

WILD GEESE

By Martha Ostenso.

"You go up to the house," Erik went on heartily. "They give you coffee."

"No, thanks," Martin answered, clucking at the horse. "Got to go along." Erik's hospitality shamed him doubly.

He drove out of the farm yard, and Erik looked after him, seeing the fish pole and net in the back of the cart. The Icelander's face screwed into a half pitying, half ironical smile.

But he did not wait to see whether Martin would take the main road or branch off below the willows to the road that went around the lake. There was in this Icelander family, a sort of grand faith in the honor of human kind.

Martin did not take the lake road. He thought with self-scathing of his original plan in coming here—to slip down below the willows and around the bend to the cove where he would not be seen by the Bjarnassons.

Amelia came out of the house as he was unharnessing the horse. Her face bore a shade of distress, and Martin guessed what she was looking forward to.

"You didn't get the fish?" she asked, looking into the back of the wagon.

"No," Martin answered shortly. "They're not fishing yet."

Amelia left him and went to the garden, where she counted the new tomatoes on the vines. They would not be ripe until late in August.

The vines were still delicate and needed careful propping. Amelia stood with one hand on her hip, the other on her chin, trying to think of something for supper to take the place of fish.

Mark and Lind agreed to meet at the Sandbos' until the return of the Klavvas.

"School-ma'ams must toe the line," she laughed at Mark, "and I just couldn't stand a scene. That would finish me as far as earning my own living for the rest of the season is concerned."

"I would like that," Mark urged. "I really have a little money of my own, somewhere."

But Lind would not listen to him. She would stay conscientiously to the end of the term.

At the Sandbos' the chokecherry trees were bending over in winered arches. Sven picked Lind a tin-canful of them, and she and Mark ate them until their mouths were puckered and dry.

Mrs. Sandbo enjoyed having the Teacher and her "boys" as she called Mark, around, and often served them with coffee and some sardines. At heart Mrs. Sandbo was sound, and as she became more used to Lind's visits, she did not ply her usual busy questions.

The Teacher walked with Mark to the edge of Latt's Slough, where they knelt and picked tiny black snails off the reeds. Lind found little waxy water lilies growing there, but the mud was too soft at the edge of the swamp for her to reach out and get them.

"They would die right away after I got them, anyway," she said to Mark, stepping back to firm ground.

denly he threw a sharp glance around the table.

"Where's Jude?" he asked. "One of her calves is missing." Ellen put in for the sake of Amelia. "No doubt—no doubt," he mumbled, and went on eating as though there was no one else present.

After the meal, Lind went out and walked down the road to look for Judith. Ellen and Charlie had the milking to do.

"Got cold feet, eh? 'Fraid of a couple of dead ones like the rest of 'em," Caleb sneered at Martin. "You'll bring back another story before freeze-up, or—we'll do 'with-out meat. Think I've been keepin' the lot of ye for nothin' all these years, while I've been breakin' my back to make a living out of this soil? A pack of good for nothings I've got for it!"

"The Bjarnassons ain't fishin' themselves, yet," Martin said in a low voice. "And I won't until they let us."

"Eh? You won't, er? We'll see if you won't! Hm!"

He went out with his lantern chucking to himself. As he moved along the cow path in the pasture and across it to the flax field, he speculated upon some way of compelling Martin to fish when the cooler weather came. It was not altogether that he wanted the satisfaction of taking fish from the obdurate Bjarnasson; it was also that he must quell any rising independence in Martin. If he started at twenty to show a will of his own, at twenty-five there would be no holding him. He must think of something.

Caleb walked in the approaching dusk like a thing that belonged infinitely to the earth, his broad, squat body leaning low over it. Presently his mind was far from the annoying trifles that symbolized his family. Before him glimmered the silver gray sheet of the flax—rich, beautiful, strong. All unto itself, complete, demanding everything, and in turn yielding everything—growth of the earth, the only thing on the earth worthy of respect, of homage.

North of it lay the muskeg, black and evil and potted with water-holes. Arson ought to fence the rotten land now that it was his.

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"Yes, and they would be mostly long slimy rots," he consoled her. They walked half a mile or so to a little sunny knoll at the edge of Gare's timber. Here they sat down, Lind spreading her pale, billowy dress out about her. In a little while Mark stretched himself out full length, shading his eyes with his hand and nibbling at a straw.

at the back of his neck. "It's never going to be like that any more," she whispered. She dropped her head against his and clung to him. "We are one entity now, my dearest."

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draw the back of her hand across her wet forehead. The gray heat was overwhelming. She looked westward to the drab bank of cloud that had been building up for ten minutes or more. Now it was a gigantic unraveling of soot, widening out to the south and the north. It broke with lightning as Amelia looked at it.

Suddenly a greenish light shot up as if from below the horizon. It had the effect of hollowing out a luminous void between heaven and earth.

"Hail," said Caleb almost under his breath as he came out of the barn. He would not admit it aloud. It might pass over.

"Hail," said Amelia to herself, her hand going instinctively to her breast.

She looked around and saw Caleb approaching. He passed her without speaking, as if nothing unusual was about to happen.

Martin, who was building an extra pippen for two new sows, threw his leg over the bar and herded all of the pigs into the shed. Then he turned the milch cows that had come home and were drinking at the trough, into the cattle yard.

Lind, who had been reading, put aside her book at the sound of thunder. It had grown suddenly dark, and then suddenly light again. She spoke to Ellen, who was baking bread in the kitchen.

"Looks like a storm, doesn't it?" She stood in the doorway and looked out. Judith was running about in the sheep pasture, getting her sheep into the pen. Pete was circling about them, helping her.

(To Be Continued.)

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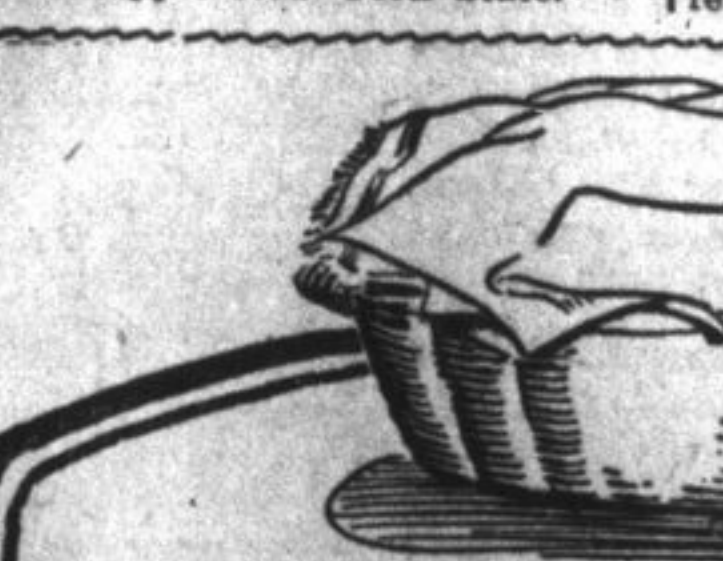
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An Ottawa report says there is reason to believe that Right Hon. George P. Graham, Chairman of the recently created Advisory Tariff Board, may yet accept the post of Canadian Minister to Washington. President Coolidge has decided finally to spend his vacation this summer in the Adirondack Mountains in upper New York State.



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