

Winter's Heavy Hand

Hagemeyer Generations - Chapter Twelve

by Stanley Hagemeyer © 2020

Siebe awoke in the early morning darkness. Guessing that it was after 6:00 A.M., he quietly rolled out of bed. He felt for the pair of trousers he had left hanging on a chair near the bed. The house was cold and he wanted to pull on some clothes over the top of his night shirt. A pair of wool socks came on and he felt at least some barrier to the January weather that seemed to have stolen into their home during the night. The howling wind asserted its domination like a wild beast daring anyone to come outside. He knew, too, it was sending its chilling tongue into their home through some of those tiny cracks he had tried to plug with rags and straw. *This house was never made for a Minnesota blizzard*, he thought, ruefully. It was January, 1908.

Feeling his way carefully in the total darkness, he headed for the kitchen where the cook stove would still have a few coals glowing inside. First, however, he felt for the match box holder mounted on the wall just around the door inside the kitchen. Grasping a couple matches he held one carefully and stroked it down the side of the box holder. It flamed into bright friendly light. After reaching up to light the kerosine lantern hanging from the middle of the ceiling, he turned his attention to the stove. But first he pulled out his pocket watch, which was nestled in a bib pocket on his overalls.

"*Ach, mein Gott*, it's already a quarter past seven," he said out loud to himself. It's still dark as pitch. Remembering the half moon and bright stars he had seen just two nights back, he knew none of that faint light could penetrate the dense sea of snow swirling around the house. The howling wind and the sound of snow flakes pounding into the siding and the windows gave him a feeling of deeper darkness. He was glad he had hauled in three extra pails of coal yesterday morning when the second day of blowing snow seemed to become more dense. The wind had not abated, but rather, grew in strength and blew fiercely. Now he grabbed a handful of the dry corn cobs from the box near the stove and sprinkled them on top of the bravely glowing remainders of last night's fire. Then he carefully ladled a few smaller chunks of coal and one bigger piece that would create a hearty fire for the morning.

Besides their need for heat, Siebe wanted to set the kettle on so he could make some tea. He finished dressing as the fire began to reassert some civility with its growing heat. *No need to wake Bauwina or the boys, and the animals could wait 'til eight O'clock.*

He enjoyed sitting and waiting for the kettle to boil so he could make some warming tea. By the top of the hour the sun would be up enough for him to see the barn, he hoped. He decided to butter a slice of the bread Bauwina had baked a couple days before. *It will go good with my tea*, he thought.

Winter breakfasts were often late during the darkest weeks of winter. But Carl, who was now six years old, couldn't wait, so like his father, he was already happily chewing on a slice of bread when Siebe opened the door, returning from the morning chores. Carl's slice had a little sprinkling of sugar on top of the butter, and he gnawed at it happily, as he heard a familiar exchange.

"Get that door shut quick, Siebe. The wind is bringing the weather right in with you!" his mother warned. She was frying potatoes and eggs done hard, with their rich yolks broken, the way Siebe preferred.

"Ja, but I had to have it open long enough to get myself through the door, you know!" he rejoined, as Carl had heard him do at least a dozen times this winter. "I don't know if this blizzard is going to get any less today. It is goin' at it pretty hard, so I put the rope up from the barn to the well and back over here to the house, just in case it gets any worse."

"You sit down now and have some breakfast with me. The boys have both been eatin' already. It took you so long, so I thought it better to feed their little tummies."

"Ja, the snow is getting deeper between the well and the barn, so I couldn't walk as easy as usual. I hate carrying the water through the snow because every little stumble and I'm spilling some of it." He had to get to the animals at least twice a day to provide them feed and water. that precious cargo out. But the horses, the cows, and the pigs and chickens all needed at least a minimal provision of that life sustaining fluid. Hay and a small bin of oats were inside the barn, so that part was much easier.

"Do you think it's going to let up today? Two days of blizzard is enough, no?" Bauwina asked, even though she knew her question had no answer. With no radio and no forecast, they were their own weather prognosticators, and they could only guess.

"I think it's not going to change for a few hours, at least. But I'm thinking of walking out to the mail box this afternoon. There should

be mail from Monday, and maybe yesterday, too, if that Bert Jenson got out and around on the good roads before it got too wild for him. He usually makes it through even in tough weather.”

“You don’t need to do that,” she responded. “We don’t need the mail that bad.”

“Well, I think the new issue of the *Farmer* should be here for January. They didn’t get it out on time right after Christmas, and I’m wondering what it says about how early spring might come.”

“Oh, Siebe, you don’t need to know that right now,” she argued. She didn’t really want him taking that long hike in a blizzard, just for a new magazine.

“It’s not so bad. I can get wrapped up pretty good with that wool scarf you made for me last year wrapped around my face.” He tried to make it sound like a conclusion and not a debate to be continued, thinking expressing his appreciation for her handiwork would help.

But Bauwina was undeterred. “Siebe, I don’t want you goin’ out on that long walk today, unless you can see the road in front of you. You’ve got to wait.” Her plea was touched genuinely with fear. She had heard about the farmer from Kerkhoven two years back who got lost in a storm and did not survive.

“*Ach, Ja, mein Liebchen,*” I can wait, I guess. I get enough walking doin’ the chores. But I don’t have any new reading material, so I want to get that *Farmer*, or maybe the *Volkszeitung*.”

“You know, Siebe, this is a good time for you to read one of those sermons in my *Prädicht Buak*, to fill your mind with heavenly things for once. You don’t have to be farming in January.”

“Ja, I guess you’re right,” he responded. And it looks like I can play with the boys a little more so you’ve got time to maybe make a batch of cookies.” The idea of a slow day with a fresh cookie and cup of coffee to go with his boys and his hard working wife seemed to melt winter’s grip on the day.

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