

Great Expectations

Hagemeyer Generations - Chapter Seven

by Stanley Hagemeyer © 2019

Bauwina was setting the table. In the living room, which also served as bedroom for all three of them, Siebe talked with Carl, who was now three and a half years old. Carl was sitting on a little stool that allowed him to poke at his daddy's knees while Siebe sat in the single cushioned chair in the house. "Did you hear me talking English when I was in the store last Saturday?"

Carl looked up at him and said, "Ya, you talked the funny talk."

Siebe continued, "That is English. We are going to talk more English at home, too, so you can learn those words."

Carl's questioning face spoke a complaint before he mouthed it. "Why?"

His Dad understood his son's confusion, because he remembered the discomfort he experienced in his early years when he discovered that his "home" language was not enough to use in the world around them. "Well, Carlie, in a couple years, you will go to school and then you need to talk English. The teaching has to be in English."

"But that's not fair. Can't I go to school at our church where people all talk the same words?"

"No, I'm sorry, but our church doesn't have a school, and that wouldn't be good for you. When I go into Clara City, you're with me. When I buy something for the farm, I'm not talking the *old country talk*. I need to talk with English speakers who run the store."

Carl was beginning to pout. "Then I just want to stay here with you and Mama. I don't want to go to school at all!"

His Dad knew this was too much for a little guy like him to understand right now. He should slow down and comfort him instead. "Don't worry about it now, my boy. There's lots of time to get used to the idea. But we will talk English at home once in a while so you get some English words into your head."

It was mid-April, 1906. Siebe and Bauwina had had a couple good years on the farm. There were good crops, and the prices were steady so they had earned enough to make the mortgage payments and begin to save for the future.

Now Siebe turned to Bauwina, "Did you start any of the ground-cherry seedlings yet for this year's garden?" He knew she had some small tomatoes growing in the little pots near the south window. But the ground cherries (husk tomatoes) were nearly identical to tomatoes

during the first half of the plant's life, so he really couldn't tell which varieties were growing.

"So, if I don't tell you then you won't know until I have 'em out in the garden, humph? What do you think? Would I not want to get those favorites of yours off to a good early start too?" Her questions seemed a little sparky, with fire, but she was just enjoying knowing something he did not know.

Siebe countered, "Ya, you know I can't tell 'em apart. You probably can't either until they get bigger. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"Come in here, now, and sit down for supper. I've got the pot on the table. It's *one pot eatin'* for us tonight. And we've got good milk to go with it."

"What's in the pot?" Siebe asked. "Sauerkraut with mettwurst?" It was one of their most common dishes.

"Ya, I didn't have so much time for anything today that would take longer. I've been busy sewing this afternoon."

Siebe was pleased, but curious about whether there was some extra sewing project going on, and for what. "So what are you sewin' today? Did I make a tear in my shirt, or something I forgot about?"

Bauwina had just scooped up some of the pot's contents for Carlie. "Here you are, Carlie. It's good sausage, the one you like, with potatoes and sauerkraut." Then she turned to Siebe, "Cut up that sausage for him, will you?"

The farmer was thinking that Bauwina was a little brisk with her talk tonight. Somehow she seemed strung kind of tight. Her voice was the same, but just a tone higher and something else he couldn't recognize. So he would have to wait to find out what was winding her up this way.

They bowed their heads in a moment of silence that was a custom Carlie had already learned was very important. Then Bauwina prayed in a subdued, low gravely voice she always used when praying, "Dear Lord, we are so grateful for the food we have on the table. We thank you for the good crop last year, and the beautiful spring weather we see right now. Bless us with good health, and receive our praise right now. Amen." They ate quietly for a few minutes.

Siebe began his usual commentary on weather, the soil, the planting he had been working on. This time of year was exciting to

him. “You know, *liebchen*, I’ve got that field in the northwest corner already sown with oats. And I think I can put flax seed in that 10 acres just to east along the fence line.” But she didn’t seem to be paying attention very much.

Siebe decided to take a different direction. “So tell me, which of those seedlings are ground cherries? Please.” His voice was soft and pleading. He pointed to the 10 little pots sitting on a board he had fixed up on blocks along the south window, just a few feet away. He turned to look her in the eye as her head came up.

The little seedlings, about four inches high, seemed to be teasing him just as well as she was. Bauwina took a breath and then with a slight grin, she said, “Well, I can tell you. The three pots over to the west end are the ground cherries. They look pretty good, don’t they. It looks like the seed we kept from last year is still good and lively.”

Now he relaxed. She seemed to be happy with this little test. But then Bauwina said, “I have something else to tell you, Siebe.”

His eyes turned immediately away from the pots and plants, and connected with hers. She very seldom made a statement like this. There was a pause, a bit too long of a pause. Was she upset about something? “What is it? What do you have to tell me?”

Finally she said, “It looks like we are going to have another baby!” Her eyes began to gleam. “I think it will be in the middle of October. That’s why I was going through all the baby clothes we have left from when Carlie was so little. And I was fixing some . . .”

“What?” Now Siebe was beginning to shake a little. “*Liebchen!* That’s wonderful. Are you sure?” He wasn’t really asking, but he didn’t know what else to say.

“Oh, ya, you know women have ways of knowing what is happening. I can tell. It’s so.”

Now he was already beginning to beam with a manly satisfaction, and said, “Well, I guess my seed is still pretty lively, too, huh?” With a boyish grin he waited for her to laugh. But she put her smiling face down shyly.

“Siebe, don’t talk so in front of the boy. What must he be thinking?” But then when her head came up she had a big smile for Siebe. It was an unspoken expression of something like “*Well, we did it again!*” Such things were not spoken in their families, at least they

had never heard such words. But they both knew the meaning without words.

“Then we should celebrate! Open a pint of those strawberries you canned last summer. We need to have a sweet dessert,” Siebe exuberated. They didn’t have a sweet fruit treat too often. But this time they both wanted it to celebrate what she had shared.

“Ya, I guess we can do that. God is giving us another child, and we can pray for good health. But you already had your sweet treat quite a few times, you know. That’s why we have another visitor comin!” She joked with a smile that bordered on embarrassment.

Yes, it was a very good spring this year thought Siebe.

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