



Sheila, pale as a marble Madonna, sang her best and Johann, with Anton clinging to his arm, heard her adoringly

JOHANN LIND

By Laura Goodman Salverson

Illustrated by J. F. Clymer

FOURTH INSTALMENT

FOR the first time in her history young Saskatchewan astonished the world. In the very belt set aside by certain gentlemen in their computations as unsuited for the raising of wheat, thousands of bushels had been grown. In fact, this was a year of bumper crops all over the Dominion, and Saskatchewan had done her part nobly. The new settlers were wild with enthusiasm, working in a kind of frenzy of joy as though by tearing through their labors they might hasten on the spring and the crop to follow.

Ole and his sons had bought a binder in conjunction with Mr. Berg and another Scandinavian. Day after day passed in a fever of work, but what joyous work! The grain stood thick and tall and the beautiful sheaves seemed to leap from the machine with conscious pride and pleasure.

Ole sat the binder like a monarch. Never had he followed the blue waves of his Northern Seas with greater exhilaration than he now plunged through the golden fields of grain. Talk of the zest of sea breezes! Ole was momentarily convinced that the much-abused plains had a stimulus just as potent. "Ja, da"! Ole couldn't explain it, but for the time he was captive to its lure. The rich earth flung up a snare of perfumes that acted like a drug to the senses. Pangs were eased and the harsher aspect dulled in its beneficent influence. Soft clouds of vapor curled up from the hot ground to

mingle with the healthy odor of the steaming horses. Whirr, whirr, whirr, sang the magical machine, close upon the dull hollow sound made by the willing feet of the faithful horses.

Behind him his sons toiled at stooking, bending and lifting with mechanical persistence; Johann in the lead but Andre doing his part ably. They had always made a good team in the harvest and if Andre showed a little less energy than formerly it was doubtless due to the preoccupation of his thoughts. Eli was as pretty as a kitten . . . not much for life perhaps, but—

"Wooho! wooho wooho"! Helga's welcome voice came floating over the field. "Wooho, wooho"! closer now. Ah, there she was at last, basket and hot coffee in hand. What pleasure, what delight the homely picture afforded! Ole stopped the horses who, thankful for release, set to flicking flies in earnest, and with a sigh of relief flung himself down on the restful earth. Andre followed suit; Johann toiled on till Helga's cheerful voice commanded obedience.

How gratifying to fling oneself upon the couch of earth; to lave in sunshine for a wordless mo-

ment while the tired muscles relaxed and the mind gathered peace. Earth, and sky, and air, all seeming to merge in one pool of burning life; a sea of pristine fire, into which, and out of which, all things proceeded. . . .

"Tish, now, Johann, no dreaming"! Helga chided, pouring out a generous jugful of steaming coffee. But, that moment's respite made the simple refreshment doubly welcome. While her men ate Helga droned on about this and that triviality. A young turkey was missing; the barn cat had got another litter. So on and on, between serving.

Thus day followed day until the crop was cut. Then came harvesting. Helga was all on pins at first. It was so long now since she'd had to feed a crowd of hungry men; she'd never get through it; she was getting old and falling behind in the arts of cooking. But after all everything turned out nicely. Vrouw Van Meiris put an end to worry by offering Haasji's services for that difficult time. Haasji was more than willing. Work had no terrors for her healthy being and curiosity concerning the mysteries of harvesting lent additional lure. When the great iron monster came puffing and grinding up the road, Haasji hopped about like an excited pigeon.

Whenever time permitted out she must go to the edge of the field to watch the iron magician at his tricks. There he stood on the plain, a giant thing belching smoke and gaping hungrily for the

ripened grain. Into his yawning mouth the great sheaves disappeared only to reappear again by way of two large funnels, in showers of golden kernels and lighter straw.

As the monster proceeded with his ruthless grinding, the mounds of grain and straw kept steadily rising, and each inch of growth meant money for Min Heer Johann. Haasji clapped her hands in glee. *Allemacher*, such a nice excitement! She wished she dared tell Heer Johann the feeling it gave her but he was very grim and dirty just then. Ach, yes, grim as the black machine to which he fed his lovely golden sheaves.

So Haasji contented herself with admiring him from afar, strange tenderness swelling her young heart. Min Heer was very big and strong, and—beautiful, but just the same he never seemed happy. Not as Haasji understood happiness. Oh, well, Haasji knew something she could do—she could hide a second piece of pie for Min Heer and put cream on it!

That happy decision acquired, back she skipped to the house to commence the ordeal of peeling potatoes for dinner. Ach! what mountains of potatoes she peeled those next two days. What piles of cakes and pies poor Helga sweated over! *Allemacher!* such a hunger Haasji never had witnessed. Sure it was good to see the threshers come, but — “you should know,” Haasji told her mother later, “it was like Christmas to see them go”!

Johann decided to haul his grain while the roads were still reasonably fit and Haasji was on fire to make the first trip with him. She had done her work well and was to receive a dress length in payment. Her mind was fixed on getting something blue—blue as Eli’s silk, and to have it made as tight as possible. According to Eli, the girls in Winnipeg were wearing princess dresses; dresses that pinched one’s waist and gave one an elegant appearance. Such a dress Haasji was determined to possess.

Johann raised no objection to her going. She always amused him and he enjoyed her chatter as they drove along. Everything pleased her; the birds on the wing, the beasts in the pastures; nothing so small, nothing so commonplace but her warm heart found it beautiful.

Johann was silent, but a singular peace possessed him. The clean air was bracing and the sunlight lay kindly upon the face of the land. Haasji’s happy chatter made part of his contentment. She buzzed in his ear like a busy little bee, and this buzzing merged with his happiness, to vitalize and uphold it. It was impossible to doubt the sweetness of life with Haasji’s gladness ringing in his ears. When they reached town he suggested she do her shopping while he drove down to the elevator. But no, her curiosity was much too great.

“Oh, Min Heer, neen, neen! I want to see him, that big tall house where you put in the beautiful corn”—Haasji still clung to the Continental name. “Neen, neen, Min Heer, Haasji likes to see that house.”

See she did, watching every movement with keenest attention. Sure, yes, it was very wonderful; it made one think machinery had a mind. “And you should know,” Haasji informed her mother later, “how honest is that house. Min Heer Johann’s waste comes right back to him. Such good pig feed, too”!

But even this day of many joys had its alloy. The general merchant had nothing in the way of sky-blue material. Johann offered comfort by contending that pink was just as pretty. Well, maybe, but Haasji had her doubts. And then, who should they meet as they turned past the doctor’s tiny office but Sheila Patrick. Haasji stiffened like a little Indian, winsome animation wiped from her happy face.

Johann checked the horses, the apparition evidently more than welcome to him. And Sheila was certainly very trim in her street clothes, and her smile somehow fitted the tailor-made turnout. A well-behaved little smile knowing just when to arrive and when to leave, like a proper caller! It flashed out now for a tantalizing moment, impressing Johann tremendously; she was so different from the girls he knew. He had thought about her a good deal lately. Even in the thick of harvesting he’d caught himself dreaming of that cool young slenderness of hers. And here she stood smiling up

at him, the yellow sunset for a background; a new warmth of friendliness in her eyes.

Haasji sensed what was passing in Johann’s mind and all at once the bottom dropped from her little universe. She was tired. She wished she’d never come . . . ten miles over rough prairie roads wasn’t so nice. And pink—she hated pink. *Allemacher*, yes, that so dreadfully wise Miss Patrick wore pink at the dance! Ach, the day was going from bad to worse! Min Heer was actually asking the teacher to drive with him some day. Now she knew he’d spoiled forever. He’d never understand her any more or the things the birds and bees and pretty flowers whispered in the dawning. Poor Min Heer,

how she longed to warn him against closing his heart to sweet foolishness and laughter . . . Haasji didn’t know, you see, that Sheila recited poetry divinely by moonlight.

Sheila was smiling less coldly now. “Thanks so much, Mr. Lind, but I happen to be engaged on Sunday. However, there’s Saturday—that is, if you’re not busy.”

Of course he was busy and of course he denied it. What are a few hours in the face of such good fortune? And after all, Andre generally took Dutch-leave with the buggy every Sunday.

So, to Haasji’s utter disgust, it was settled Johann should call at the Patrick’s on Saturday at four o’clock. What was more, Sheila promised very graciously to take supper at the Boen’s.

That completed the ruin of tottering happiness. All the rest of the way Haasji sat in gloomy silence but Min Heer didn’t notice it. Or very nearly so. Just once he looked at her, the shadow of surprise in his dream-filled eyes, but Haasji knew he hadn’t really come out of his trance.

A little later waking to the fact that his young companion drooped beside him, he twitted her lightly as he thrust a quilt behind her back for greater comfort. “Poor kid, you’ll be wiser next time and wait till someone goes to town in a buggy; pretty rough going in a wagon these days.”

Haasji sniffed. “He is all right, that wagon,” said she. “You should know, Min Heer—you should know . . .” Poor Haasji floundered, at loss to explain her meaning. “Ach, you should know it is the pink”! she finished sharply. “I hate him, that silly color.”

Johann’s laughter rang out gaily but Haasji failed to respond. She had discovered a new cruelty in life. It was so hard to be a little farm girl. *Allemacher*, yes! Well, she’d become a monster of knowledge, wise as the serpent. Nay, wiser—wise as Miss Patrick!

MR AND MRS. PATRICK received Johann with humorous courtesy. They were becoming accustomed to their niece’s admirers. Not a week passed without some shining buggy being tied to the fence.

Miss Patrick was forced to admit a little later that Johann was not so ignorant as she had supposed. Something, the pleasure in his heart, the

loveliness of the autumn day, or the charm of his fair companion had freed him momentarily from customary reticence. Or perhaps the memory of his first success had something to do with it.

All his springtime hopes had come to fruition. The labor had been hard but the reward justified it. His faith was in the land and the land had repaid him. A thousand fresh ambitions had hold of him, inducing him to talk as he had never talked before; giving word to hidden thought and captive fancy. Sheila began to respect him; to understand a little of the vision pioneers must have.

Something warned Sheila that this was no time for arguments, and reasoning, she suspected, no matter how clever, would never subjugate Johann Lind. She must find a better weapon, a more subtle method. Prompted by age-old instinct, she became sweetness incarnate; and alas, discovered his weakness. Whatever else he was, or was not, his heart proved curiously susceptible to poetry—beautiful phrases enslaved him. Sheila decided to make the most of it.

“Listen now,” she told him in conclusion, “here’s a message just for you:

*Ye rigid Ploughmen, bear in mind
Your labor is for future hours;
Advance—spare not—nor look behind—
Plough deep and straight with all your powers.”*

He took it much more seriously than she had intended, for seriousness was not what she wanted just then. So she launched into humorous doggerel that brought the laughter she preferred.

By this time they had reached the far end of Simon Berg’s hay-land. Not so far away rose the thatched roof of the Russian’s poor little house. Something about the place struck a sympathetic chord in Johann’s heart. He wished he’d gone to see them; they must be very lonely—that was it, the place had a desolate, lonely look. Just now he’d have preferred not passing the Zekof’s but he wanted Sheila to see a beautiful piece of country that lay beyond. But since he must pass he conceived the mad idea of stopping to get acquainted.

“Having a hard time, I guess,” he said to Sheila, nodding toward the sorry-looking place.

Disgust overspread her face. “Ugh! You can imagine their state of mind. Look at that dreadful house! Not a window open anywhere! And . . . Heavens! don’t tell me it serves for barn as well as house”!

Johann was just a little bit nettled by the way she spoke. “Well,” he drawled, it helps to keep them warm.”

“Johann Lind! You’re not upholding them?”

And then they caught sight of Mrs. Zekof herself. A sizable body was Mrs. Zekof, not easily overlooked. Barefooted, but with her head decently covered, and skirts hitched up to her knees, she stood in the midst of her potato patch. She had heard them coming and, hand to forehead, watched to see them pass. Judging by her gloomy expression, watching folks pass was her only contact with the social life of the community.

At her feet lay a great pile of clean-skinned potatoes, the decorative splashes of moist black earth peppering her stout red legs sufficient witness to her right of ownership. Behind her swept a vast plain; the tiny potato patch no more than a mole on its golden cheek. And the peasant woman, shapeless, ugly, dirty from tireless labor, loomed up in its vastness like the spirit of primal struggle. Johann looked at her with quickened sympathies. Despite her stubborn patience she seemed the victim of unequal strife; her gloomy figure portraying eloquently the terrible loneliness of the whole struggling human race.

“Poor devil,” thought he, black eyes half shut, brows drawn in a heavy frown. “Poor unhappy devil”!

“I’m thirsty,” said he, as he jumped down to



undo the gate. That might be, but as he angled toward the house his eyes never left Mrs. Zekof, in them an expression far from critical. Poor Mrs. Zekof's leathery face darkened with suspicion and distrust as the strangers drove up. But then, meeting with that compassionate look of Johann's she sprang to sudden, passionate life.

"Glory be to Thee, O God," she shouted in her native tongue, rushing forward to welcome her visitors.

Johann nodded, deeply touched by her childish excitement and, smiling, made her understand he was thirsty and would very much like a big drink. Which common request seemed to affect Mrs. Zekof like a great honor. The first laughter of months on her lips, she dashed into the house, reappearing from its cavernous depths, cup and iron pot in hand. Sheila shuddered with horror as eager Mrs. Zekoff blew into the cup and wiped it carefully on her petticoat before pouring out the milk.

But, very much a Lind, Johann accepted the drink. "Thank you, Mrs. Zekof," said he, "you are very kind." And to Sheila's eternal wonder, drank the last drop of it.

The children now came flocking round them, curious and interested. There were five of them and brighter-eyed youngsters Johann had never seen. But they were not all inclined to be friendly; the eldest, a really beautiful lad of twelve, hung back suspiciously. Johann grinned at him boy-fashion. "Come and see me some time, young fellow," said he.

"Glory be to Thee, O God," shouted the poor mother, catching Johann's hand to her lips. "He will come, Barin—he will come!"

Gracefully as might be, Johann freed himself, leaped into the buggy and, with a cheerful word or two for the now clamoring children, rode away.

Sheila was in a huff. "It's a mystery to me, Mr. Lind, how you could drink milk from such an awful source. Surely you know that microbes. . . ."

Johann struck the horses a sharp blow and they, poor creatures, unaccustomed to such treatment, sprang forward in shocked surprise. Sheila caught at her hat, flinging Johann an indignant glance. "Really, I should think you'd be more careful of your animals," said she.

"Oh, well . . . we have our failings and our tastes," he returned in a soft voice that, nevertheless, grated on Sheila's sensitive nerves.

FALL faded into winter, and with winter came leisure. Helga, happy as a lark, spent her free moments in making patchwork quilts. Andre made no secret of his admiration for Eli, so she confided to Ole she meant to make six quilts for each of the boys, and as many pillows. Besides, she was already saving the down from her fowls for a purpose she refused to divulge.

There was a good deal of gossip concerning Andre and Eli in town. Some suspected it was to escape the colorless life at home she had taken up with him. With a father like Simon she'd never have gotten out at all unless a suitor took her. This was the general opinion but, keener wits hinted that, left to herself, Eli might have chosen differently. A counter statement barely whispered for by now everyone understood that Johann was a regular caller at the Patricks, and old Mr. Patrick took considerable pains to explain what an up-and-coming young farmer he was.

As for Johann, he loved Sheila and he hated her. He wanted to believe her fine and true, but some-

thing he could not quite understand made him rebel against her cold reasoning.

Conscious of unworthiness, he accepted her viewpoint, or persuaded himself that he did. She was so wonderful, this wise Sheila, so poised and selfless; so zealous for the common good. Of course she was right in all she said and of course he loved her cool sweet ways.

Still more than likely it was to propitiate that other side of his nature (the side that rebelled against Sheila's mechanical code) that he made a friend of the Russian boy. Many an evening young Anton spent with him and Herman in learning to read or listening to Herman's dignified interpretations of the tales he himself loved.

But there was a darker side to their intimacy. As the boy lost his shyness, he too had a contribution to make. Old Herman stood aghast at what this baby knew of wickedness and sin. Even Johann shivered at his descriptions of peasant up-

for his children, but not enough wood to keep warm. So he must cut down trees with Anton and his next younger brother to help him. They thought it great sport, adding much to their dignity, this pulling on the crosscut with their father, and little Nikolai, only seven, went with them to cut off the branches when the trees were down.

CAME then a bright December day when they were more than usually merry. Zekoff was in high spirits and joked with the boys as though they were men. So many trees were down; in spring the stumps would come out and then—Horspody! a nice little patch of new land! So Anton and his brother hung on manfully to the cold handle of the saw, and down thundered tree after tree, while little Nikolai chopped the harder, showing his brothers what a man he was.

Who can say just how it happened? Always at that precarious moment when a tree stood poised after its trunk was severed, the father gave a warning cry that the boys might leap to safety. Always the poor man called sharply: "Nikolai! Nikolai!" and little Nikolai would scamper aside like a timid rabbit. But on this day when so much zeal possessed them, little Nikolai wasn't quick enough. Perhaps his frantic ambition to do his share, or the weariness of his tired little body dulled his mind . . . that ill-fated tree poised proudly; then, a restless complaining from the branches . . . "Nikolai! Nikolai!" cried the father sharply. "Nikolai! Nikolai!" Down crashed the heavy trunk.

One terrified scream escaped the child, and he lay silent, the great black poplar spread about him.

Frenzied with horror, the father tore at the heavy trunk, babbling incoherently, the frightened boys clinging to each other, too terrified to move.

"Oh God have mercy! Oh God have mercy!" he cried distractedly, lifting with clumsy tenderness the maimed body and stumbled off toward the house. "Christos, mercy!" sobbing aloud the boys followed.

Daria may have seen them from her small window, or instinct may have warned her. Out she came to meet them already beating her breast. "O Christos! O Christos! . . . Christos Voskresye," she moaned. Against her broad bosom she pillowed the fractured head of little Ni-

kolai—little Nikolai who had danced down the path so gaily a few hours ago; little Nikolai, her manly darling.

On the doorstep they huddled together in agonized silence, these two bereaved parents, the winter's cold having no further chill for them. Daria rocked herself a little with her sad burden; Zekof stared into space. The smaller children crept into the corners of the house; but Anton watched his parents with dilated eyes. Johann—Barin Johann of the kind heart, he might do something. What that something should be he couldn't conceive, for, young though he was, he knew death. Horribly silent bodies stretched along the roadside . . . he shut his eyes to exclude the vision . . . ah, he remembered them. He would never forget—nor yet that awful sound when a body fell . . . Yes, he knew death, as all know death who know Russia ever so little.

But something must be done, and Anton had but one friend. Barin Johann would understand. Barin Johann always did.

JOHANN happened to be watering the horses when Anton came stumbling into the yard. "Barin, Barin!" panted the child, his eyes like

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"Thanks so much, Mr. Lind, but I happen to be engaged on Sunday. However, there's Saturday —"

risings in the Baltic—of the dreadful slaughter that had driven his people away.

As time went on he grew pathetically attached to his new friends and eagerly desirous of showing them his gratitude. He even brought Helga a queer cheese with strange seeds in it; for which she kissed him, and later flung it to her hens. But though he learned to laugh and chatter unreservedly with Johann, he never ceased worshipping him as a kind of superman. Nor did Daria, his mother, ever omit a prayer for the kind Barin when she knelt before her rude Ikon.

Now they were often quite gay as they sat before the fire listening to Anton's tales of the nice people on the great farm. For Barin Johann was, in their estimation, not only a good neighbor, but a rich gentleman.

But now Anton's father had to cut wood, day in, day out. He was afraid their small store of fuel wouldn't outlast the winter. All spring, all summer he had toiled like a beast and Daria with him, but even four hands can't accomplish everything. There was enough green feed for his cattle, and potatoes

Johann Lind

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coals in his head. "Nikolai. . . .our little Nikolai. Oh, Barin, our little Nikolai—" he got no farther for a fit of weeping. Johann slipped his arm round the shivering little figure, calling sharply at the same time to Andre to come and take the horses and to hitch up the drivers. Very gently he led the frantic child to the house.

"Herre Gud!" Helga was instantly all sympathy and began stroking his hands and patting his poor cold cheeks. But Anton pushed her away. He was a big boy, not a baby; he was come to get comfort for others, not petting for himself.

"Barin Johann," he cried shrilly, "it is mama needs you—oh, Barin, the tree killed him! I saw it—I saw it all. . . .It came so quick—so terribly quick!"

The horror of the thing now doubly clear, poor Anton gave a dreadful shriek and fell to beating his temples with his hard little purple fists.

"Now, then," said Johann turning to Helga, "you had better drive the boy home. I'll see what the neighbors can do."

He didn't beg assistance. "There's been an accident at the Zekofs. Get ready. Get ready to lend a hand, and be quick!" he cried, as he dashed up to a farm house. And, something about him, strong, dominant, sitting his wicked-eyed pinto so carelessly, made the command seem natural. He was like a scout calling out his regiment. No one thought of hesitating. All at once the Zekofs leaped into their proper place in the community.

By the time he had finished his round the nearest neighbors were already there. A white spread had been thrown over the only bed and here lay little Nikolai. Crouched on the floor nearby was the poor father, staring stupidly, clasping and unclasping his hands. Daria wept. But Johann, whose pitying eyes first sought her imagined that hers was the lesser grief. Indeed, as she wept first on one neighbor's shoulder, then another's, he understood there must be a certain magic comfort in these tears.

Mrs. Berg was cooking soup in a big iron pot, Haasji and her mother setting the rough table. From various corners the younger children watched, eagerness in their eyes despite the strange terror that bound them.

Johann saw that Eli had a tapeline and was measuring certain shabby little garments. This was unbearable, yet it fascinated him. Slowly, carefully, her fingers slipped from seam to seam. Bent above her pathetic task she, somehow, seemed different. He saw that her face was not only gentle but full of womanly pity. And pity lent character and dignity more becoming than the coy ways she had tried to imitate. When she looked up meeting his probing eyes she neither flushed nor smiled, nor stammered in her speech. For that moment, at least, Eli dared be herself; gentle, full of sympathy, happy to give comfort.

Thus the passing of little Nikolai induced tenderness and good will from every quarter. Men who had spoken carelessly or slightly of Zekof, now pledged themselves to lend him a hand in springtime. A shame, they thought it, letting a man struggle along like this with everything against him. And women who had made jest of Daria, hushed her woe, admired her children, gave of their small store to brighten her home, and themselves wept bitterly at her sorrow.

The men discovered that quiet Mr. Van Meiris was an excellent cabinet-maker. To him, then, fell the making of the little coffin from the fine wood Johann donated. And so it went. For the first time, also, Johann gave to the world his handicraft. There were no roses for little Nikolai, but on the slab of wood that was to rest above his bruised young head, Johann carved a single lily that drooped in pathetic realism from a broken stem. Ah, never again was Barin Johann mere man to Daria!

But though all was so dutifully done, she wept inconsolably; and into her weeping crept a new note of despair, that haunted Johann. Helga said it would pass. When the funeral was over she'd pull herself together.

Mrs. Berg and Helga took great pride in the number of buggies that drove up to the Zekofs on the day of the funeral.

The one flaw to their way of thinking was the fact that the minister was away at a convention. But Mr. Patrick, as Justice of the Peace, felt justified in offering to take the pastor's part and, with commendable dignity, read a chapter from the gospels over the frozen grave. Sheila, pale as a marble Madonna, sang her best and Johann, with Anton clinging to his arm, heard her adoringly. Never was she more lovely or farther removed from common clay. Her eyes were calm and tearless. That, too, Johann read to her favor.

But, when the dreary service had ended he came upon Haasji crying wildly behind her father's wagon; and somehow he longed to sit down beside her, to give way to the heaviness of his heart.

"Why Haasji, why child!"

"Oh, Min Heer Johann! It is so sad to sing. . . .when someone dies," she wailed, burying her little nose in her woolen mittens. He repeated this dully as he rode off into the winter twilight. "It is so sad to sing! It is so sad to sing. . . ." And the pony's feet took up the refrain, beating it out endlessly on the magic carpet of snow. "It is so sad to sing—" Johann dug his heels into the animal's side, swearing softly at his foolishness.

A PERIOD of storms now set in, and for days men kept as close to their houses as possible. But Ole rather enjoyed these elemental meannesses, blowing and blustering and stamping off the snow each time he entered. "Ja, this isn't Norway! I ask you can it be worse? By jiminy, if the old boat don't keel it's a queer thing, you bet!"

Old Herman, less hardy than formerly, had grown a bit sensitive to cold weather. His bones ached miserably, and he would demonstrate for the benefit of the family how difficult it was for him to straighten his back or lift his feet to put on his shoes.

"Nu, ja, you better try a new liniment, Herman," Helga would suggest helpfully, "or maybe some more pain killer."

"Ja, killer—that's good," the old man chuckled. "No, Helga, you don't use it on me that killer." All he wanted was to be left to lie in the peace and warmth of his own room.

But one morning Herman was very ill. Andre rushed off for the new Doctor. He proved a pleasant young man, convinced of his own abilities. The old man was in no danger he said. It was nothing but la grippe, with care he'd be up and around in a week. The prophecy was fairly accurate. Herman wasn't up in a week, but by then out of all danger. None the less, the siege had a peculiar effect upon him. Always reluctant to speak of himself he grew strangely talkative and he couldn't bear to be left alone. He must have Johann near him constantly and so long as he was there he rambled on like a man in delirium. It was as though he feared passing from life with a burden of troublesome confidences.

The thing reached a crisis the morning he wakened feeling very much better. It was a bitterly cold day with a blizzard blowing that thundered and shrieked round the buildings in tireless fury.

"Such a gale, such a gale!" the old man began. "I don't recall another like it—save one. . . .But that was a storm I've never been able to forget. Strange, Johann, how we poor humans cling to our terrors—"

"Now, grandfather, if it's unpleasant why not let it pass? We want you to get well."

Herman ignored this excellent suggestion. "I'm old now, my son, don't worry me with excellent advice. I'm sick to death of sheperding each word and thought!"

Johann saw that a deep flush had overspread the old man's countenance and that his eyes were suspiciously bright. Better let him ramble on, thought he, than to get so excited. He laughed softly. "All right, grandfather, out with your sinful confession, get it off your chest!"

Herman signed deeply and turned accusing eyes on his young companion. "Your jest, my boy, is nearer truth than you suspect. . . . Listen then, I'll be brief, for all this thing is grievous to remember.

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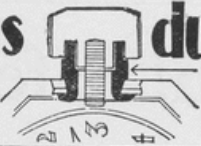
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Johann Lind

Continued from page 86

No need to tell again how terrible the Northern Sea boiled round the reef we called the Devil's Palm. You know all that—I've told it many times. What you don't know is that your mother came to me out of that pit of death—a wee baby she was, tied to her own mother's bosom, and the sole survivor of a Brittany schooner."

"Brittany? She was French, then, my little mother?"

Herman waved his hand impatiently. "Don't interrupt me—we'll come to that—nay, we'll begin there for how I happened to be near the reef to witness that tragic episode matters nothing. There were gallant hands aboard the schooner, they kept her off the rocks—fought that hell of water as long as strength lasted. . . . 'Tis just as well they perished—I know the breed. Nu, ja, I said I'd skip all that. . . . It was quite some time before I got her, that poor French lady, from the sea. I thought at first she was dead; but, no, she lived for several weeks.

"'Tis as well to be truthful at my time of life. Those weeks were heaven and hell to me. Aye, you can look amazed, but I was young then, and she the loveliest creature. . . .

"And she trusted me. Hers was not a happy life. Born to the stage she had risen quickly to fame as a dancer. Then, tempted by all that wealth must mean to temperament and beauty, she had married a rich banker. It ended as most such affairs do. . . . she went back to her profession and then she met Jens Kerkvold. That was queer. I knew the Kerkvolds in Copenhagen—ja, that was in my student days—" For all his seriousness the old man couldn't help chuckling at Johann's wide amazement. "—So? You think it strange a student from Copenhagen should have taken to shepherding? Well, perhaps a little learning makes one mad—that, and a pretty face. . . . Nu, da, those Kerkvolds—fine folk they were and Jens as much a Viking as you'd want a man. Books wearied him—the sea had him from the start. Queer to think of it, that fate should have taken him to the Brittany fishing fleet in his first captaincy. Stranger still, he should have won that Butterfly of France, only to bring her home to Norway to die.

"Well, you can understand how the thing took hold of me. I'd always liked Jens; and there was I with his dying wife and infant daughter on my hands. Queer again, how one reasons in youth. She would have none of my offers to get her to his folks. No, they'd never like her she fancied. Ah, she was very emphatic on that score. She had seen too much of life; it had killed the faith in her. All she wanted was to know that her tiny daughter should grow up good and innocent. That, she fancied was the way to happiness—happiness, she had come to believe, must come from simple tastes. . . . And, because like Jens I loved her, I swore to do her bidding—"

So much bitterness had crept into Herman's habitually gentle tones that Johann grew alarmed. Perhaps the old man was worse. Perhaps he was wandering in his mind! "Now, now, grandfather, think no more about it. Whatever you did, you did for the best."

Herman struck fist on palm sharply. "So! You think I'm vaporing? Age brings upon us that fine suspicion. Bah! you young idiot! Idiot, yes. But then, what could you expect of Johann Lind?"

Johann sat thunderstruck, staring in blank incredulity at the withered old man half buried in quilts and pillows. Herman smiled for the first time. "Nu, ja, now I've got your attention. What's more, since I've insulted you, you'll not so quickly doubt my reason."

Then for the first time Johann learned the truth about Herr Lind; saw the point of Helga's curious phrase. Bigots all, those Linds, but charming in their bigotry—the remnant of a once great house. Herman was grown mellow with age. He saw the Factor with tolerant eyes, and did his best to make his son so see him. A strange, proud man, Herr Lind, but no monster; just, according to his code but not a hypocrite; never one to hide his shortcomings.

But Johann would have no more of it. He was filled with unreasoning rage. All he had suffered through misunderstand-

ing, he now laid at his father's door. A pretty inheritance he had of this father; this despot and despoiler of innocent womanhood!

"So! I'm a thing like that—a Lind! My God, a thing like that for a father!"

"Softly, lad, softly! Such things are part of the muddle we call life. Be just! Herr Lind was disposed to do his duty by you—"

"To send me from the country—to starve in an unknown land—"

"Not so fast, my son. He had nothing to do with it. Herr Lind had a strange passion for tormenting his lady, 'twas she conceived the plan. Plot and counter-plot, you see."

"Ah, I see all right," cried Johann angrily. "And you talk of justice to a beast like that! First he killed my mother; then he'd use a helpless infant to inflict misery on a dishonored wife. A lovely inheritance! What can you expect of Johann Lind! God, yes! What can you expect of a breed like that!"

Something of the fire that once was his, rekindled in the old man's sunken eyes: "Young fool! I'd expect courage for one thing—aye, courage to laugh at the world! Whatever is wrong or right is of man's thinking. The Linds thought for themselves—the conceits of others didn't matter."

But Johann had no taste just then for philosophic deduction. His soul was steeped in conflict. He longed to wreak vengeance on that despotic father for all his sweet young mother had suffered. He saw her now so clearly, that child-woman, dreaming her innermost dreams among the hills. Ah, if she had only lived how he'd have tried to make it up to her. Poor little mother, crushed on the wheel of life!

He lifted an ashen face to Herman. "You're right. I'll not add to her shame. These Linds, damn them, will never find me whimpering. Still, you can hardly expect decent people to take pride in such an inheritance."

"People! What do you mean 'people'?" Herman's voice was contemptuous. "People! Nine out of ten are only echoes of the loudest noise broadcasted. Praise, blame, it's all the same. Bah! the bleating of sheep has as deep significance." Mischief crept over his pallid face and he chuckled softly. "Aye, and when the sheep riot 'tis best to sic the dog on them!"

WHEN the siege of evil weather lifted, Johann made up his mind to visit the Zekofs. Once past the bluffs behind the farm, he saw the Van Meiris' shack, its grey smoke curling lazily upwards, the one sign of life in a white desolation. But no—out from the doorway danced a brown bundle, arms waving windmill fashion.

Johann reined in at the fence and Haasji shrieked at him lustily: "Oh, Min Heer, isn't it a loveliness this snow? The trees like puff balls on a Christmas tree! But always it's something to spoil. My mama wants to know what's good for frozen feet, chicken feet I mean. Already we have us a hospital behind the stove."

"Well, now Haasji—" Johann affected deep gravity. "I'm not up on the chicken business. Mother should be able to help you."

"Ach! didn't I know it! It's to Vrouw Boen I should go, right away I tell my mama. But no. Always she thinks of the lung fever. 'You got your feet wet, Haasji,' she says, 'and come on a fever.' Ach, that makes for me a sadness, Min Heer. In such a pretty snow you should not get sick."

He agreed with her with a clouding of spirit. She struck at the root of things, this young Haasji, in her childish prattle. "But this once we can get around the difficulty. Suppose you tell Mama Van Meiris that I offer you my pony when I return from the Zekofs. And Andre can take you home again, he'll be going to the Bergs after supper."

"Oh, Min Heer! you make for me a grand picnic. And I shall take me along a caraway loaf for grandpa. But—perhaps it will make for you a fever to walk, Min Heer? Well, I wait then. But look, at the funeral I promise that poor Anton my 'Hans Brinker.' Maybe you take him for me now?"

The little kindness was particularly

pleasing to Johann for he happened to know how few were Haasji's treasures. When she reappeared, not only with the book but a basket of her mother's famous sweet cakes, he smiled upon her with such excess approval that poor Haasji turned beet red.

"Ach! you make a laugh at me," she accused him sharply. "Maybe it's my fatness. Two pounds more I got on me, and no potatoes for a week!"

"Heavens! You don't say so."
She made it very plain that levity was uncalled for. Johann hastened to make amends. "But, Haasji, surely you're not forgetting that you're growing tall?"

"Oh, Min Heer!"
"Why, of course, it's quite noticeable. Why yes, I'm dead certain those two pounds are all expanded in length!"

"Min Heer, right away I get me a measure. You should know—oh, Min Heer, it is so sad to look like the little pig!"

At the Zekofs, Johann was welcomed like a king. Daria, all excited eagerness, shoed the children out of the way and dusted a rickety chair for the Barin. Hopsidly! he found them in a mess but, oh, so welcome was their Barin Johann none the less. But now he was come he felt suddenly ill at ease. The dusky room was unbearably hot and smelled of strange odors. Some sort of soup was sizzling on the stove, and a pail of pig feed stood near. The table was littered with dirty tin dishes which Anton was about to wash in a rusty pan. Zekof himself was nowhere about.

Daria's glad enthusiasm was short lived. Down she sank on an overturned bucket and, eyes pathetic as a hound's still fastened on the Barin, she lapsed into silent gloom. For the moment Johann felt unutterably revolted. He wanted to bolt and run like a dreamer fleeing a bogey of the night, but poor little Anton was watching, waiting—

"You got through the cold spell all right," Johann began lamely, addressing the boy.

At that Daria began to weep and to beat her breasts, rocking herself to and fro disconsolately. Poor Anton sighed. "Barin, it is always so. Always the weeping. . . . The wood we burn—it is little Nikolai's soul. If we don't freeze it is because he suffers for us. Oh, Barin, it is very awful!"

Johann lost sight of his aversions. He spoke now as gently as to a child.

"Good Mrs. Zekof, you must be brave. You must do your best because of the others."

She may not have understood him clearly, but she stopped weeping to listen to his voice. It was a voice she would ever respect. And then Anton translated for her.

"Yes, Barin, it's true, she says. But little Nikolai can't see the glory of God. That is killing her."

"What!" Johann was incredulous. Heavens! what superstitions human beings do shape for their own undoing. "Anton, I'm afraid I don't quite understand—"

Poor lad, he did his best to explain: "You see, Barin, Nikolai can't enter Paradise for he died in his sins. . . . and mama can't even pray for him. . . . she's in sin herself."

It came to Johann with something of shock that the world of men should still hold so strange a concept of spiritual Fatherhood. What poor Daria needed now was sympathetic understanding not intellectual enlightenment.

"Now, Anton," he began cheerfully, "there must be something we can do for your mother. It is she needs comfort, not little Nikolai."

Anton turned this over in his mind gravely. "But, Barin, even her Ikon dropped down from the wall and broke. It is a sign that God is angry. Now we can't even give thanks for mercy."

"Nonsense, Anton! It's more likely a sign that the string was rotten, or the nail driven in a poor place. However, if it's only an Ikon she wants, we'll soon fix that."

The boy was delighted. "Oh, Barin, if it could be done! Oh, if it only could be done!" Then hurriedly he explained the Barin's statement to his mother.

Into her perpetual darkness stole a faint gleam of light and, grateful always, she flung herself at Johann's feet, kissing his hands with religious fervor. "Glory be to Thee, O God!" she cried, "and peace to this noble heart!"

Johann felt a bit shaky when he finally got away. And, laugh though he

might, he couldn't forget the festering pain in Daria's eyes. These Zekofs, how lose they were in that maze of superstition—Lost, and without a decent God to shepherd them!

These sacrilegious musings were happily routed by Haasji's merry greeting. All smiles and laughter she waited for Min Heer by the roadside; caraway loaf in one hand, a pint pail of pickled cabbage in the other. "So! We get us a cure for the hens, Min Heer, you think?"

WHEN the Christmas season was at an end and the dull months of January and February faced the young people, they began making plans for various entertainments. There, Andre played an active part, for both Eli and he were prime favorites in the village. Johann attended these festivities, but something about him antagonized the people. His independence and unconscionable mannerisms were against him. In their secret hearts these good people suspected such measures as indicative of an upstart nature. And when it was noised abroad that he had spent a hundred and some dollars on a set of Encyclopedias they were sure of it.

Now Andre was different. They could understand him. When his share of the crops was sold he behaved as a young man should. He bought his pretty sweetheart a bracelet and a silver brooch. Yes, and if he did spend a little foolishly on smart clothes, well, such was to be expected of a lad in love. Oh, Andre was a fine young fellow and no mistake about it!

Another grievance against Johann was the silent way he had. Never a word could you get out of him concerning his own affairs. Most of all his attachment for Sheila worried the villagers. There, too, he acted as no sensible lover should. Just when they were certain his capricious fancy had been captured at last, didn't he up and stop going to the Patrieks altogether! It was all very queer and past divining.

Nor would it have seemed less strange had the poor gossips known that Sheila herself was as puzzled as they. Johann had simply stopped coming to see her. Being an admirably poised young lady she decided to ignore the whole thing and to turn her zeal to good account. For a month, she devoted her spare time to fostering the reading circle. But in the end curiosity,—that's the name she gave the impulse—got the best of her and, under pretext of enlisting his services to get young Anton to school, she wrote him a letter.

That was a wonderful day for Johann, a sort of rebirth of hope. Ever since Herman had related that unhappy Norse-land romance he had been suffering from a feeling of unworthiness. Hate them he might, but he was a Lind of the Linds and who of a breed like that might aspire to a girl like Sheila?

Then came her letter. Conventional, cold, written in a neat irreproachable handwriting it had power, none the less, to remake his mental world. He couldn't be so utterly worthless since Sheila sought his help! She had not forgotten him—had no intention of forgetting him. Well, heredity be damned, he'd show the world yet that a Lind was not always crooked in the blade! He was strong, clean of heart, and ready to battle the world. Ah, with her beside him, what might he not accomplish!

But first there was the problem of Anton. To win the Zekofs over to the idea of sending the boy to school was not so simple as it sounded. Unless something could be done to better Daria, there was little hope of freedom for Anton. It was then that Johann remembered the Ikon. He had forgotten all about it in his selfish despondency! Well, that at least was quickly remedied. The thing was done and Daria was so overwhelmed with gratitude she couldn't even weep. It went too deep for tears. Glory be to God! the Barin opened the doors of Heaven for her!

Anton promised to report the effects of renewed prayer, and Johann came away with a light heart believing that things would soon right themselves. It was something of a catastrophe, therefore, to have Anton come tumbling to the barn one bitterly cold night, soon after, more discouraged and miserable than ever before.

"Things pretty bad yet eh, Anton?" asked Johann, clearing a place for the boy on the bench beside him.

Continued on page 88



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Johann Lind

Continued from page 87

"Yes, Barin. First it was better and we began to be glad again. But now it is the same. She cries and dreams, and always little Nikolai haunts her night and day. He is so unhappy she say—lost in Limbo, no light of God to guide him. . . . Oh, Barin, what's to become of us?"

What indeed? Johann saw no way out of the dilemma. School, of course, was an utter impossibility. Someone had to be home to look after the smaller children. All he could do for the time being was to lend Anton books, and to see that from time to time the poor children got a bite of decent fare.

THEN for a time he forgot the Zekofs. He forgot the Zekofs and everyone else besides, save only Sheila. She had been all grace and charm the night he called to report his progress in Anton's affairs. That night Sheila caught a glimpse of the real Johann and felt that formerly she had greatly wronged him. Then, too, thanks to certain gossips, she knew by now that Johann came honestly by that air of his. If he cared nothing what the world thought of him it was because the Linds had long since recognized no law but their own. Of course, no one knew who or what the Linds were, but that only added zest to the mystery. Since it was so difficult to pry any definite explanation out of the Boens, it simply proved their suspicions were well founded. The Linds, it was very certain, had a colorful history.

All this helped to influence Sheila's opinion. She began to see in Johann a conquest worth the making, and before he left that wonderful night she found herself in his arms. And his voice, so cold and biting at times, she discovered had a marvellous range of persuasive tenderness. Ah, yes, Sheila was well satisfied with her conquest when she waved him goodbye.

Johann, riding home under the stars, saw the world about him transfigured by the glory in his heart. Waste and still, the white prairie rolled on to the far rim of the sky. Nowhere a sign of life and no sound save the rapid hoofbeats of Johann's mean-eyed bronco, carrying him like a king through the night.

THE Young Ladies' Guild were going to hold a box social! Not a common ordinary affair such as the churches had recourse to in times of financial stringency, but a unique and spectacular affair. The neighboring towns were invited and all manner of preparations had been underway for several weeks.

Sheila was the genius of the whole thing. Hers were all the new suggestions and hers the adamant will that carried them through. For one thing there was to be a symbolic pageant, a march of the Seasons with herself as Spring, Eli as Summer, the young Doctor as Autumn, and old Mr. Patrick as Winter.

All this involved a tremendous amount of practice and rehearsals and Johann spent many a bored hour while his love draped herself this way and that in an attempt to attain perfection, or flew about assisting the clumsier efforts of others.

But, whatever his opinions of the forthcoming social, the rest of Hawthorne to a body, dreamt, thought, and talked nothing else.

Johann admitted that he would be more than delighted when the silly show was over and he could get a few satisfactory hours with his lovely Sheila once again. No doubt this secret longing had much to do with his eagerness to be off in good time when the long awaited evening arrived. Helga teased him for starting out so early. No matter, he was ready, the team was ready, and the night was calm and bright; if it was so outrageously early he'd go by the Zekofs and drop a bundle of papers for young Anton to read.

Poor little Anton! Queer he should have thought of him just now. It was so long since he had troubled about him. He'd have to do better in future.

This cheerful anticipation scarcely prepared him for the sight that met his eyes when he whirled out from the screen of willows hedging the Zekof's meadow. By the rude enclosure that marked little Nikolai's grave, poor Daria crouched, beating her desolate breast and wailing

bitterly. Alone in a frozen world she was oblivious to all but her own misery. She saw nothing; heard nothing; knew nothing but the black madness tearing at her soul.

Johann was shocked beyond anything he had ever experienced. Quick and compassionate he hurried toward her. "Mrs. Zekof, Mrs. Zekof!" he called out sharply.

She raised her head slowly and looked at him, her eyes glazed and staring. She did not recognize him.

"Good mother, come away." Johann's voice was gentle as a caress. "Come away, good Mrs. Zekof." And he lifted her like a child. Doeile but uncomprehending she leaned against him weakly, her poor, dull eyes searching to know his face. "Come with me," he urged softly, "come, Mrs. Zekof, it is Barin Johann."

A sharp convulsion passed through her body and her poor, half frozen face twitched pitifully. Barin Johann? Barin Johann? At last she knew him. "Glory be to Thee, O God! Barin, you will save me. . . . save little Nikolai! Yes, so—you are good. You not hate poor Russian woman?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Zekof, no one hates you. We all know how hard you work for your little ones."

But she interrupted him with a shriek. "Oh Christos! I—I let him go to the woods—I let him go to the woods to be killed. My sin! my sin. . . . Barin, it lays on me like a load. All day, all night. . . . and I—I cannot pray. . . . Oh Christos! no one to pray for the little Nikolai—my little Nikolai in his unblest grave!"

At last Johann understood. "There, there, Mrs. Zekof, try to calm yourself. We will see what can be done." The sound of his voice seemed to comfort her so as he half carried her back to the house he kept up a steady flow of small consolations.

He had taken his buggy robe to wrap about the shivering woman and he bent closer to refasten a loosened fold. "Mrs. Zekof, good mother, I know what you want—it is a priest to search your heart for you."

"God's mercy!" Daria whispered, her poor cold lips finding it difficult to frame the thanks of her heart. "God's mercy on thee, Barin!"

If he had wavered at all in his sudden resolution he now stood firm. Sheila would have to forgive him. . . . But of course, she would understand. It was twenty miles to the nearest mission. . . . what of that, Daria's peace of mind depended on it—

Back on the road, he laughed mirthlessly, something in the depths of consciousness doubting despite brave words. How long would she wait for him? How long would she wait?— Down crashed the whip level with the horses' flanks and away they plunged into the night.

WHEN Johann got home next morning, tired, bedraggled, his horses steaming in sweat, he was met by a most indignant family. Helga's round face was an accusing moon.

"Ja, Johann," she burst out immediately, "whatever got into you? Is it right, do you think, to keep Miss Patrick waiting like that? Waiting and waiting, till not a moment could be spared—her with the program on her hands. Let me tell you it's a good thing you didn't hear the worst of it!"

Without a word he proceeded to unhitch the team. But they rallied round him like a bevy of gnats.

"By gar! if you was one to drink I'd understand it," was Ole's contribution, "but such queerness I can't make out!"

"A fine how-do-you-do, I'll say," snorted Andre, his manner bristling as though the whole thing were a personal insult. "Yes, a fine how-do-you-do! One would think you were crazy, Johann Lind!"

Whatever Johann had meant to say in his own defence died a quiet death. He was suddenly overwhelmingly sick of them all; their suspicions, their curiosity and small-souled lack of faith. Whatever he said would be wilfully twisted and misconstrued. Fire raged in his heart, his fingers trembled at their familiar

Continued on page 89

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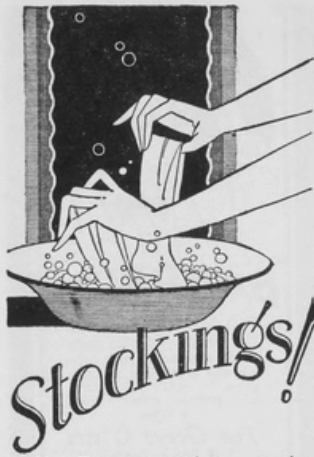
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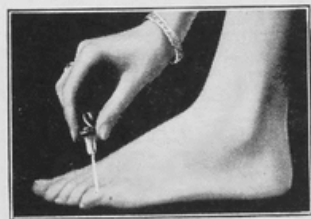


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Johann Lind

Continued from page 88

task but he made no sound nor sign of hearing his tormentors. When the horses were fed and comfortable he flung himself up the stairs to Herman's room.

The old man was perusing an old almanac. He shot a quick look at Johann as he threw himself down on a nearby stool. Each member of the family had in turn told old Herman of Johann's scandalous behavior, yet he seemed no-wise affected.

"Nu, da, I see here that they had a wet season in Eighteen Ninety and bad crops," said he, returning to his almanac. Johann broke into wild laughter; reckless, chilling, laughter that made the old man plunge the deeper in his book. Ah, he knew that laughter, with something of the sea's own madness in it, and the bitter pain it held. . . . He had heard it before—God's pity!

After a time nothing was heard in that dim, cloister-like room save the ticking of the old clock on the table by the bed. Herman cleared his throat, took off his glasses, laid down the almanac and addressed himself at last to Johann.

"My son, remember what I've said of folks. . . . fools, the most; seeing nothing but the outer manifestation. Spiritually dead they have no charity; lacking the rational faculty they don't know truth when they see it—of such is public opinion!"

Johann answered nothing but he was grateful nonetheless. It was very well, this resolve to ignore the world of men, but to a sick heart human sympathy would ever be welcome.

That night Helga renewed her criticism over the supper table. She was forever disgraced in the eyes of the community; nor could she imagine how to go about explaining his behavior. To choose such a time for a prank! Surely he didn't expect Sheila Patrick to speak to him again?

Johann set down his cup sharply: "Suppose we let that pass," was all he said. But that acted like tinder to Helga's wounded pride.

"Herre Gud! Listen to him—let it pass, he says! Now I ask, is it just I should suffer for such behavior and not even know what it's about?"

Something approaching a smile tugged at Johann's lips. "No, I don't suppose it's particularly just, but you see, there's nothing to tell," he told her quietly.

"Nothing to tell!" Helga repeated hotly. "Now, mama," Ole's good nature rebelled at such protracted querulousness. "Now, mama, young men are queer sometimes. Ja, I was queer myself. Women can't understand these things."

Helga was angry indeed. "Ja, well, all I got to say is thank God Andre takes after me. What's to come of it I don't know."

Johann pushed back his plate and walked out of the house. On and on he went, not caring whither, on and on, into the gratifying silence. It surprised him vaguely that in time he should see the Van Meiris' shack—a little blotch in the wide sea of silence. He resented it just a little, that small friendly house, like an intrusion upon a dearly prized solitude. He turned at the fence to retrace his steps back to the road and, out of thin air it seemed, a flying figure came tearing after him.

"Min Heer! Min Heer! Min Heer! Impatient, scowling, he swung round upon her. But Haasji was nothing daunted. With breathless eagerness out tumbled her tangled sentences. "Oh, Min Heer! Anton, he told me. He told me all! And his mama is glad again. Min Heer, it makes for me a pain in the breast to think of it!"

Eyes like stars, little work-red hands pressed to her heart, she met his dark looks bravely. Ach, if she only dared tell him how it ached for him.

"Min Heer, it makes for me a sorrow—" She was on the point of tears, and tears were not a habit with Haasji. Johann stood rebuked.

Forget it, Haasji. Forget it, child—" Just for a moment the winsome smile that, on rare occasions transfigured his face, flashed into life. "Foolish Haasji, don't let it make for you a sorrow—but, just the same I'm glad you understand."

He left her at that, curiously comforted; never suspecting what he had gained in

peace she had lost in happiness. Tears streaming down her windblown face, Haasji stood watching Min Heer so long as she could see him. When he had vanished into the gathering dusk she stood there still a long while crying silently. Ach, there was never a one like Min Heer. Never, never, in all the wide world!

MEANWHILE Johann decided to go back for his pony and ride to the Patrick's. The sooner that was over the better. Once there he met with scant welcome.

"What do you want, sir?" was Mr. Patrick's frowning greeting, fired like a pistol shot from the half opened door. It had a curious effect on the culprit. Johann flung up his bold, black head, and laughed.

"Nothing much, partner," he drawled, "just a word with Miss Sheila."

Old Patrick fumed and blustered but under the steady mockery of Johann's half-veiled eyes, the storm died an abortive death.

"Well, 'tain't likely she'll see you yet," he grumbled. "But wait." Leaving Johann still standing in the doorway he hurried to the foot of the stairs and called out loudly for his niece to come down.

Then, doubtless thinking that smoother waters lay ahead, he returned and in more amiable tones invited the guest to enter. Miss Sheila would be down shortly. With which happy announcement Mr. Patrick took himself away.

The whole affair was beginning to amuse Johann just a little, and that, had Sheila known it argued danger ahead. She came at last, slowly, deliberately, her trim figure upright, her whole manner frigid as puritan displeasure could make it.

"You wish to speak to me?" Her voice was as chilly as her words were commonplace.

"Oh, Sheila, don't talk to me like that!" broke from him passionately, the sight of her despite this strange coldness was able to twist his heartstrings. "I know how it must have seemed, but let me explain. You will understand. . . . Sheila, you must have understood that only something vital could have taken me away at such a time!"

"I understand nothing, Johann Lind, except the unalterable fact that you made me a laughing-stock when I should have won credit."

"Sheila, listen," he interrupted her sharply. "I was on my way here when I found poor Daria Sekof lying half-mad by her little boy's grave. . . ." In few words; in all simplicity he told her what he'd done, never doubting her belief and sympathy.

She looked at him coldly. "You expect me to believe that?"

In turn he stared at her, shocked, incredulous. "Do I expect you to believe it?"

"Yes, do you expect me to believe such a silly tale? And if I did, would you expect me to feel any different about it? Would you expect me to be less indignant that the fears of an ignorant peasant should be more to you than my self-respect? But really, Mr. Lind, I'm not so simple as to believe you."

For a wild moment Johann doubted his senses. It seemed as though the meaning had gone out of life and all that he was, thought, dreamt, or ever expected to be, spun round in mid-air. Only Sheila, cold as a manikin, seemed firmly rooted as she cut at him with her whip-like voice. At last he saw the grim humor of it all, the whole sorry trick of existence. Some worshipped shapen images and these soulless things grinned down upon one's devotions senselessly. Others thirsted after the mummery of saintly words. . . . and he, poor fool, had worshipped womanly grace and chastity, and that frozen virtue mocked him for his charity.

With tantalizing deliberation Johann buttoned up his coat and reached for his cap; never taking his eyes from Sheila's angry face. Little by little they narrowed, those eyes of his, and Sheila shivered.

Johann laughed. "So," said he, his voice singularly throaty and soft, "—well, some day, perhaps, you'll come to know that faith is no reflection upon honor."

Noislessly he closed the door behind him.

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