

"Haasji Van Meiris, don't tell me you're moping on a day like this," he teased

JOHANN LIND

By Laura Goodman Salverson

Illustrated by J. F. Clymer

LAST INSTALMENT

NEVER such another day at the Van Meiris'! Haasji was home again; Haasji to take your breath away! Golden and gay as ever, but with a sparkle and confidence as dazzling to her proud parents as the new diploma she waved beneath their awed noses. "You should know, Mama, what nonsense they put in my head! Terrible things, such a joy to forget. Ach, so fast as I get me a husband I put them away with the paper in the attic."

"Allemacher! Haasji, with the paper like that you talk of a husband? Right off, like a commoner in a pastry-shop? Peter, you hear? A daughter with learning talks no fitter than the rest. Better, maybe, to learn cheeses and sewing. Little pig! come kiss your mama."

That was not all. The Van Meiris' hadn't only a daughter fine as any lady, but a new house to grace her. Vrouw Van Meiris had come into a little money; Jacob Kriss, God rest him, having left his sister the modest savings of a lifetime. And, to what better purpose could one spend such money than making over the old home for a pretty daughter?

Haasji flew about like a happy bird. Such a lovely "hofje," now would you believe it? All the tarpaper covered with bright shingles and a fireplace in the new room to boot! Such a joy for one small family. It wasn't right, said Haasji; they would have to give a party and invite the little Russians. Every one, and make them all cakes with caraway and white raisins!

The Van Meiris' with a living-room so like a picture! Ach, yes, braided rag mats on the shining floor; the good Holland table by the low window and the high-backed chairs standing round so proudly. But what was this? A desk? A mahogany desk, with fine carved legs, for her very own? Ach, so much joy was like God's sunshine! To the

utter delight of her sensible, stolid parents, Haasji flew from one to the other, a whirlwind of caresses and foolish endearments. Allemacher! Vrouw Van Meiris turned moist eyes on Peter, and Peter, comprehending, blew his nose loudly. What fools they were to have dreaded change in Jongevrouw Haasji!

After supper when the dishes were put away and Peter was finishing the chores Haasji thought her of the cedar chest she had brought from Saskatoon. "Make a wish, Mama, before I open it. Quick! a husband with black eyes, and babies sweet as buttercups. Quick, Mama, while I turn the key!"

Vrouw Van Meiris made the wish, laughingly shaking an admonishing finger. "Haasji! A wish like that you should make in silence. A husband with black eyes . . ." Vrouw Van Meiris leaned forward suddenly, worried wrinkles on her broad brows. . . . "What for black eyes?"

Haasji, pretending not to hear, flung a set of table napkins, delicately embroidered, into her mother's lap. "All those horrid holes, Mama, in one winter—with chemistry besides. And look, twenty-four towels for the face, and more for the bath."

"What for black eyes, Haasji?" the good Vrouw insisted. "Ach! she hides from me behind a towel."

"Five tea-cloths, seven runners, six pairs of sheets, pure linen," continued the mischief methodically.

"Haasji Van Meiris! When your mama speaks it is nice to wave a sheet in the face and say nothing? Black eyes! Tch! you should not trust them, neen, even that Johann how queer he acts."

The laughter faded from Haasji's eyes, playfulness falling away like a garment. "How queer?" she demanded, almost sharply.

"You didn't hear? She didn't tell you?"

Haasji gripped the cedar chest with both small hands. "Didn't hear what? Mama, so much ridges makes a madness in me!"

Vrouw Van Meiris frowned. "Sure, yes, so too said poor Vrouw Boen. A thing like that you wouldn't believe after what she did for him."

Haasji's gold-flecked eyes literally snapped fire and, jumping to her feet she whirled on her astonished parent. "Min Heer has done something wrong? Something dreadful? Ach, where is he? I must find him . . . I must find him to say I don't believe it." She stamped her foot in childish anger. "Neen, not a word of it!"

"Haasji Van Meiris! Haasji . . ." Vrouw Van Meiris was startled out of all composure by the look in her daughter's face. "Little dear one, listen to Mama—wait till you hear. It is not so dreadful, maybe, to steal a bride sometimes . . . but from a brother . . . and to marry like that without warning and no little cakes! Sure, but . . . Haasji, Haasji, Allemacher, what is it? Little pig!"

But Haasji would have nothing of clumsy sympathy. "He is married?" she repeated slowly, all the shine and glitter and gold of her dulled for the moment. "Min Heer is married? Ach, well—that is as it should be. But stealing? I do not understand . . . Min Heer is married—to Eli?"

Vrouw Van Meiris frowned more darkly. "Sure, yes. In the winter we don't believe it—neen, that Eli just runs to her sweetheart and Johann goes to work—but see how he feels us? A week now they are married. Ach, what a business! Vrouw Boen can't ever forgive it only that Eli is so sick."

Min Heer Johann was married to Eli Berg. Haasji wondered how she could receive that death's

head intelligence and still live. Min Heer of the laughing eyes and eagle-pride coveting Eli Berg . . . little weepy, spineless Eli Berg! But what was that of talk, and forgiving? They dared to criticize; to slander—to talk of forgiving Min Heer Johann Lind?

Sword-sharp came the cutting thought that she herself had been instrumental in bringing this to pass. Allemachter, yes! Hadn't she given the little sponge money for her ticket? Ach, she wanted to rage and scream but the tongue clove to her mouth and words, like mad buzzards, sailed round and round in her head. She had helped to destroy him, her so dear Min Heer, —finished what the cold-eyed Sheila began by her meanness!

Anger done, one thought alone remained. Let others all desert him, he'd find her loyal still — ach, yes, though the heart of her died ten deaths. Never before so true a descendant of staunch Flemish Burgers Haasji faced her troubled mother. "You believe it, Mama? Such lies of Min Heer? You believe he—he—took that Eli just because she was Andre's . . . you believe he did it to make pain for Vrouw Boen?"

Vrouw Van Meiris groaned. "Haasji—little dear one, have sense. To see, is it not to believe?"

Haasji's amber eyes encountered the "hope-chest." Cheeks flaming, she slammed the lid, pushing it from her in angry distaste. "Neen, Mama. Min Heer is my friend . . . I do not see—and cannot believe."

Brave words. Yet for all that Haasji felt like bolting when, early next morning Dame Helga was seen hurrying towards the house. Vrouw Van Meiris, wrestling with a sore suspicion, burst out nervously: "That friend business, Haasji, don't let it make unkindness for poor Vrouw Boen. Already she got troubles enough. Min Heer Andre writing grief from a broken heart and—that—that other giving only grunt and grin to explain what nobody understands."

Good Vrouw Van Meiris might have spared her warning. Helga sensed nothing new, or strange, in Haasji except the added womanliness on which she commented in true Scandinavian fashion. "Nu, da, I see you're no longer a little girl to fetch milk, friend Van Meiris. Herre Gud, how time flies. But a pretty young lady isn't so bad—if you watch her, huisvrouw."

Mrs. Van Meiris, smiling blandly, offered a chair beside the new fireplace. "We watch her, you bet—so much learning mustn't waste. Neen, my Haasji knows better. Already she got promise to teach in Olden."

Helga heaved a sigh, doubting for the moment, the greater blessing of sons. Certainly young Haasji was a comfort to her parents. But, she mustn't tarry. "Vrouw Van Meiris," she began, going straight to the heart of her errand, "what to do I don't know. That Eli cries for her mama—'Mother, Mother,' all the time, like a child and no bride whatever! God forbid I should keep Lena from the house in sickness. But, welcome or not, the poor thing can't come near death with fever and a broken leg."

"And you dread telling Eli," interpolated Haasji.

"Herre Gud, you should see her! So little and thin, and a heart like a dry leaf the least wind could whirl away. To tell her such a thing—"

"Min Heer Johann, cannot comfort her"? Haasji couldn't check the words though her face flared red at sound of them.

Helga looked surprised, and just a bit shocked. Sneers from Haasji Van Meiris? And, complex mortal that she was, a simmering of resentment stirred in her heart. After all that Johann had done Haasji, or the Jensens, or the Beckers; or any of them, for that matter. Now she thought of it, what had he done worse than that heady Sheila, trampling a man's faith for silly jealousy! Ja, after that, what could you expect of Johann Lind?

She tried to speak with dignity. "Nu, da, Haasji, Johann can't comfort away a weak heart. What kindness can, we do for her."

Vastly ashamed of herself, Haasji flung penitent arms around Helga's neck, kissing her old friend soundly. "Look, now, Vrouw Boen," she promised brightly, "this very day I go to see that so comfortless Eli. You shall see what a way I have with brides."

Nevertheless it was Haasji of lagging step and heavy heart followed the familiar paths to Min Heer Johann's flax-field that afternoon. Min Heer's flax-field! How she had hated yesteryear's flowers—so azure-blue like the eyes of Sheila Patrick. More fool she to have placed her hate so unjustly . . . a flax-field couldn't remain a barrier forever!

Disheartedly she marked the new growth springing up tender and softly green, a shimmering carpet for fairy feet. Min Heer's flax-field—but what was that? Voices, loud, boisterous, coming in crude chorus from the road beyond. Ach, that cracked falsetto was surely Hans Becker's contribution—what had he to say, the lumbering Dutchman? "Sure, that's the how, I tell you—" She could distinguish the words now, plainly, "—it's Andre's land he's after. Losing the girl he don't come back — damn smart that Johann Lind."

Haasji's face crimsoned, her amber eyes points of flame. Just wait till that Hans Becker came calling at the house! She'd make his dull wits labor! Completely immersed in thoughts of high revenge Haasji failed to see the tall figure looming statue-clear in the poplar bluff until his laugh betrayed him. Ach, it was awful to have a heart as thumpery as rabbits. He made in her a scare, sure, yes, and a big madness—laughing like that . . . Laughing—with a face granite-grim and the dear black eyes empty darknes! She ran to him blindly, little hands welcoming, a world of sympathy in her sweet eyes. "Oh, Min Heer, do not hear—do not heed, the devil has them by the ears!"

He stood so still, looked at her so strangely, a queer fire flashing across his rigid face that earth and sky, and all between grew hopelessly jumbled. "Min Heer, you are not glad . . . have no welcome—for little Haasji, the so funny Dutch kid"?

Even then he said nothing; could say nothing—the heart of him prometheus-bound. Never so much a Lind he watched her coldly, not the least sweet detail failing to lodge, arrow-sharp, in his breast. Haasji Van Meiris, the gay, the golden, the consummation of a thousand dreams; discovered too late! "Min Heer . . . Min Heer"!

Words worse than useless; the Lind laughter, low, steel-edged, came to his aid. "Haasji Van Meiris," he mocked her, "you should know to jump a defenseless man like that is to make a madness in him."

That was better. Haasji flung up her golden head, retorting gaily: "Sure, yes, a slow tongue, Min Heer, makes a good Dutchman. But look, my mama would tell you Haasji Van Meiris gets to be a bluestocking—would you prefer the Canadian edition, Mr. Lind"?

"Heaven forbid! Keep the bluestocking for better company."

That much accomplished, why must they fall as glum as gloom again? Where the salutes so habitual to her merry lips? And Min Heer . . . Min Heer didn't even laugh; stared, instead, straight before him with the frozen gaze of eagles.

Rounding the bluff, Haasji's eyes hardened. Ach, what was that making strange the Boen house? A new porch, canvas-shuttered against the wind, running like a white grin across the face of it. Faintly she put her query: "You have builded, Min Heer?"

His voice bit deep and ruthlessly: "What you see is a sun-porch—for my wife. She's tubercular . . . so they say."

Whereat Haasji, kindest of beings, was sorely tempted to laugh. Min Heer flung that terrible truth at her like a bad boy flings cherry stones. And, paradoxically, her heart melted towards Eli. Poor Eli the comfortless! "I'm sorry, Min Heer, for that . . . and, sorry to forget my manners. But yes, you should know I wish you joy, Johann Lind."

Just an instant, the smile she loved best to

remember lighted his eyes. "And I—hope you'll be kind," he told her, "Eli needs a friend, Haasji Van Meiris."

THEY were near the gate now; a moment more and the Johann she had treasured was hers no more. Ach, before she relinquished all to Eli she must make him understand. She caught his arm as he bent for the latch, a glow in her face he never forgot. "Johann, I—that is—you should know it makes no difference . . . that talk, that so big foolishness! Neen, neen. To me Johann Lind is —Johann Lind forever!"

What could he say? What dared he say, bound to a fate dark as Helia, and to what purpose? Like that other Lind whose rich blood fed his veins he shrugged, eyes mere slits in the cold mask of his face. Then, with swift compelling grace—pledge of that same proud source—he caught and kissed the little hands extended in such selfless devotion. "And there," said he, raising his voice to carry, "you'll see we've planted morning-glories. Eli likes them best of flowers. Eli! Eli, my dear, here's a visitor for you."

Haasji had need of stout Dutch courage to confront an Eli so altered, so pitifully drained of life, and still keep smiling. Allemachter! one glance from those poor despairing eyes and Haasji forgot everything but a friend's need of friendship.

To Johann, watching from the doorway, no sunrise would ever loom so golden as Haasji's swift compassion. "Ach, Eli! You should know better," she cried, flinging strong young arms around the invalid. "Sure, yes, much better. To marry without bridesmaids and little cakes, what could you expect? A bridesmaid cheated, Eli, always gives bad thoughts."

"Sure not!" riposted Haasji, fluffing the pillows and smoothing the counterpane, fussy as a mother.

"Haasji, Haasji . . . I—you don't understand—" "Sure not. Haasji Van Meiris can't understand a thing like that! To get her a man makes a big fuss. Sweet words, sweet cakes. Ach, so much sweetness I can't count in a hurry . . ."

Like sparkling spring waters Haasji's cheerful nonsense flowed on. No end of things to say; so little time to say it—no good for Eli to interrupt! Ach, no. A girl who cheated friends of throwing rice and goodluck shoes must take her punishment silently. She'd have nothing of explanations. Neen, neen! what was there to say? A hundred thousand words wouldn't make her less the wife of Min Heer Johann. Sure not. And what was needed then beside.

Deeply, sincerely, Eli longed to confess the truth, but what could a feeble spirit offer in face of such perverted cheerfulness? She knew herself an impostor, the innocent cause of bitter misunderstanding, and, more punitive still, couldn't escape the feeling of somehow having betrayed Haasji Van Meiris also. "Oh, Haasji, please listen," she beseeched the resolute comforter. "Johann, make her listen . . . Tell her the truth."

Instantly she regretted the words. Lost in perplexity she had failed to see how Haasji's gaiety affected him—Dear God, she'd gladly die to wipe away that hard misery set like a brand upon his brow. Perhaps she bared her heart in the look she flung him. He shrugged; the smooth depth of his laughter a comfort, for all it amazed her. "Tell her which truth, my dear? That you were a fool to accept a good-for-nothing, or I in luck to get so sweet a wife"?

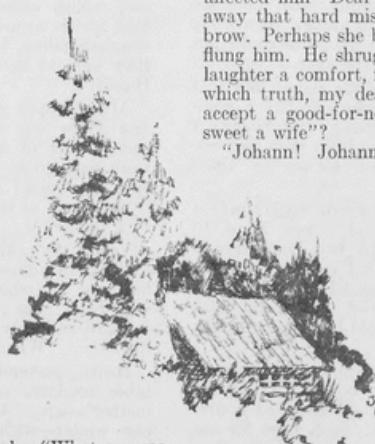
"Johann! Johann—"

"Ach! out on you both," cried Haasji, deep crimson staining the white of her firm white cheeks. "Min heer, get in the house and tell Vrouw Boen to set one more plate for supper. That so dear sweet wife needs much advice, you bet."

But when he was gone she sat quite still a long moment; her eyes, that knew no dissembling, fixed defiantly on space. Poor Eli, helpless witness, wondered again why Fate had cast her in such cruel roles. Loving Tess she had brought a gift of doubt. Loving Haasji . . . No, no! Dear God, she mustn't even think it! "Haasji, dearest Haasji," she cried out, like child in pain. "It won't be long! I—oh, I'm not caring—indeed I'm not! But the Winnipeg doctor told me I'd never—"

Like a whirlwind Haasji caught her in her arms. "Eli Lind! you should know better. A doctor like

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that makes foolishness in you. Sure, yes, I feel it. When Min Heer Johann gets him a sweet wife, he keeps her, you bet.

"Haasji, Haasji, do listen. You ought to know—"

"But, yes," said Haasji, firmly, "I do. Too much for one Dutch head. Ach, be still! And before I forget; your mama has a little trouble in the foot. Neen, not much. Just enough for good excuse. Newlyweds, you should know, don't fit so well a mama-in-law."

BEGAN now for Eli days brighter than any she had known. To be the centre of interest, the object of everyone's care was a novel experience howsoever tinged with iradicable bitterness. Haasji gave her whole leisure; Herman revived his story-teller's art; Anton sang for her. Even Daria, after bespeaking her saints, donned her best and, shoes on back till within easy distance, paid a lengthy visit.

No empty-handed visitor! Choicest vegetables, washed and glowing; a great seed-cake and certain buns famous in Riga was her offering to the sick bride. Christos pity! such luck was a crucifixion!

Haasji was there at the time reading from a big book. Horspidy! that was unwise. Learning was a weariness—good thick soup with plenty of oil much better. But she beamed on Haasji, shrewd eyes appraising one, then another, the pale child wedded to her Barin; the Barin himself, still smiling, yet somehow altered, an the irrepressible Haasji, whose strong hands served so ably. From one to the other . . . Horspidy, that Dutche one had a queer way of watching the Barin, little yearning shadows crossing the golden eyes, giving place again to laughter when he looked on her— As Anton said, that Haasji was a deep one!

Yet despite this seeming peace and small diversions the house of Boen rocked upon a smoldering crater. Deep at Heart Helga still nursed resentment. Nor was it lessened when, on each trip to town, she encountered fresh criticism and persistent curiosity. Johann Lind and Johann's doings on every idler's tongue. Herre Gud! it tried her sorely. Such times she could not bring herself to look at Eli, nor, indeed, to enter the porch at all.

But not until the day she received word Andre wouldn't pay his yearly visit was Eli made to feel the brunt of it. "Ja, see what you've done—" Helga burst upon poor unsuspecting Eli, waving a letter high in air—"Mark it, Eli Lind, for the like was never heard. Both sons lost to me—do you hear? Both sons destroyed by your light philandering. Sorrow, shame, lonely old age, God spare you, Eli; I can not!"

Smiling grimly, Johann entered behind her. "Mother," said he, "Theres much more room inside." And, before she could resist, the angry old lady found herself lifted bodily into the kitchen. Back with Eli he dismissed the whole thing with a shrug. Helga's tempers meant nothing; in an hour or two she'd be back smiling and penitent. Mother Helga had a heart belying her tongue.

Eli shivered. "No, no. She hates me. I know it. I've always known it. Oh, Johann, why can't she hear the truth? Why can't I tell her Andre never cared—even that would help. What difference could it make?"

"Eli, dear, I hate old arguments. And differences are the devil to explain. Suppose you just humor me—it means a good deal, after a fashion."

Pity he could not see her face; all her soul shining there, her heart in the dust at his feet. But his eyes were fixed on the flax-field showing blue in the distance, and his thoughts were dark as death. When he left she watched his straight, free-striding figure crossing to those fields where instinct told her, his one comfort lay. Dear God, now she knew there was grief too deep for tears—

Little image - of - shoreless-sorrow, silent, unseeing, tired hands like silver leaves in her lap, Haasji found her hours later. "Haasji," said she, softly, "I've been thinking how good it is to escape the winter. . . . I always hated snow."

Johann Lind

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WITH Lena so long in hospital (though God knows a leg shouldn't need such mending) Simon lapsed more rapidly into brooding anger. He always knew doctors were arch deceivers and hospitals mere pirate dens. What else explained this fuss and care? Herre Gud, the old woman lived like a queen while he struggled alone in the house! Not that the house was much in itself . . . ridiculous of Solvie Stubbs to ask fifteen dollars a month to keep it! The woman was crazy. No, it wasn't the house, but the pigs and chickens. Somehow the devil had got into the chickens. Never an egg could he find, and the pigs died. The cream went bad, and the butter worse—fleabites in themselves but taken together enough to make a man lose patience with the world.



Who Are You?

By Lucie E. Bevan

Ten little fingers, ten little toes,
Everyone pink as the sweet wild rose;
One little mouth as red as a cherry,
Two little dimples, saucy! Oh very!
Soon there'll be curls to make a crown,
And shining big, two eyes of brown.
I said, "Oh sweetheart, who are you?"
She only smiled and gurgled "Goo!"

She raised those supple ten pink toes
Until they almost touched her nose.
I could not help but pinch her cheek
And think no wonder men are weak,
When little rascals air their charms
And wave around those lovely arms.
"You know more than you care to tell,
Now truly, aren't you Daddy's girl?"
She only looked me through and through
And smiled again, and gurgled "Goo!"

He lost much more than that the morning Dr. Willson's bill arrived on the post. "Ja, da," Mrs. Jensen detailed later, "the poor man got a shock to shrink the flesh on his bones!" He gasped; he groaned; he sank nerveless upon a handy apple-barrel. Three hundred dollars—that's what he asked, that son of Judas. Three hundred dollars for patching a bone in one old woman's leg. Herre Gud, whoever heard of such outrageous nonsense!

Dame Jensen offered comfort: "Effie Becker—the fat one washing dishes in hospital—told me Lena's leg was a job to be proud of; splinters and swellings and complications—"

"Ja!" Simon leaped to life, "you said it. Complications! That's what makes money these days. But wait, Mrs. Jensen, in the complication business I'm not so dumb myself!"

That night he wrote Andre demanding in no uncertain language the nine hundred dollars he owed him. High time he paid him, the young devil, making game of trust and fools of women! Ja, let him pay at once or he'd make short shrift of the glamor around his name. But Andre had the wisdom of the sphinx. Never a word Simon received, much less money. And with expenses piling daily what was he to do? Employ a Lawyer as greedy as the rest? Throw more good dollars after bad? Not he. Not while there was a loop-hole. First he'd try the screws on Helga; tell her a few fine truths of that son of hers. Worse scoundrel he than the other!

The resolution formed, he descended like storm upon the Boen household, his young bays, newly broken, thundering up the lane to the ear-splitting jangle of creaking wheels and groaning axles. A frightened cry from Eli tore Helga from a brown-study induced by several household catalogues and sent her flying window-ward. "Simon!" she gasped, incredulous, dismayed. "Simon Berg coming here!"

"So it seems," said Johann, getting up quietly from his struggle with accounts to lock the door of Eli's shelter.

"But what can he want? What now?"

Johann smiled. "Judging by looks he'll tell us soon enough."

It is doubtful whether Simon saw Jotter when he stamped into the room. All the way down he'd been so busy rehearsing his spleen at Helga. Ja, he was certain now that all Lena's insubordination dated from her intimacy with high-handed Helga. Well, he'd show her she couldn't poison a man's wife against him and get away with it, the creature!

"Helga! Helga! A word with you, Dame Boen—"

"Yes?" Johann's wind-warm voice had a hint of laughter in it, "so we gather. Sit down, Simon Berg, the day is young."

Simon sucked his breath like a drowning steer, kicked aside the proffered seat and roared, beside himself: "Your time's coming, Johann Lind, never doubt it. Just now it's Helga Boen concerns me most. Ja, mischief-brewer, you'll get the truth for once. Mother of thieves, that for your pride!"

"Simon," the voice came gently, mockingly, "you do me wrong. Thief, man, not thieves; in thievery I own no rival."

Simon blinked, treading his anger, nonplussed the moment; what did he mean, the cocky young devil? Ja, what did he mean by laughing in his face? Bah! smart talk—but there's smarter. What's a girl to nine hundred dollars? Nine hundred dollars—ja, you needn't look poison yet, Dame Boen; save it till I send that son of yours to jail."

Helga clutched the table for support. What was he ranting? Her son . . . her son . . . nine hundred dollars—ja, her son . . . nine hundred dollars—ja, her son . . .

Not suspecting Andre's transaction Johann stood bewildered for a moment, his clear-visioned eyes fixed on the sneering face before him and, malignant or no, truth stood painted there. Once again Andre had failed in the measure of a man.

"My son"? Incarnate Rachel, wounded, stricken—"MY son"! The cry cut Johann to the depths of feeling. Slowly, dreading what he knew, he turned to face her. Poor mother! old, grey, bent with toil, the frightened heart of her pleading in her eyes. "Not my son; not Andre—No, no, no! Tell him he lies, Johann. Tell him to begone!"

"Helga Boen, I tell you the truth. Your son—"

Johann's laughter descended, silk-entangled, twixt their wrath. "Thanks, Simon," said he, "you flatter me really—and, come to think of it, I can't see how the thing escaped me. . . . Of course you'll get your money."

Simon stood petrified, open mouth an ugly gash in his choleric face. Helga, senses reeling, sank into a chair. Herre Gud, what a fright she'd got! And what a fool to let doubt enter.

"Yes, of course you'll get your money," Johann stipulated calmly. "That settled, suppose we step outside?"

Recalling, clearly, arms steel-hard and uncommonly swift in action, Simon thought best to comply. After all, if the fool paid him what else mattered? "Ja, well and good," he growled at finish. "Just the same—why do it, Johann Lind?"

Knowing well each word had been, and still was, insufferably clear to Eli he chose his answer accordingly. "Suppose we call it conscience—payment for the goods I stole"?

No whit deceived, Simon answered coarsely: "Ja, da! at last you admit seducing the creature from a good home and lover. You surprise me, Johann Lind!"

"As to that, Simon Berg, we weren't discussing excellence," Johann drawled

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Johann Lind

Continued from page 28

good-naturedly, "debt and debtors, keep reminded."

Simon was no fool. Hate Johann he might yet here was sacrifice commanding due respect. "Damnation, man!" he blurted, "what's the truth? You can't be dreaming money knowing I despise you—and you never wanted the little fool."

Johann pointed to the horses. "Nervous brutes, Simon, don't keep them longer."

"I'll have my answer. Ja, after all, I'm Eli's father."

Johann laughed softly. "Her father? Now how did that escape me? Well, and I, Simon Berg, am her husband—because—I love her."

Thanks to the noise of Simon's departure the scurry of flying feet seeking the poplars was happily lost . . . Haasji Van Meiris, unwitting eavesdropper, flitting madly—truth she should have known. Ach, fleeing what she DID know, stupid red-head!

Satin cheek against a gleaming bolt she chided herself sharply: "Haasji Van Meiris, little fool, what could you expect? Min Heer to hate his wife? Min Heer to play the scoundrel? Min Heer another Andre? Neen, neen, not that . . ." Ach, no, it was Min Heer's trouble grieved her; those lies and, yes, that wife so good-for-nothing! It was that—only that. "Neen!" Haasji struck her hands together sharply. She lied, it wasn't that . . . it was Min Heer him self, strong, true . . . her so dear black-eyed Johann, lost to her forever.

Eli had, indeed, heard every word and never words more deadly. Nor was it her father's voice alone cut her like a sword. Johann's answer added an infinity of pain to her overwrought conscience. She felt she hated him. His generosity enslaved her; his sacrifice outraged all sense of righteousness, and this last gallant offering robbed her of the final shreds of self-respect. What need for such fine mockery? Love her! Dear God, did he not know that love should have no advocate? Heeded no measures of why or wherefore? How could he think so to delude her? Oh, she would not have it! Of debt she had enough—this last she could not suffer.

The rumble of wagon wheels grown fainter Eli crept to the open screen. Yes, he was there by the gate, his fine head high, his splendid figure rock-hewn in its certain power; the fields he loved before him in a billowing green sea. Eli shivered; that conquering strength of his affrighted her. How could she hope to sway such granite purpose? And yet she must—she must!

"Johann," she called, in a voice quite strange and startling. But not so startling as the revelation in the face he turned to her. Dear God, how like to death must be the thought of her!

"You called, Eli? You want me?"

Oh, dreadful gentleness! Now she knew what made the Linds invincible and terrifying. The breath caught in her throat, the heart a racing madness in her bosom, but she forced herself to speak lest he come and by his nearness put an end to resolution.

"Yes, yes I did—I do. I want to talk to you, Johann . . . But not now—later. I'm so—so very weary now."

A ghost of a smile kindled his face. "As you say, Eli. But I warn you I'm quite unmanageable."

And so she found him. No argument, no pleading, no tears could change him. Invulnerable behind that laughter of his no barb could reach him. Once more she longed to hate him. To hate and defy and by defiance save them both. "Johann," she cried in desperation, "think of me if you'll not think of yourself. Helga hated me before; think how she'll hate me now. Don't leave me at her righteous mercy!"

He picked her up child-fashion, wiping her tears, smiling whimsically. "Now, Eli, you'd think your husband wasn't the least defence to hear you talk. Pretty pass this early in the game!"

Lying against his shoulder, wet lashes slender down-turned crescents on her cheeks, the look of him that morning rose to mock her. Woman-wise she knew happiness was not for them. His kindness, sprung of pity, could but teach her

hate; his patience fix more firmly her sense of obligation . . . Strange, was it not, that now she saw her duty clearly? Now, when all was lost. Dear God, she would be patient; she'd keep her counsel and wait the day of destiny.

OFTEN enough that resolution came near to breaking for Helga neither tried, nor cared, to hide her fresh dislike of Eli. But harder to bear were the constant aspersions cast on Johann whenever a soul was round to hear. In tones calculated to penetrate the porch-chamber Helga recounted each fault and failing, inherent and acquired, on the slightest provocation. Outraged pride presumably took this form of grief that others should suffer with her.

In Johann's presence she assumed a blighting tolerance that only once gave way to hot reviling. That was on the day he drove his bloodied cows to auction. Herre Gud, what callous disregard of her opinion. To sell the bloodied stock they'd dreamt so long of possessing—God smite her if she'd seen the like before.

Eli sickened to hear the things she said; awful death's-head things intended to break the stiffest pride. Dear God, help him, help him . . . ! How could he be silent under that volley of bitter insults? How could he smile? How (wonder of all) could he laugh?

Laugh he did, but the laughter hung like a sword suspended long after the door closed behind him. Helga's angry violence crumbled to weak self-pity. She was ruined; the farm was ruined, they were all ruined by Johann's foolishness. Herre Gud, what had she done to suffer such a fate? Troll take the Linds and all their breed forever!

Eli waited no more. Wrapping a thick shawl round her shoulders she left: that prison-sanctuary of hers and, fear-winged, fled to Herman's hay-loft, wrestling that good old dreamer of all composure through writhing wraithlike in upon him.

"Nu, da, Herre Gud! Eli? Can it be Eli—Eli Lind?"

His consternation was so comical she had to laugh, a-tremble with weak nervousness though she was: "Oh, it's not my ghost, worse luck, grandfather—just me myself."

Making place beside him he rebuked her gently. "Nu, nu, little one, is that wisdom? To forget like that what's best for you—"

"Stop! Stop!" she cried sharply. "I'll not listen. I'm through with listening. All my life I've done nothing else and nothing ever went right. Now you shall hear me—I can't be silent longer. Herman, nothing they say is true. Lies, lies, all of it! Johann doesn't love me. Never loved me . . . couldn't love me. As to Andre, I hate, I loathe him! Oh, Herman, if you knew the things he's said and done! . . . This money—it was he got it from Papa. I know; I was there—to get it he pretended love for me—" she broke into hysterical laughter, "-oh, Herman, it's funny, terribly funny, that love of Andre's—as funny as the hate of Johann Lind!"

"Nu, nu," Herman soothed her kindly, "not so fast, little one, an old man's wits are slow. There, rest your head against my shoulder. Take heart, child; things are never as bad as they seem."

Truth, doubtless, yet when he had heard the whole of her story comfort failed him, and wisdom offered no hope. Herre Gud, what ways the little feet of women trod! What bitter cups Life passed them!

Gentle as a mother he wrapped his rug about her. "Nu, da, little Eli, rest yoa. That lad of mine will yet be happy—dwell no more on that. Ja, take it for truth, my foolish one, there never was a Lind but got his joy."

E LI'S story strengthened rather than prompted Herman's action. Of late his thoughts had turned, with peculiar persistence, to Herr Lind. Perhaps the intolerable situation confronting them all had something to do with it—or the feeling that Time must shortly call an end to dreams. Nu, ja, be that as it may, the Lind sins and glories mingled softly in his mind. How they loved ac-

complishment, those Linds! Conquerors always; conquest their justification for excess and tyranny—graceful sinners, too. . . . Herr Lind was ageing now; a son might not be unwelcome. It was worth trying for something must be done. Never a Lind but laughed in the face of unhappiness—defeat of purpose was another matter.

Convinced in his own mind Herman set about the business of drafting several letters. Which painstaking labor done he tried his best to ameliorate Helga's bitterness. But Helga eschewed peace-making. So far as she was concerned Johann had transgressed beyond forgiveness. Came then, that unforgettable day when Ole brought the mail from Hawthorne beaming like a midnight sun for the grand surprise he'd give them. Grinning and blowing and full of foolish talk: "Sure, Herman, the Steamship Company sent a travel book from Denmark. Ja, and here's papers for Eli. Bills for Johann and that new horse book—"

"Ole, what mail!" Helga's voice rang sharply.

"Tut, woman," his broad face fairly glowed. "Mail? ain't it mail, all this? But ja, now I think of it, there's something for you, Mama—"

"For shame, Ole Boen! Something? God pity such dumbness, it's a letter from Andre!"

Joy flooded her like sunrise. He wrote so beautifully, her darling boy, the hand close, fine, every word a jewel. He loved her; he missed her; he longed so fervently to see her . . . especially now that he was on the point of leaving for Minneapolis. Helga readjusted her glasses, re-read the line . . . Ja, it was there, unmistakably clear. But what nonsense followed . . . Minneapolis where he'd enter business with his father-in-law—Father-in-law? Whose father-in-law? Herre Gud, what was wrong with her senses?

"Ole! Ole! quick, read what it says—tell me am I crazy?"

But Ole never read that letter; more convincing proof of world-madness galvanized their fears. Screams, ear-splitting and unearthly, ripped their stupor like forked lightning. Wild-eyed, hysterical, half-clad Eli tumbled in, a Winnipeg daily clutched to her breast. "See, see," she shrieked, "how fine he is, your Andre. Hats, flowers, frills—a whole column on the wedding and here in the corner . . ." she swayed; would have fallen but for Ole's quick support—"here in the corner three little lines: 'A girl's body . . . found in the Red River'—Tess. A girl's body—Dear God, just that—my beautiful Tess. You should have seen her, known her; heard her laugh—A girl's body!"

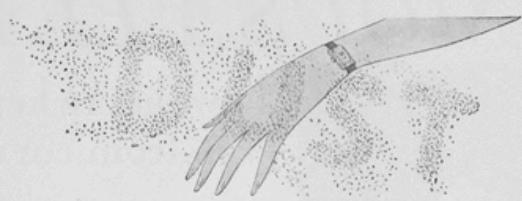
She shook herself free of Ole and, fearless at last, snatched the letter from Helga's helpless fingers. "What use to read his lies? Not Papa; not Johann; not God could keep me silent now! Helga Boen, that dead girl was Andre's sweetheart. She loved him; she worshipped him . . . dearest Tess, how shall I make her understand? Do you hear, Helga Boen? Do you understand? She loved him; she had faith in him and see what it got her? Faith in Andre Boen, your fine son!"

Grey-faced, Helga spoke with stiff pride. "She's out of her mind, better take her to bed."

Unnoticed in the excitement Johann had entered from the rear. The singular quality of his voice struck them oddly, dashing their fever like a shower of cool rain. Said he, "Mad folk are apt to be too honest . . . Eli, my dear, why all this? Why such—"

The sentence died unfinished for Eli, drained of false energy, gave a smothered, heart-despairing cry and sank insensible at their feet. Alas, for courage burned out so soon! Yet an Eli, strong, had amazed them more, her little weaknesses were grown familiar. God's pity! Would that look plainly writ in the pale upturned face ever be familiar? Helga shuddered. She must be mad: the whole world might be mad, but here was something greater than life commanding instant service.

"Out of my way—" it was the mother. Continued on page 68



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Johann Lind

Continued from page 30

heart speaking. "So, poor little one! Poor little one! Quick, the spirits of ammonia from the cupboard—no, leave her to me, my old arms are strong . . . Ole—it's got to be; you'll have to bring Lena. Nu, da, don't stand there staring! Can't you see? Lena must come. Ja, and that quickly!"

But Ole hadn't heart to face a woman, broken, half dead with such news. Herre Gud, no! Better that Johann, whom she trusted, be the messenger.

Strange how the weakest natures sometimes rise to sublime heights under final punishment. Lena received the tidings in dignified, tearless silence, unbroken until the Boen farm buildings flashed into view from a bend in the road. Then, it is true, she caught Johann's arm in sudden soul-sweeping terror: "She isn't gone? I'll see my Eli smile again . . . hear her voice—?"

Johann looked very grim and forbidding, but he assured her as best he knew, stressing the good they would do one another; the joy they would bring—stressing, too, the need of caution. Lena heard him with closed eyes and a hint of smiles around the lips. "Johann Lind, Johann Lind," ran her thoughts, "I'd never imagined lies could be so gallant."

Eli sank very rapidly. Once in her mother's arms it seemed she neither cared nor knew that life was slipping from her. Like lovers under doom of separation they could not bear to be apart. Hour upon hour Lena sat beside her—and here was the miracle—smiled in the face of death. Smiled always, except that early dawn when Eli spoke of Andre; of Johann Lind, and Haasji Van Meiris.

But even then black anger sustained her. She had lost much, would lose more yet this remained: Helga, nor all their little world, should hug their slander longer! As if in confirmation of the thought, Eli touched her hand: "You'll not forget, Johann, Mama? You'll tell them everything?"

"I'll tell them, child, have no doubt of that!"

Eli bethought her of another debt: Haasji Van Meiris . . . how was it she had forgotten? "Dear Mama, I must see Haasji. Tell Johann I must see Haasji."

Left together a terrible silence twined round them. Words seemed impossible, thought an effort. But at last Eli found strength to begin retelling the tangled story in feverish vehemence. Yet neither relief nor joy sprang to Haasji's face. "Haasji, Haasji, you understand, don't you? Dear Haasji, say you do!"

Haasji shook her golden head roughly. "What for, Eli Lind, should I say it? A man like that to love you—it is enough."

"Haasji Van Meiris! Can't you believe—?"

"Neen! Eli Lind, I don't have to believe. I know. Shame on you for such talk! Didn't I hear him with my own ears tell your papa that he loved you?"

Only that intolerable iron-weight in her breast prevented Eli's bursting into laughter. Never before was Haasji so funny; so like a little angry red hen. Very beautiful her smile as, little hand clasping Haasji's, she whispered shyly: "Kiss me, Haasji, and—don't quite forget me . . ." He said that to Papa, Haasji Van Meiris, because he knew I could hear. He didn't know I should see his face"! If a dying voice can be said to be fierce it was Eli's when, a moment later, she pushed her friend from her. "There, Haasji Van Meiris, I've paid my debt . . . No, no, leave me. Leave me, dear Haasji, to Mama."

IT WAS a changed Lena faced her one time confident in the dreadful quiet of the Boen kitchen the day of Eli's funeral. "You're satisfied, I suppose, Helga Boen, with the fruits of your pride."

"My pride"?

Lena laughed harshly. "Ja, what else? Now I think of it, Simon and you aren't so different. Money for Simon, Andre for you—false gods, Helga Boen, for the ruin of us all. You may well look surprised, for it's queer that Johann Lind came never to your mind. Yet who, can

Continued on page 71



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Johann Lind

Continued from page 68

you tell me, keeps the farm together and the roof over your ungrateful head? Shame to you, foolish woman. Ja, and for all I've lost I'm happier than you, Helga Boen, with such a conscience!"

"Lena! Lena! Lena Berg, for the sake of the past—"

But Lena had no intention of laying down the cudgels, not until Helga cowered before her, pride in tatters, the last illusion wrested, would she halt her righteous destruction. But then, for such is the perverseness of human nature, the spectacle of Helga broken and contrite, dismayed, more than gratified her. Ja, it was right the stubborn old creature should suffer, but after all wasn't she to be pitied? Poor thing! God knew, sorrow for the living was no less bitter than decent grief for the dead.

Sensible to the suffering in Lena, Helga fumbled towards her with nervous, groping hands: "Pity, Lena, pity! I see my blindness. Ja, my wickedness and sin. No wonder the Lord has taken away my son!"

That desperate cry swept down the last barrier. Foolish old women, what good this drawing swords over the graves of their dead? Better, like Norsemen, to bury the blade and shame together.

"Helga Boen," Lena's voice was warm and glowing, "God give we never forget friendship again!" Arms entwined, grey heads close together, they neither heard nor saw that Johann had discovered them. Lost in the sublime comfort of ill-forgiven they sat far removed from earth. And Johann, seeing them, felt something of their strange peace lodge in his heart also.

IT WAS fall before Herman heard from Herr Lind; a cryptic message in keeping with character. "Good sir," wrote he, "have the goodness to expect me six weeks hence. I suffer shocking curiosity concerning the young fool you call my son."

Nu, da. Clearly Herr Lind had changed very little. Perhaps he had been a fool to write at all. He should have known Life could adjust its own problems. With peace restored, what need for Herr Lind to arrive at all? What need indeed! Even Simon, humbled at last, said never a word though Lena stayed on at the Boens'!

Very like a troubled child Herman laid the message before Helga. She looked at him in utter bewilderment over the rim of her reading-glasses. "Herr Lind? Herre Lind—Herre Gud! Not OUR Herr Lind coming here?"

"Ja, our Herr Lind. I wrote him when things were bad. Nu, da, when it comes to that, Johann should know."

"Shame on you, Herman!" Helga chided sharply, entirely losing sight of the real issue. "Shame on you, foolish old man, not speaking before. Look at the house! Ole, Ole; get right to Hawthorne for paint and brushes. Not to such a dullness will I welcome the master!"

The six weeks ran to six weeks more and Helga's now shining house still waited its visitor. Perhaps he'd changed his mind; wasn't coming at all; hadn't intended to come, thought she, and grew strangely nervous about it. God knew he owed them something!

But at last he came driving a fine black cutter behind a dashing team that twinkled gaily to the tune of many bells. Helga was the first to see him. "Ole! Herman!" she shrilled, "it's he! Herr Lind, as I live! Quick, Lena, put on the kettle—ja, da, where is that Johann, do you suppose?"

Scarcely less hurried, Ole hurried out to greet the distinguished visitor. "Welcome, welcome!" he stammered awkwardly.

Herr Lind leaped lightly to the ground, his dark face smiling. "Devilish cold, Ole," said he. "I'm not sure I like it, though the air is fine and the sunshine dazzling." Off flew the gloves and Ole found himself gripping a lean white hand, steel-fingered and immaculate. "Well, well, Ole, so we meet again. A small place this world of ours."

"Ja, ja," Ole was thankful he had the horses to unhitch; those eyes of the master always had unstrung him. "Ja, small place this world of ours."

Continued on page 72

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Johann Lind

Continued from page 71

not so big . . . Be so humble, Herr Lind—Helga waits inside."

"So Helga waits inside. My good Ole, that reminds me of better days."

But the Helga stiffly curtseying before him in her spotless prairie home was not the Helga of better days. Pity, thought he, how time robs a woman—only her voice was familiar.

"Herr Lind, welcome, welcome! Lena Berg, this is the master I served long since." No hand at bowing, Lena offered a chair and turned quite red at the gracious thanks he gave her.

Only Herman, sitting apart, found it difficult to forswear the past now the man was come. Troll take it if he'd get more than a curt nod from him!

Herr Lind shrugged. "A mixed welcome, eh, Helga?" He laughed lightly and the laughter stung them like points of steel. Herre Gud! how like he was that other . . . How like in everything! But what was he saying in that well remembered way of his? "Mistress Helga, be so good, I pray, to tell me where he is—that quixotic idiot I've come to see."

"Herr Lind," Helga flushed, speaking heavily, "you'll find him nobody's fool. You'll find him far from that! Set in his ways—queer maybe, but—"

"My good Helga, spare your efforts. Perhaps I've a notion what Lind virtues should be. I doubt not he has a full share of them."

Happily for Helga, whose conscience urged immediate defence, Ole, with the truant in tow, entered at the moment. The smile died on Herr Lind's lips; his eyes narrowed, every feature of his high-born face expressionless as marble. Devilish queer, thought he, how much a man may give and be no whit the wiser! The humor of it made him laugh. High Heaven! Wasn't it laughable to see himself like that in a perfect copy? Lind length; Lind looks; Lind score to the finest detail. Devil take him for an ingrate if he didn't laugh!

The mellow mockery bridged the need of introduction; steel on steel their glances crossed merciless as dueling swords. Herr Lind was the first to offer true. "Come, come, don't tell me you've seen a ghost."

"No," said Johann curtly. "Devil fits the case much better."

Herr Lind's laughter had a lilt of springtime gladness. "Devil or no, you're true to form, my son. Enheartening, not to say delightful discovery!"

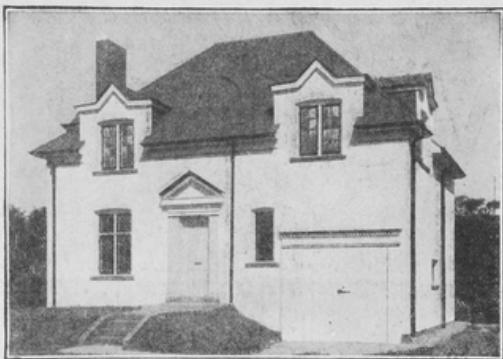
Again their glances crosses, tipped for battle; but somehow, something indefinable, yet strangely compelling, shining in Herr Lind's eyes put an end to hostility. Out flew Johann's strong young hand. "Sir," laughed he—a note of spring there also—"I hadn't thought to welcome such a meeting. But—it seems you've won again."

That evening Herr Lind was at his best; scintillating, brilliant, admirable proof of pleasure in his son. A lad to his fancy. How sad Fru Lind had quitted a sickly world ere seeing again this lively reproach of his! Ah, no dullard either that Johann Lind . . . And when he talked, from down the corridors of time another gay voice sounded. So like the Little-Dancing-One, yet every inch a Lind—devilish queer the whole of it!

Herr Lind had gladly stayed the week had business permitted. But he was due in the Danish capital within the month and much was yet undone that claimed attention. To his surprise Johann suffered a twinge of regret at parting and, still more surprising, found himself confessing his hopes and pride in the land.

Herr Lind heard him through in amused toleration. Such lofty optimism after repeated failures struck him as deliciously funny. Lovable ass, his head still in the clouds! But not till he'd taken leave of the family and he and Johann stood alone at the gate did he hint of his real errand. Said he then, almost hungrily: "My son, what would you say to a partnership in a thriving business? A business not so altruistic, mayhap, as this Empire building but infinitely more lucrative, if not soul-satisfying. I'm serious—it's the reason for my coming. Johann Lind, in your own country a position by no means despicable awaits you, should you care to accept. I don't

Continued on page 76



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Johann Lind

Continued from page 72

deserve it, but nothing would give me greater joy than seeing you established in Rene-Dahl—the ancient home of the Linds."

What should he say? Johann knew well where the offer tended. Affluence, culture; all things he'd dreamt of, knowing them his by right of instinct, waited his taking—"Father . . ." the word came heavily, "it's mighty fine—I'll not forget. Still—I couldn't do it."

Herr Lind resumed his armor. Imperious, cold, he took his place in the cutter. "Don't be a fool," said he, "give yourself time—mail travels swiftly."

Johann spoke with quiet firmness. "Swift or no, it matters nothing. My answer stands. You mentioned country—a place where through chance I happened to be born. You err, sir; this is my country because I love it; and choose to live in it; and give it of my strength."

Herr Lind lost patience. "Poesy and poppycock! What can you know of choice, prisoner here on these primitive plains?"

Johann laughed good-naturedly. "How does the bird know he belongs in the sky? These primitive plains are just that to me. Lind perversities, you know, need room for expansion—" He broke off, suddenly serious. "Look, Herr Lind," said he pointing towards the house, "does that tell nothing of my reason?"

Herr Lind frowned. What he saw: Helga and Lena, crook of cream between them, setting out for the milk-house. What he heard, a jabber of affectionate warnings: "Ja, careful now, Lena, there's ice in the path!" Not so fast Helga, the air's cold for hard breathing—Tish, my legs all right!"

"Harmony from chaos; admirable, admirable," he shrugged, "but a dull substitute for youthful pleasure."

The tone angered Johann. Every inch a Lind, he shot back swiftly: "Perhaps it pleases me to mock inheritance. To build, rather than destroy!"

Mere slits, the black eyes watching Johann; mere thread, dark scarlet, the taunting mouth; the stern face gray-granite—death in life one nerveless moment. Then the dulcet laughter breaking free again: "Once a Lind, always a Lind! Well, have it your way—the one way ever open to the breed."

Fortunate or no, Peter Van Meiris, with Haasji at his side, turned into the lane. They'd been to Hawthorne and had picked up the mail. Allemacher, Peter wished he'd known sooner about the distinguished visitor. Sure, yes. A man rising from factor to shipowner in Copenhagen was an honor to meet. A shipowner with family to boot!

Haasji of a sudden felt a yokel, blushed and stammered and, furious with herself, fled to the house. Ach it was too much, four black eyes on her face together and the heart like a camel in her breast.

Seemingly lost in Peter's praises, Herr Lind had missed no shade of temper. The quick blush on Haasji's cheek, the dark gloom in Johann's eye—Herrre Gud! What delightful idiocy! What delicious blindness!

Van Meiris gone to join his daughter, Herr Lind turned quizzical eyes on that deluded son of his. "So, you've made your choice. This COUNTRY has your heart, weeds your youth. Here, I take it, you'll weave your dreams, fight your battles, win your victories. But, one scoundrel to another, let me warn you it's not in the way of happiness."

No mistaking now that hard laughter designed to hide the torture of souls too proud for pain. Hard on heels this reckless mirth Johann spoke of the roads. It was better to turn east at the forks; it saved a mile and was smooth going.

Herr Lind waved a deprecatory hand. "Plague on prudence and pig-headed pride!" Devil take it, Johann Lind, at least you'll promise to visit Rene-Dahl some day?"

Johann's smile, luminous, fleeting, seemed a flash of dream from down the dear dead years . . . God's mercy! just so had she smiled—but he was speaking: "Gladly, Father. Believe me, I've always wanted to feel the swell of waves beneath my feet."

Herr Lind picked up the lines: "Well, here's happier days, Johann Lind, and,

don't forget the hills of Rene-Dahl are wondrous green in spring-time."

Every silver bell a-chime, and the mellow Lind laughter running like a theme through it all, Herr Lind whirled down the lane. Pleased with himself; with his son, and, pleased most of all with the golden Haasji whose warm blushes hovored like dawn at rim of darkest night.

CAME at last a glowing dawn when Johann wakened to the call of spring. Freshness, rapture, a grand leap of pulses everywhere. Mischievous breezes and twinkling showers splashing the cheek of earth; green shoots showing; birds on wing overhead. Another spring; another dawn; a new creation; God speaking in earth and air and sky!

It was early; by walking fast, Johann decided he could cover the west lot and be back in time for breakfast. He'd have to see the poplars with the round sun a great gold wheel behind their tender tracery. He'd have to see the flax-field—Johann shrugged at the thought. What a fool he'd been—What a fool he was still. The heart of him beating high for no better reason than sap ascends.

Walking fast, half formulated ideas drifting like sea-blown fragrances through the casement of his mind, Johann neither saw nor heard Haasji Van Meiris until he was right upon her. Solemn young druid dreaming there in the poplars by his flax-field. They stared at each other like strangers. How was it, thought he, a dark woman was ever called beautiful? Why nothing on earth was lovely as Haasji with the sunlight crowning her head and the pea-green poplar leaves dancing in a swirl behind her! Beautiful? She was more than beautiful, there was about her a grace ethereal, a sweetness transcending the earthly.

But Haasji had no such illusions about herself. Very earthly indeed, the regrets and longings of her warm young heart. Ineffably precious this meeting with the man she loved. "Min Heer," she smiled, "this so lovely place tempts me . . . It is gladness you didn't cut the wood."

He laughed, unceremoniously pulling her down beside him. "Now, Haasji, I've been scolded enough about that flax-field. All said and done the crime could be worse."

"Sure, yes, and the reward greater," she told him gaily. "Flax, Min Heer, is well enough, but wheat—nice yellow wheat pays better."

"Ach," he mocked her, "you've forgotten in bloom."

"Poof! Such sickly blueness makes for me a pain! Blue like fishwives' eyes! Neen, you should know better."

Watching her through half-closed eyes Johann sensed, despite her seeming gaiety and frankness, a touch of melancholy foreign to her sunny nature. Haasji Van Meiris, don't tell me you're mopping on a day like this," he teased her.

To his dismay and, ungraciously, his delight also, her lips quivered suspiciously, brave gold eyes quickly veiled. "But yes, it is a mope, sure," she admitted softly. "Min Heer, tomorrow I go to Mevrouw my aunt. She doesn't like it alone, and so dear uncle makes him a trip to Amsterdam for three months."

Johann's eyes twinkled. "But, Haasji, you were happy in Saskatoon before."

"Stupid!" She flung him a contemptuous look. "Before! Ach, before and today, you should know, is very different. In Saskatoon there is much noise, and buying of bonnets. But, ach, what for to say it. You should know, Johann Lind, these so dear woods, the quiet sky and—and this so foolish flax-field, makes for me a loneliness in summer!"

"In summer? Why only in summer—why only the flax-field makes in you this so dear loneliness, Haasji Van Meiris?"

"Stupid! It is hot in cities. Ach, little holes in the pavement your heels make, so hot it gets, and the air like a smell of bad washing."

Never had she heard him laugh like that, joyously, exultantly. Ach, so he found her funny, did he? Color mounting, she treated him to her best Canadian scorn: "I'm honored, no doubt, you find me so amusing, Mr. Lind. I'd

like to serve you, but Mama's waiting breakfast."

He caught her hands fast. "Now, Haasji, be patient. I'm not so much amused as needing advice. I'm thinking of building a house, here in the clearing. What do you say to that?"

Certain her cheeks resembled boiled beets Haasji's temper flared accordingly but the ready retort died under stress of his eyes. Ach, Mama was right. Black eyes were the plague. Sure, yes; and Haasji did her best to glare angrily. For all the effects it had she might have spared the effort. "A little house, chrome walled, green-roofed, with a flax-field for blue lawn; how's that, Haasji?"

She jerked her hands free rudely, but determined to play the game. "Chrome walls, green roof; sure, yes, but the rest—ach, what foolishness! You should know a house like that has soft grass, gravel walks and on the wall scarlet runners, and hollyhocks in a row before."

"And the house should face the road and have a mansard roof and long windows—"

"Neen, neen!" Haasji jumped to her feet. "What for a French roof on a little house here on a Canadian farm? You should know better, Min Heer. Neen, neen, better a Dutch cottage with dear wide-silled windows—ach, you make a laugh at me, I see it in your eyes. Johann Lind, I'm cross with you!"

Away she flew, followed by his laughter. Thought she, tears stinging her eyes, how good to know Min Heer could laugh like that. Sure, yes. Just the same she was glad that Aunt Grietje needed her . . . that little house, in building, would simply kill her!

Secure in certain hope Johann was content to let her go. But after she was gone many were the visits he paid Vrouw Van Meiris; presumably to learn the ins and outs of proper Dutch cottages. A knowledge she was happy to impart. Allemacher, yes—with eyes like that what could a man not ask?

So time moved on peacefully, till the day Johann was cutting his fields, the grain standing ripe and tall, and Helga put an end to calm by bursting upon him excitedly: "Johann, Johann!" she cried, hoarse and breathless from her run to the field. "she's hurt . . . she's home—Haasji Van Meiris is hurt!"

Solid earth a storm-tossed barque, a flimsy, breaker-destined; life itself illusion . . . nothing left but chaos. For a wild heart-beat Johann doubted his senses, dreaded his reason and knew the terror of fear. Herre Gud! Helga's conscience smote her. She hadn't meant to scare the lad like that.

"Nu, da, Troll take me for a fool, Johann. It's not so bad. Just a little burn—Peter stopped by to tell me—"

He was off across the fields leaving her speaking to empty air, the grey team for company. Before the Van Meiris cottage the good vrouw was soberly sweeping the path. "Allemacher!" she gasped, at sight of the wild-eyed visitor. "What is, Johann Lind?"

He was past, and over the threshold, in what to the calm Dutch housewife seemed a single savage bound. "Allemacher, what a fever! What a mad, mad, fever!"

But to Haasji, sitting in an old rocker, bandaged feet on a huge hassock, the sight of Min Heer flying like that was paradise in action. "Min Heer!" she cried. Her dear amber eyes turned like golden stars to the glory of his face. "Min Heer! Min Heer!" He swept her to his heart as recklessly as though she were not half good enough for you."

Vrouw Van Meiris, weary of sweeping, gave a hasty glance into her orderly kitchen. Ach, even more hastily the good vrouw decided another turn down the walk could do no harm.

Said Johann, struggling back to common sense: "There's something I'd like to show you, dear heart."

"Ach, flax, most likely!" Haasji taunted.

He punished her with kisses. Well, for the fright you gave me, Haasji Van Meiris, you deserve nothing better. Of course, I thought you'd killed yourself."

"Ach! Min Heer, you should do better. Hand on heart you should tell me such things!"

Hand on heart I'll tell you this, Haasji. I'm going home for the team—you should know I'd take you to the flax-field."

"Allemacher!" was all poor vrouw

Van Meiris found to fit the proposal. "Back and forth across the fields in such a heat? For what, Haasji Van Meiris? Foolishness! Little pig, kiss me! Foolishness, sure, yes, but such a grand foolishness!"

"Mama," the radiant Haasji wheedled expertly, "a little box of your so beautiful broodjes, a pie, and cold chicken. Min Heer looks thin. He works too hard!"

"Sure," grumbled Mama, "and it makes for him a rest running like that two miles in the heat? A fat husband you get by it, maybe, Haasji Van Meiris!"

But Haasji returned a look so shining with sheer rapture Vrouw Van Meiris had great difficulty in breathing, much less grumbling. Allemacher! Had she ever looked like that? The whole heart a song in her breast? Neen, neen, love came not often so richly dowered!

Mischief that she was, Haasji burst out gaily: "Mama, you should laugh no more on wishes. A husband with black eyes—you remember? A husband with black eyes and—"

"Haasji Van Meiris! You should know to say such things brings bad luck. Hush! I hear the horses. Sure, yes, running like a race for the doctor!"

They were off at last; the dusty road an enchanted highway before them; the day and the world their own. With definite purpose in mind Johann swung north; the Beckers had a new house she should see; the Swansons a few apple trees and, of course, Mrs. Zekof's garden was worth the journey. On they drifted, through a quiet land drenched in color and clear-fluted song of low-flying meadow larks. On, over lazy trails through a kingdom rich as the golden grain-fields, sweet as their hearts high singing.

Just where the willows swerve and the poplars break in a clearing, bathed in the sunset glow, Mrs. Zekof loomed before them. A great hulk of a woman, barefooted, mud-spattered, begrimed, a huge mound of freshly-dug potatoes beside her. Up flew her hands at sight of them: "Glory be to Thee, O God! Barin, Barin!" She ploughed forward heavily, each step deep-planted in rich wet earth.

Laughing at her plight he checked the horses. "Take your time, Mrs. Zekof, take your time. Eternity, and everything else is mine today!"

Daria Zekof needed no such foolish explanation. Haasji's little bandaged feet was another matter. Infinitely tender, she touched them with toil-roughened fingers, a flood of pity on her lips. Haasji laughed gaily. "Ach, you should know, Mrs. Zekof, it's a small pain for such a big joy—a smart trick, maybe, to catch Min Heer."

"Glory be to Thee, O God!" cried Daria Zekof, and because love made her beautiful Haasji bent and kissed her. Gabriel's summons had startled her less. Amazement, disbelief, rapture, each in turn twisted her wind-baked features grotesquely. "Christos Voskresye!" she whispered hoarsely: "Christos Voskresye!" Then, enraptured, "Barin, it is true, the Lord is risen . . . the heart of your lady tells it! Much luck, Barin. God give you many sons!"

Away again into the crimson sunset over the lanes they loved, never before so rich in beauty. And, down through the poplars at last. "Min Heer!" For all its excitement Haasji's cry was weak. "Min Heer, do YOU see what I see? Johann Lind, is that a little house? A little Dutch 'hofje' on the edge of your GRAIN field? Stupid, you shouldn't kiss me now! Ach, make haste, you horses, I must see that so dear little house."

Johann's laughter spoke inimitable things as he lifted his eager Haasji over the threshold. "A little 'hofje,' Haasji, not half good enough for you, dear heart."

"You should know better! A house with Johann Lind for master is like a castle in the clouds. Sure, yes, a queen could weep to have it!"

"Haasji, Haasji!" Johann's laughter filled the little house. "Don't think to fool me, my golden flatterer."

"Stupid!" She laid her soft warm cheek to his, her eyes twin mirrors of sweetest mischief. "Sure, yes. A man is master of the house but, mevrout, it is she rules him, you bet!" Then, sweeter yet her sudden seriousness, her long, unshaken faith declared: "Johann Lind, my so dear love, to keep this precious house, and your heart forever, it makes for me a little scare. Ach, sure, yes, and a joy like heaven!"

THE END

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