

THE SKETCH BOOK

WHEN BJORNSON AND JONAS LIE KICKED OVER THE TRACES

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IT was at the time when Björnstjerne Björnson and Jonas Lie lived in Paris and before either one of them had attained fame. On a certain day they were walking along the principal thoroughfare, Björnson in that heavy fashion characteristic of him, Lie sprightly and looking very small at the side of his formidable companion.

A beggar approached them and both men involuntarily reached in their pockets. "Lie, say, you give the man something," Björnson broke out, "I haven't a sou with me."

"Why, Björnson, I am in the same fix. I was just going to ask you to give the fellow something. You won't find a penny in my clothes."

The two writers came to a stop and looked at each other inquiringly.

"Why don't you have money about you, like other decent people?" Björnson viewed his companion depreciatively. "Answer me, Jonas Lie."

"Well, that is what I should like to ask you. I don't see that you are so particularly well off in that respect."

"You see, in my case it is Karoline who, well you know . . ."

"That's it! With me it is my Thomasine. She gives me no more than just carfare. She insists that I don't know a thing about taking care of money."

"Why, Jonas Lie! I'm surprised at

you. You submit to such treatment?" Björnson blustered out.

"See here, you needn't talk. Are you any better off than I am?"

Björnson had a very serious look in his eyes as he remarked: "Isn't it curious? Yes, why do we submit to such treatment?"

"When we study the situation", said Lie in reply, "it makes quite a difference. We are being treated like just ordinary beings. Both of us can write, but when it comes to those women folk of ours, why they hold the reins."

They continued on their walk, discussing their downtrodden position and digging deeper and deeper into the problem with the view of solving it. Wasn't it about time that they became masters in their own homes?

"Of course," remarked Lie, "we must realize that there is something back of all this."

"Something back of this?" Björnson queried.

"Man alive, it is as clear as day to me. When our wives find that we haven't any money about us they know that they can feel safe at home. There is no chance for us to do any cutting up."

The other contracted his heavy eyebrows as he grumbled: "I guess you see this thing better than I do." But from then on they were both fully conscious that they were being treated very badly by their other halves. But just wait until they returned home. They would show them . . .

Suddenly Lie turned to his friend with the exclamation: "Björnstjerne, let us go and have a good time. It's

us for the best restaurant and for the finest lunch to be had."

Björnson gazed wistfully at the clouds above his head. "Do you know that as a matter of fact I am quite hungry?"

"Of course", Lie retorted. "Both of us are undernourished. Now come along."

They found the restaurant in the Champs Elysées, the finest of them all. For a moment they stood hesitating. It was such an expensive looking place and what were they but a couple of young poets?

"Vengeance!" Lie spoke the word encouragingly. "Remember that we are to have our revenge. You know, it is Karoline and Thomasine who will have to foot the bill."

It was *some* lunch. If one is to let loose, let it be done properly. They began with oysters and champagne, and when their appetite had been aroused many other good things followed. Sitting there they felt their domestic chains drop from them, one by one.

"Your health, Jonas!"

"And here's to you, Björnstjerne!"

They continued in this fashion, paying each other the choicest compliments.

"Jonas, you are the world's greatest genius."

"Björnstjerne, you are the magic flute of Norway."

When they got around to the coffee and the brandy they concluded that the day should wind up at the Folies-Bergère.

Then came the waiter with the bill. Both of them reached into their pockets.

"Jonas, you please pay the bill."

"Pay, are you crazy? You knew I didn't have a sou in my clothes."

"But have you forgotten so soon

that I never have a spare cent in my pockets", Björnson thundered.

"But it is all your fault, Björnstjerne . . ."

"My fault, you say? Wasn't it you who got that bright idea that we should . . ."

"That is old woman's talk. Well, what is to be done? I suppose we'll have to come back and pay up. What do you intend to tell your Thomasine?"

Lie looked disgusted: "We shan't be able to get away from this place. They will fetch the police."

"You mean to tell me that they will go for the police, that there is to be a scandal?"

"When people order meals and don't pay for them that is usually done. They treat this the same as they do stealing. I assume they will march us both away to jail."

Silence fell on the two for a moment. At their elbows stood the waiter, reminding them of the unpaid bill. He was very busy, he remarked.

Björnson placed his big hand on the shoulder of the little Frenchman. "My friend, I have left all my money at home", speaking very confidently.

"Oh, and you?" The waiter turned expectantly to Lie. Well he, too, had forgotten to take money with him from home.

"Both of you?"

Yes, both of them. "You see," said Lie, "it is a family failing, this neglecting to bring money from home. We are brothers, as you notice; both of us wearing spectacles."

"Why don't you tell him the truth?" broke in Björnson heatedly in Norwegian. "Tell him that our wives . . ."

"Now you just keep quiet", Lie shot back quickly. "Don't you understand that we'll be laughing stocks as it is?"

The waiter now brought the head

waiter and the latter summoned the manager.

"Since you gentlemen have left your money at home everything will be all right, but I desire one of you to remain here while the other brings the money", the manager said blandly.

The two poets looked at each other inquiringly.

"Jonas, did you hear that? One of us must stay here."

"Well, Björnstjerne, that means you."

"No, no, Jonas, you have a much more honest face. You stay."

"I am entirely too thin, Björnstjerne. You are a much better security."

The long and the short of it was that Lie stayed. But when Björnson, accompanied by the waiter, stormed into his home to get the cash, there was another story to tell.