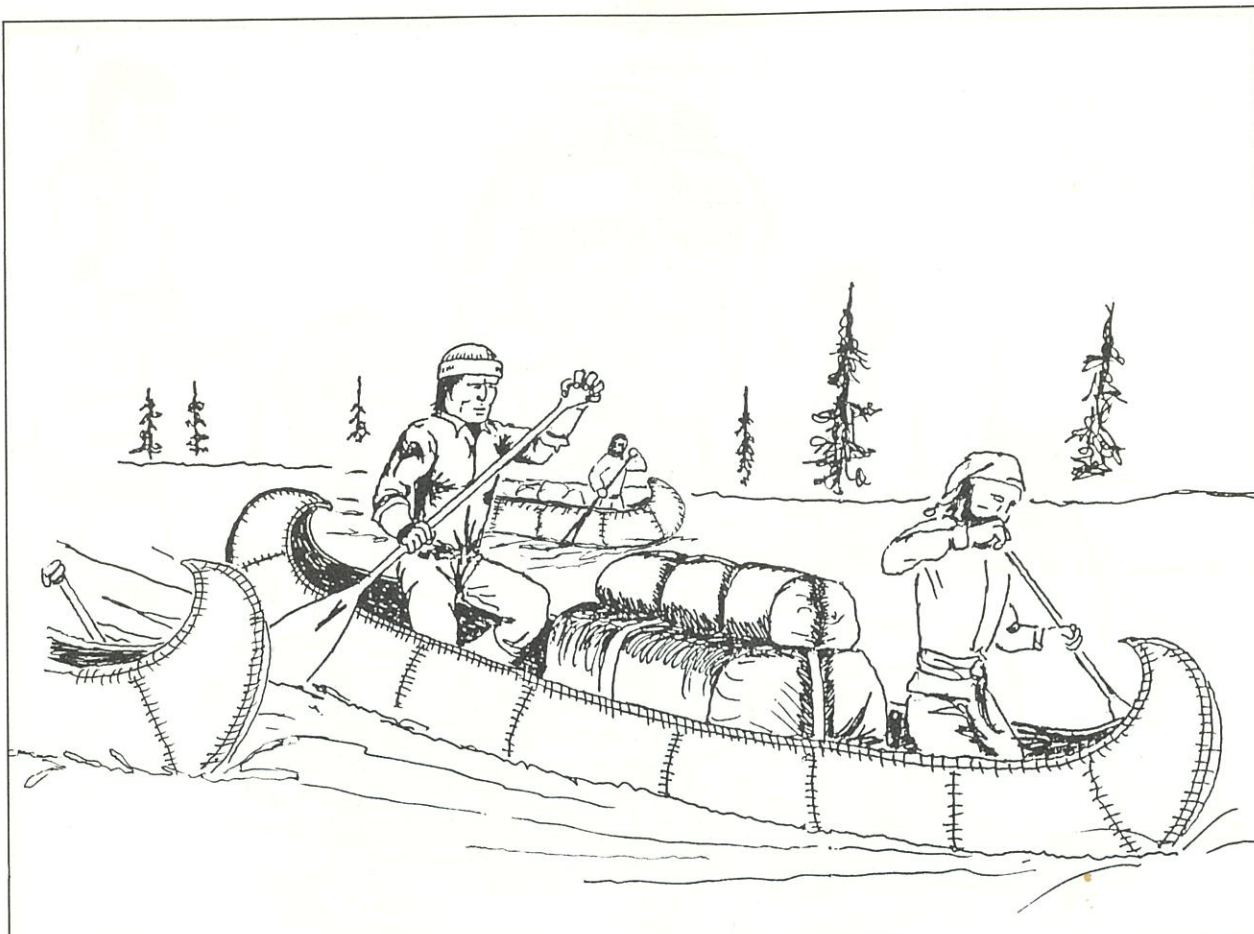




In the evening Marguerite joins the women of the community as they sew a large patchwork quilt. While they work, the women laugh and talk. "Keep your stitches even," Kohkum reminds Marguerite. "This quilt will keep you and Baptiste warm through many winter nights." "Yes, it's a fine quilt," adds another woman. "It should last a long time." The children keep busy too, cleaning and carding the raw sheep wool. It will be used to line the quilt.



Baptiste hopes his brother, Jean Pierre, will return soon. Jean Pierre is a voyageur for the trading post. Jean Pierre and Baptiste have worked for the post for several years. Baptiste was a good student at the mission school. The trading post hired him for his skill in writing and arithmetic. Jean Pierre, however, preferred the outdoor life.



Jean Pierre is glad he made this choice. He and the other voyageurs take big bundles of supplies to isolated outposts, then return with large bundles of furs.

When the voyageurs travel overland, the bundles are strapped to their backs. When they travel by water, the bundles are stacked in the canoe.

However, this type of work is not without danger. Last summer Jean Pierre and the other voyageurs travelled to an outpost. On the way home, one man drowned while shooting the rapids.

Another time, a voyageur became lost in a blizzard. He was very lucky. His brother found him buried in a snowdrift and rescued him.



Jean Pierre will be Baptiste's best man at the wedding. He urges the others to hurry on the long journey back to the village.



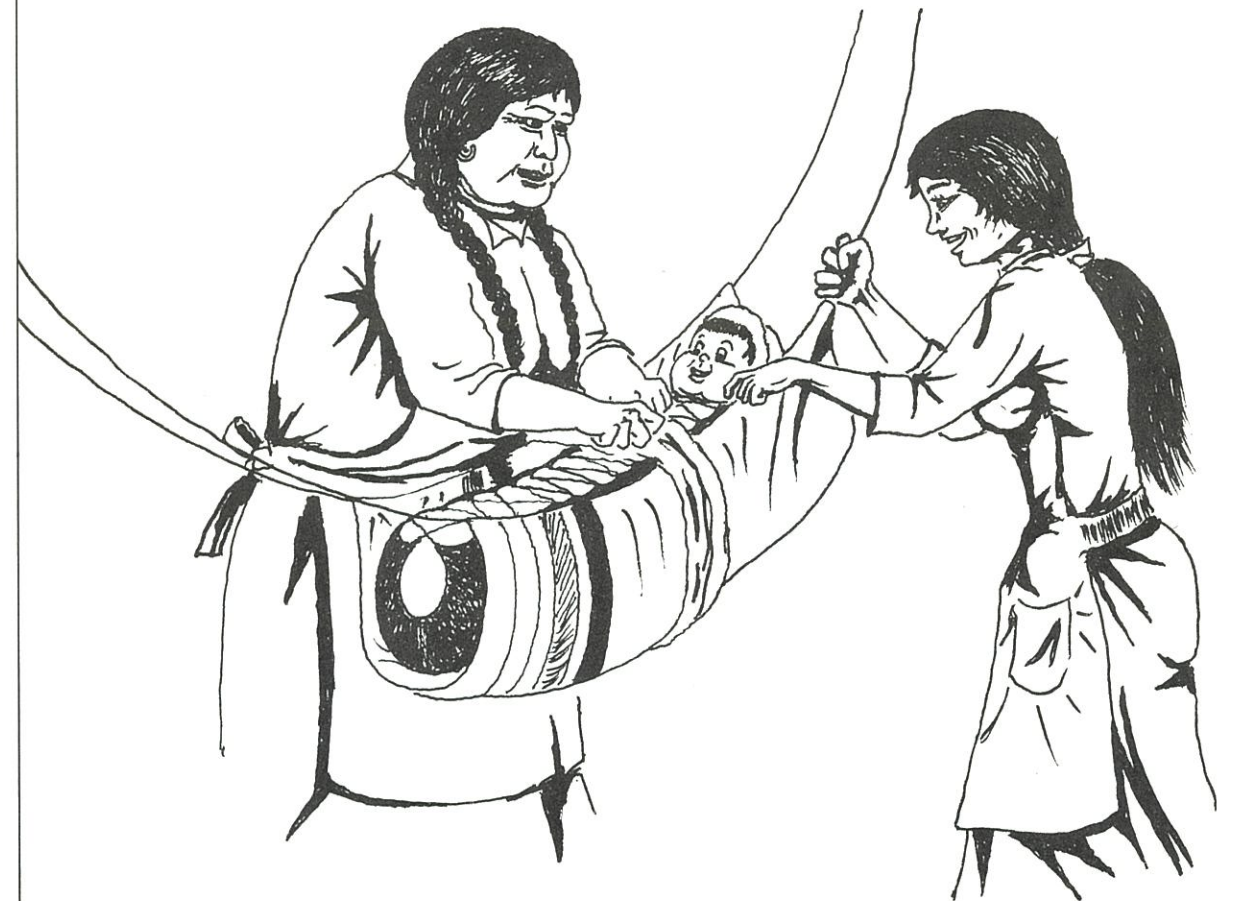
"How many pairs of moccasins will you wear out at the dance?" asks one of his friends.

"I bet you'll spend your pay on ribbons and silks and sweet-smelling soap," teases another.

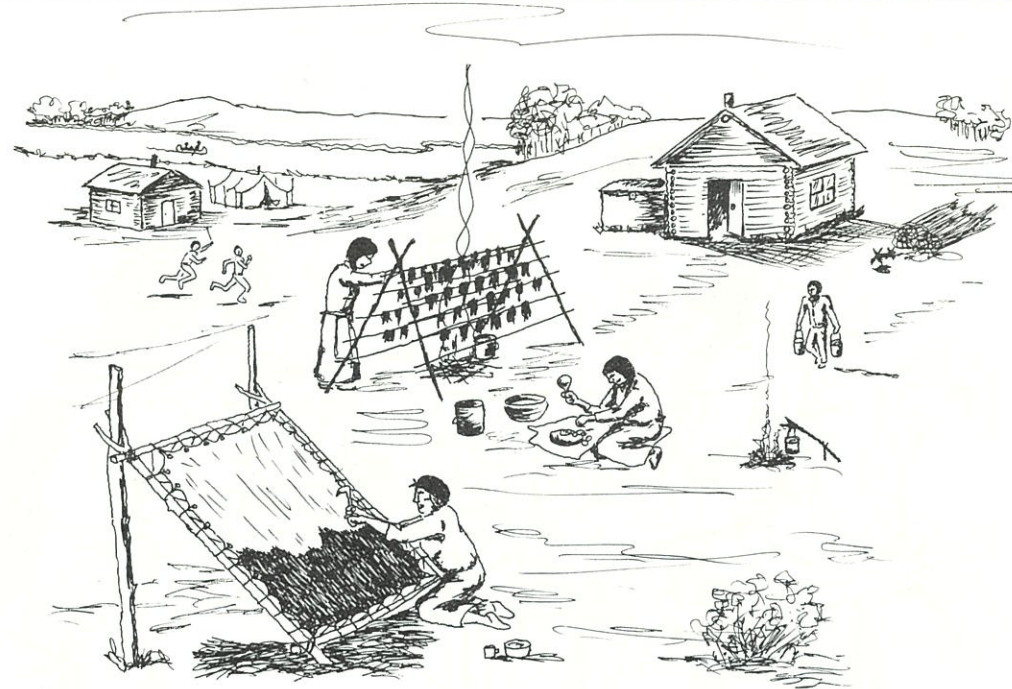
Jean Pierre grins. They are right. He will buy the best shirt and moccasins he can find. He will wear out not one, but two pairs of moccasins, as he intends to dance long into the night.

Auntie Mary and her three children have come to stay for the wedding. Marguerite helps by looking after her youngest cousin, a baby boy.

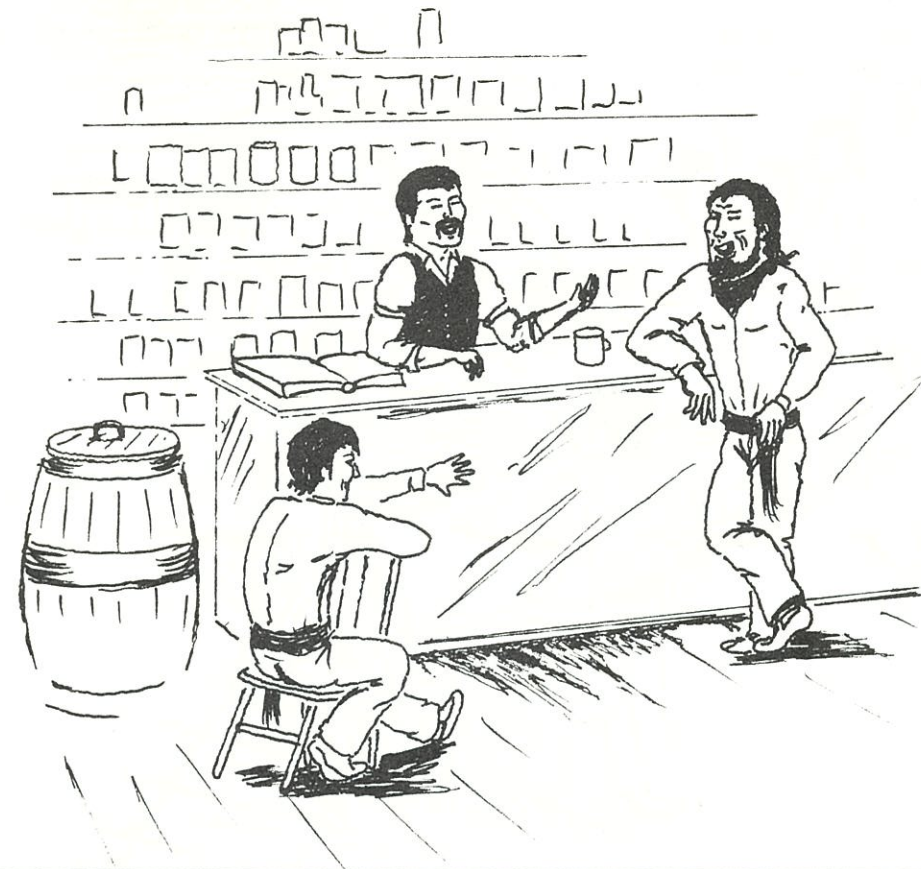
Auntie Mary has made a hammock for the baby, using an old blanket and long laces of rawhide, then tying the rawhide laces to the rafters. Marguerite pushes the hammock to rock the baby to sleep.



A week before the wedding, the cooking and baking begin. The sky is clear and the sun is shining. The women are glad to have good weather as they work. They cook large cuts of meat on spits over open fires and boil smaller pieces of meat in iron pots.



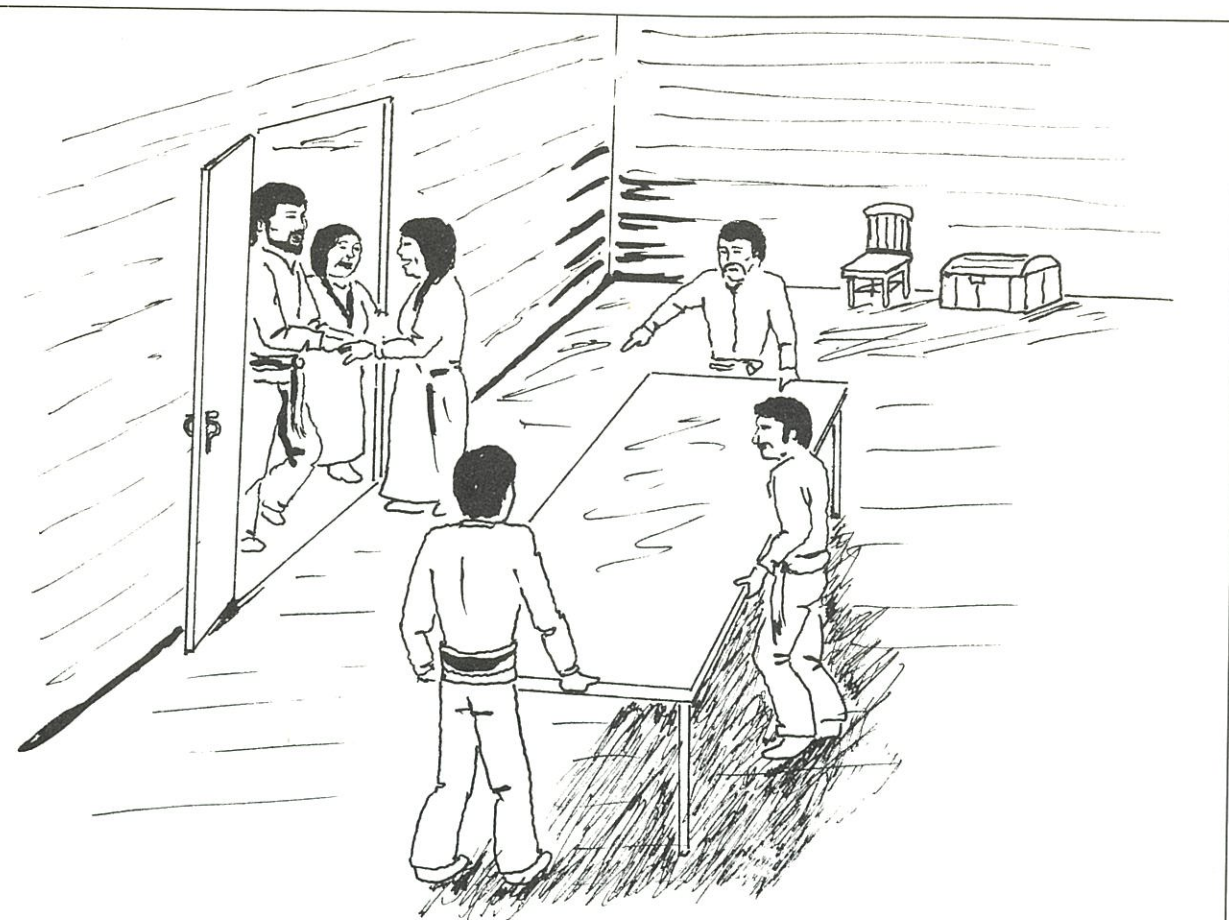
The neighbours take turns helping Marguerite's mother. One carries water from the creek. Another gathers wood and stacks it near the house. Auntie Mary's job is to make pemmican with lots of blueberries in it. This will feed the guests in the late hours of the evening.



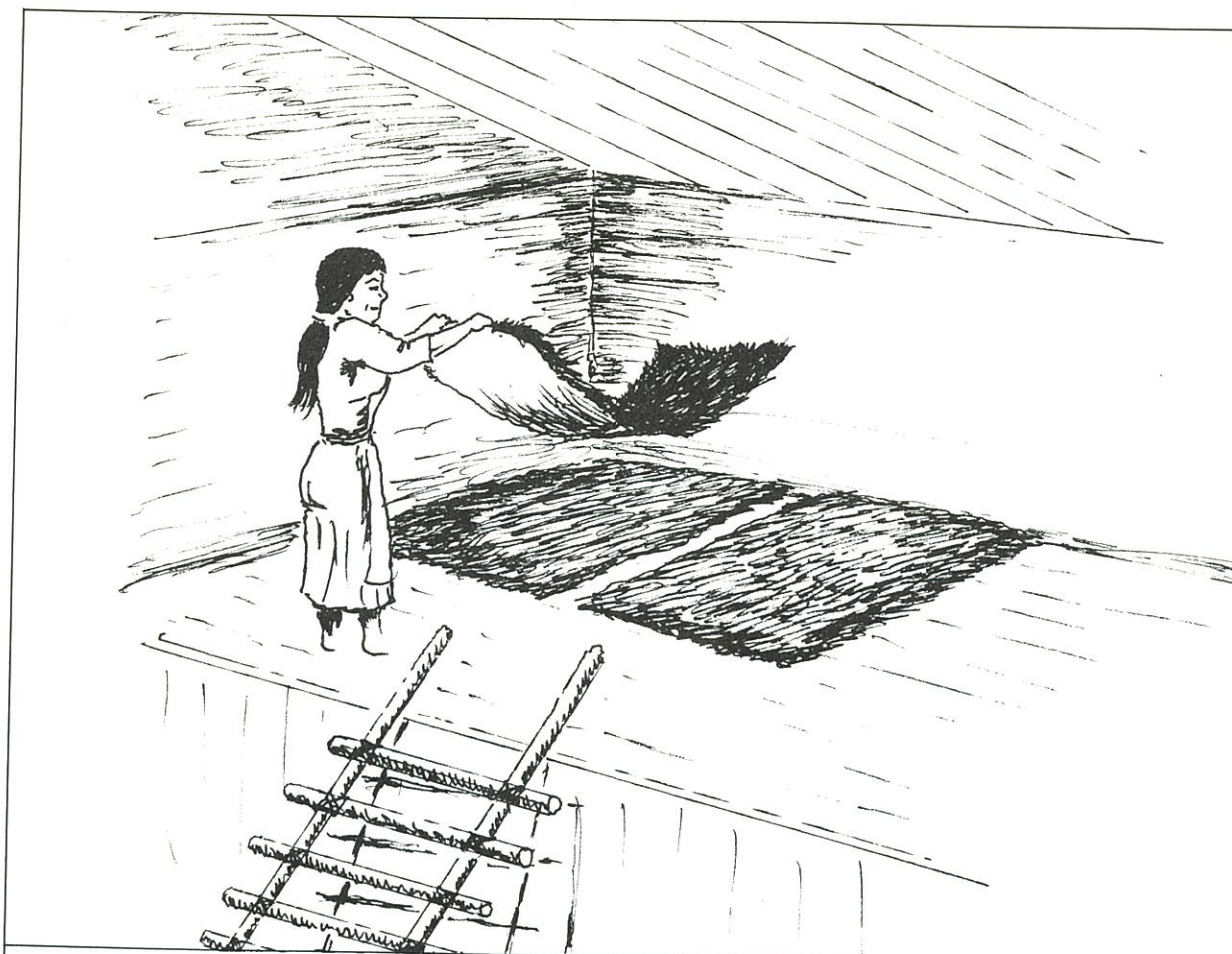
Jean Pierre and his friends have returned. They visit Baptiste at the trading post.

"I have new leggings," Baptiste tells them. "They're black felt with beadwork and shells."

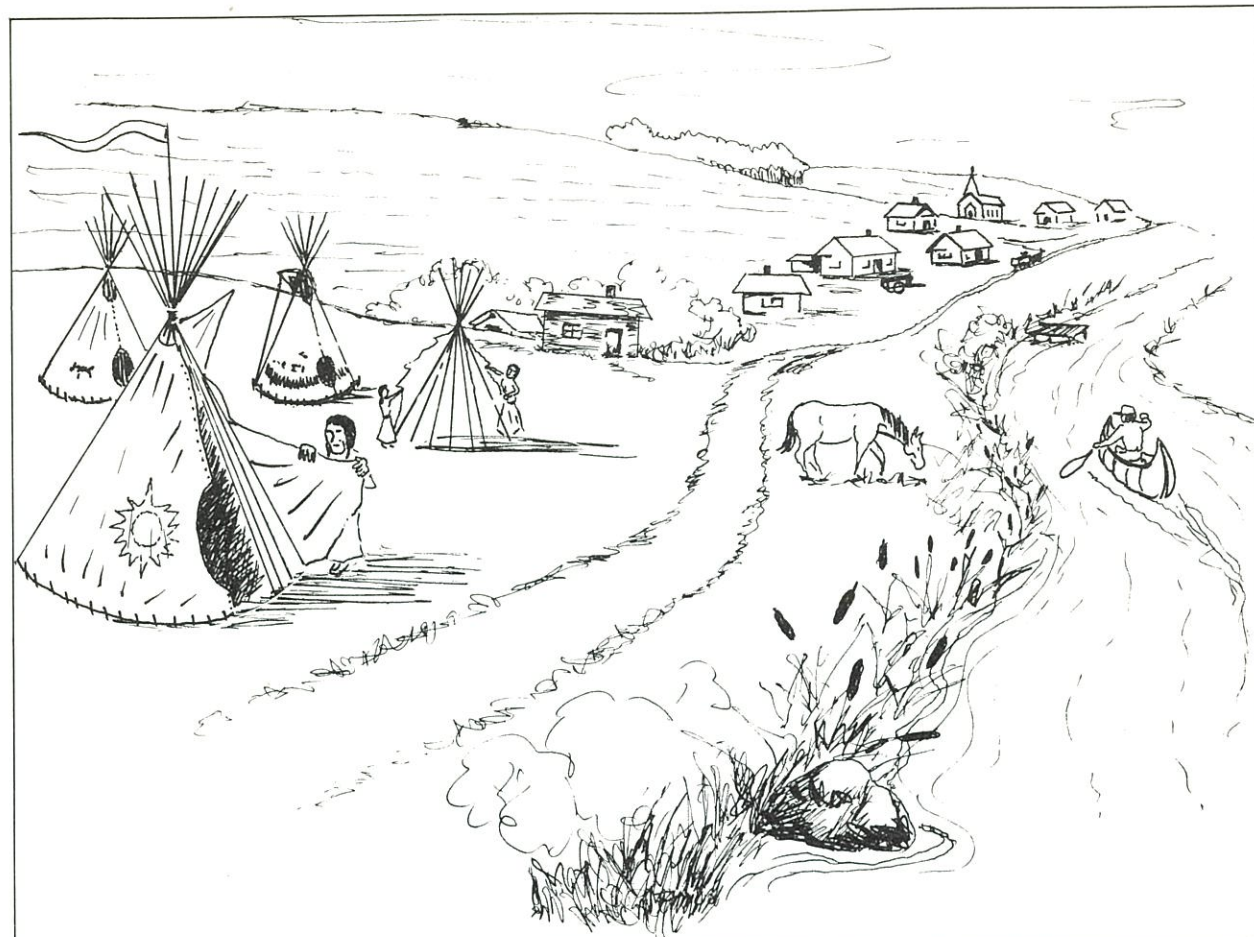
"Our mother made them," Jean Pierre adds. "He'll be the finest looking bridegroom in the country!"



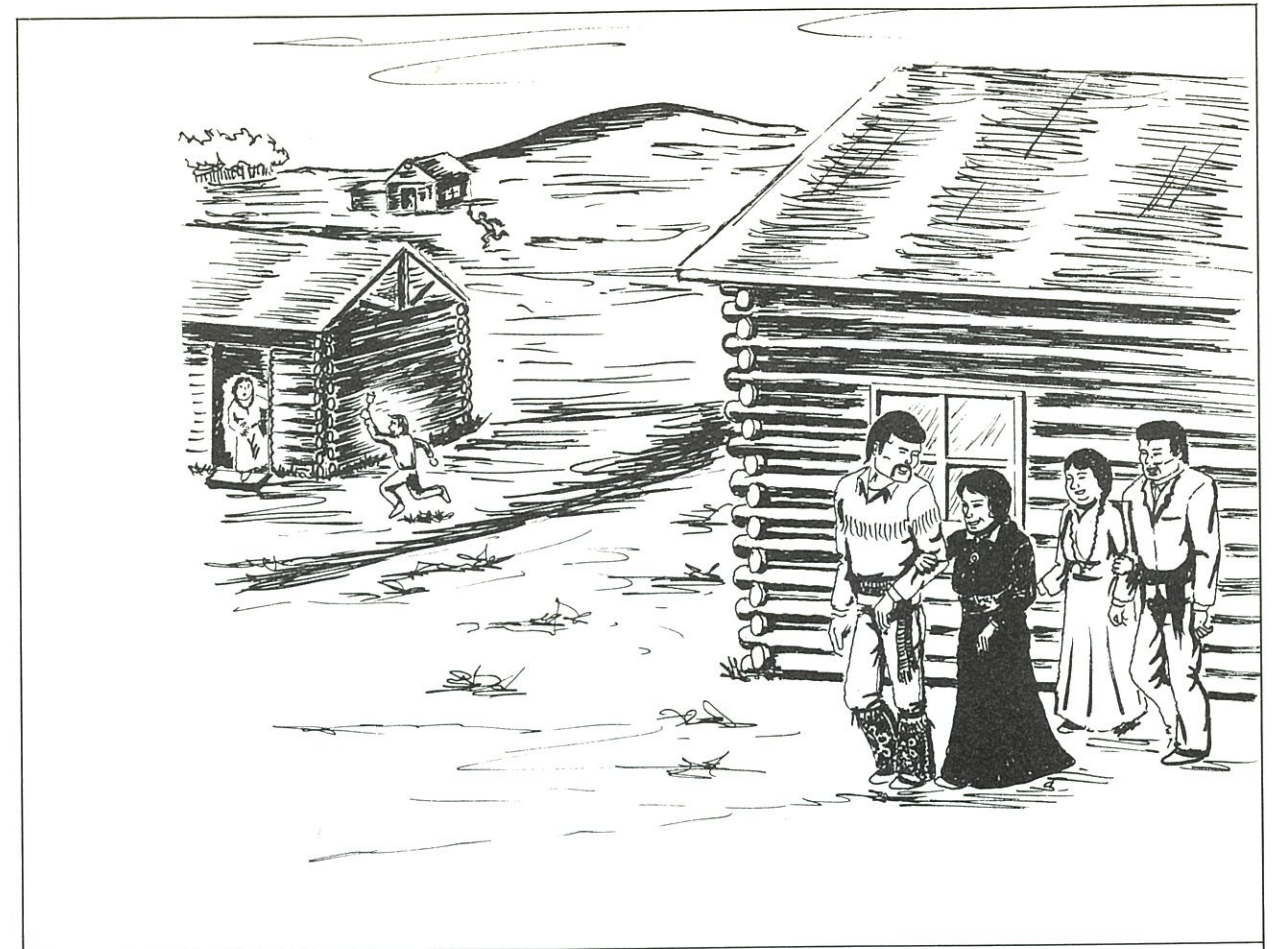
The day before the wedding, more guests arrive. Marguerite's mother greets them.
The house must be made ready. The men move the furniture aside and set up long tables for the feasting.



In the loft above the main room, Marguerite spreads buffalo robes on the floor. This is where some of the guests will sleep. Every family in the village will have guests staying with them.



The Cree relatives set up their lodges beside the house. Kohkum is staying with her brother. He is Marguerite's godfather.



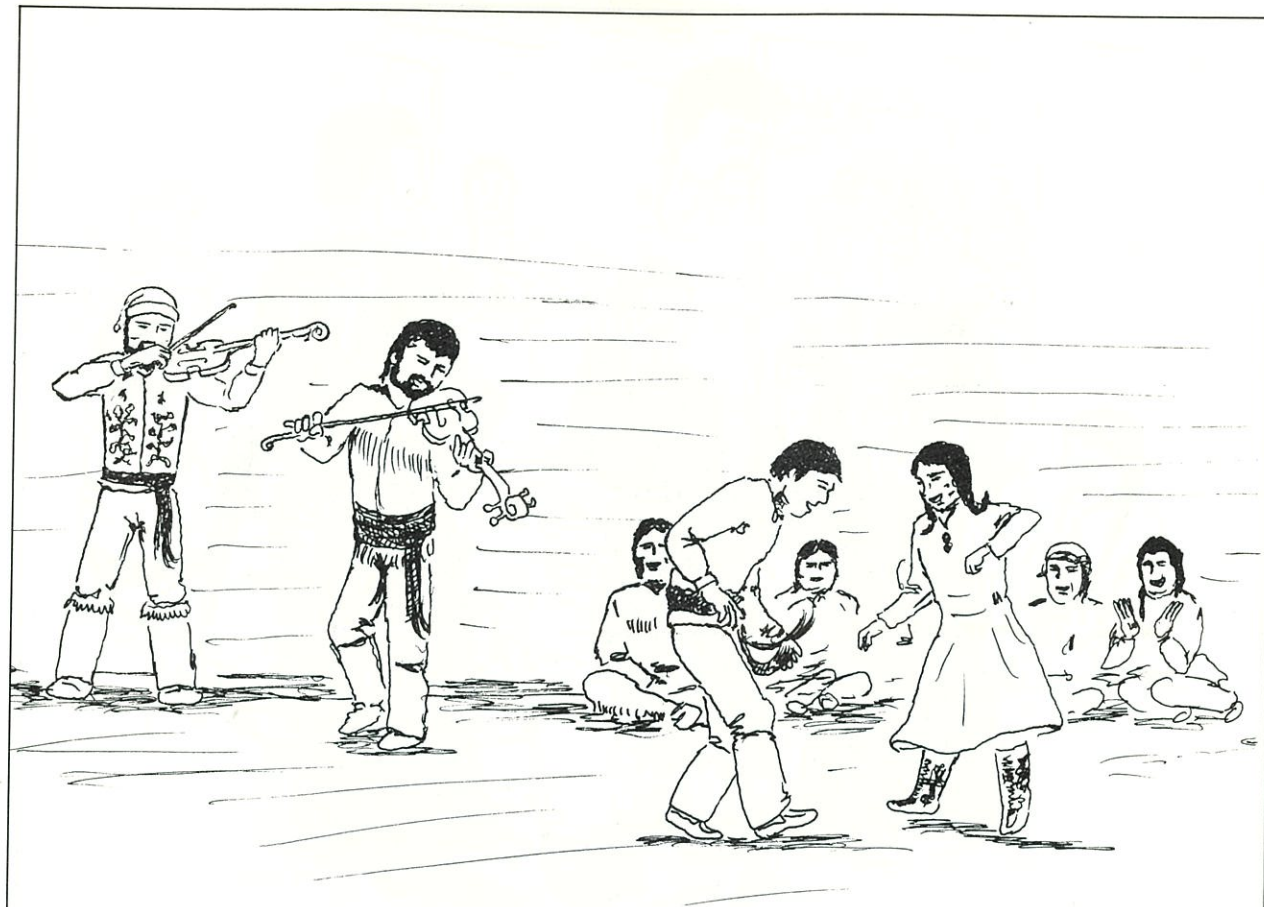
The day of the wedding has finally come. Boys run from house to house ringing little bells. This tells everyone it's time for the church service. Baptiste and Marguerite leave the house. They will lead the wedding procession. As they walk through the village, their family and friends join them.



"I, Baptiste, take thee, Marguerite, as my wife," says the groom.
 "I, Marguerite, take thee, Baptiste, as my husband," says the bride.
 "To love and to hold till death parts us," they say together.
 After the wedding, everyone returns to the bride's house, where they will be served a grand feast.



The wedding dinner is served in several sittings. At the first sitting, Father Richard sits next to the bride. The guests laugh and talk as they eat. The other guests visit outside, everyone laughing and talking.
 "See my new sash," calls MacAuley. "This will help tie the knot!"

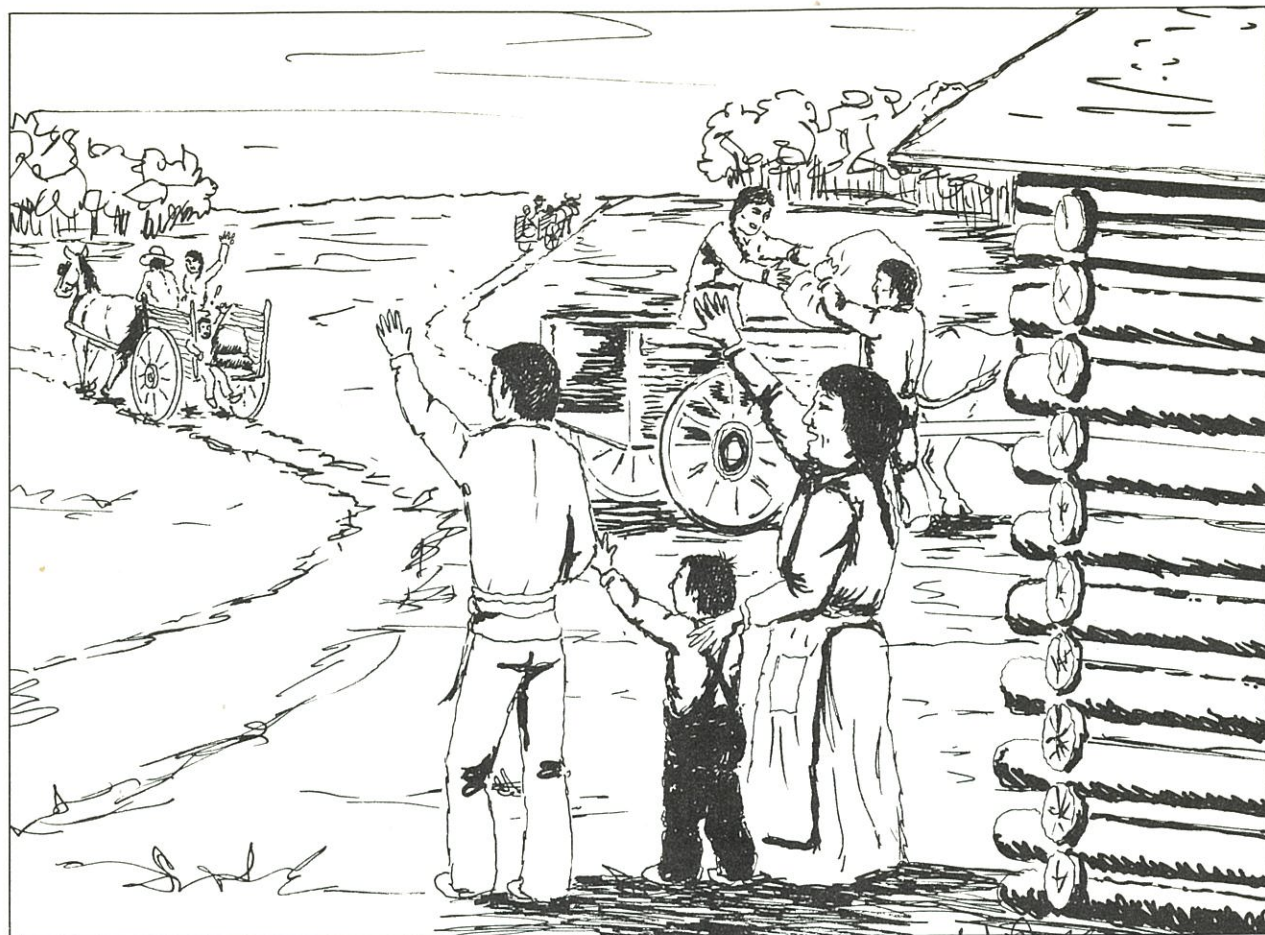


After the feasting, the wedding dance is held. MacAuley leads the fiddlers in the French, Scottish and Irish folk songs the people love to hear. He plays jigs and reels and two-steps. The music gets louder and faster. Many people are clapping and singing along.



The Cree relatives have brought their drums. They, too, dance and sing. Their traditional songs honour the happy occasion.

The dancing goes on until the early hours of the morning. For several days there will be more visiting and merrymaking.



Then, family by family, the guests pack to leave. They say good-bye and return home.

Life in the village returns to normal. But everyone will remember the happy time they spent at Baptiste and Marguerite's wedding.

