
The Soul That Sinneth

The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

EZEKIEL 18: 4.

By EMA S. HUNTING

Henry Schultz drove into the yard and unhitched the team from the plough. It was coming sunset already—the dusty, cool October sunset that so early sent him in from the fields. In the meadow back of the barn which they had never been able to drain because there was no place lower to drain into, innumerable frogs croaked and chorused. Visitors from towns had sometimes found the sound dreary coming through the hush and low wind of twilight: and indeed Henry thought it unpleasant since it reminded him of the half acre of waste land his ditches and tiles could not make profitable. But in the main, he paid no more attention to the frogs than he paid to the colors in the level, deep prairie sunsets, or to the scent of rank vegetation, past its prime, from the roadsides. He smelled the sweat on his team, and the odor from the open barn, partly of animals and partly from the hay and grains stored there, and he caught from the house a whiff of potatoes frying in fat.

He drove the liberated team over to the trough to drink. After that they must be fed and bedded, this team and two other teams and Johnny's driving horse besides. Then there was the milking and the separating and the pigs. It was dark, with a cold

whisper of wind in the trees, when he turned towards the house.

He was a humane man, Henry Schultz, and fed his animals before he fed himself, or before his wife could eat or get her work put aside. A silent man, partly deaf, who drove regularly to church on Sundays, seldom spoke, and for recreation improvised chords and modulations on the reed organ in the parlor, evenings and Sunday afternoons. He owned three farms: but the last one, the one in Minnesota where land was still cheaper than in Iowa, that would be a long while getting paid for now that he had everything to do alone and might even have to hire a man.

He stood at the bench outside the kitchen door where there was a pail of water, a tin dipper and basin, and took a long drink of the cool, deep well water tasting of iron. Everything to do — yes, just when Johnny was getting over his nonsense and settling down into some help to a man. The girls, of course, that was natural — girls get married and go and what can you say? Besides, Carrie managed the work by herself: but how could he manage one hundred and sixty acres, and the cattle and the pigs, and the cream to haul, and the repairing, and all? How could any man? He had never thought so much of Johnny's help, always talking about school and machinery, and driving that Klinefelter girl to church — a little fellow, anyhow, short in the legs: it was a wonder they took him. But of course they would take him, take *his* boy, the only one he had to do anything. He stood by the bench with the water

running out of the dipper beside him and stared at the grey sky where the sun had long disappeared. In Texas, they said he was, a big camp, thousands of young chaps he had written his mother. Well, let them go, the thousands, if they wanted to be fools: but let them let *him* alone, him and his, his acres and his barns and his boy.

The frogs were quiet, but the cottonwoods in the grove bent and thrashed and shed their dry leaves on the wind.

He poured water into the basin and splashed face and hands, and groped his way into the kitchen to dry on the towel behind the door.

There was no light in the kitchen except the glow in the cook stove and a bar of yellow in the slit of the dining room door. Supper was waiting, pushed back to keep hot, but Carrie might have been there watching for him. He took up the comb hanging on a chain beside the towel and combed his wet hair. He could hear the rockers of a chair in the next room, rocking, rocking on the bare floor. That was the grandmother, too old to do anything, sitting as she always sat, waiting to be fed. He dropped the comb and pushed open the room door.

A lamp with a white china shade stood on the supper table throwing yellow light in a circle across the dishes and the red and white table cloth and leaving the room dim. The grandmother sat in her corner, not rocking now, sitting still like a cat. He could see her face peering at him. Even then he did not speak, did not say, "Where's Carrie?" nor shout for

her as another man might have done. It was true he was ready for his supper after a hard day's work —

He saw the door of the parlor open and his wife look at him. She too said nothing. But he saw that she was white with swollen patches of red about her eyes. She had something — a bit of paper — in her hand.

Then he spoke. He said, "What's the matter?" She made a little sound in her throat, but it was not a word, and gave him the yellow paper: and even then, instead of going into the kitchen, she went back into the parlor and pulled the door shut.

He carried the paper to the table and sat down and began reading it, held close to the light.

Private John Schultz — of pneumonia — October 6 —

There was not a sound from the grandmother, not a sound from the parlor, not a sound from the man at the table reading —

And then there came a cry, and an awful curse, and a blow that set the lampshade rattling and the light flickering in the room.

"You!" he screamed at the grandmother. "Here eleven years and worth nothing. You there in your corner, hanging on, and Johnny dead. Dead." He ran out of the room, and through the kitchen, and in the yard they could hear him, screaming.

Carrie crept in from the parlor and touched her mother.

"Kommen Sie mit, ma. Go to bett."

"Ja. Ja. I go. I go." She scrambled up and

clung to her daughter and they went through the dark, shut parlor to the bedroom. The pipes of the reed organ gleamed with gilt in the corner. Their feet were noiseless on the ingrain carpet padded underneath with straw.

"At Carl's," whispered the Grandmother, "there are the children, so many. Und seine Frau — but I go, I go there. Ich denke —"

"Ja. But never mind tonight, ma. Go to bett."

"Ja, zum bett. I go."

All night, at times Carrie heard him: but in the morning he came in to his breakfast, fed in silence, and went out to the chores and the ploughing. She carried him his lunch and put it down in the corner of the field, and she swept and burnished the house, and called up her two daughters on their farms to tell them.

"Johnny?" they said. "But, ma — he just went! Johnny? Oh, ma!"

"Yes. But don't come over tonight. Wait a day or two." She knew the neighbors would be listening in — "rubbering." "There's to be a big funeral. The telegram said so. An escort of honor. They are coming with him all the way from Texas."

"Oh, ma! With Johnny!"

"He was a soldier already. I swept today and tomorrow I'll bake up some biscuit."

"We'll come to help you."

"Yes. But not tomorrow. Wait a day or two."

In spite of Carrie, whispers ran about the neighborhood. Henry Schultz was crazed. All day he ploughed in his fields while Johnny lay dead. Old

Grandma Haar was to be sent to her son's, nine miles away, where there were seven children and the farm was poor. She would die there, they said. Henry had pulled down the flag from the window and burned it.

"No one but May Klinefelter has dared go near the place," they whispered. "It looks funny, her not married to Johnny. But she went over to help Carrie while Henry ploughed in the south eighty."

Then a rumour from the village. Henry Schultz had telegraphed to the camp in Texas that he would have no soldiers with the body. They would have come — an escort of honor for Johnny Schultz, two weeks a soldier. Now there would be no one.

Few dared, when the coffin arrived draped in the flag, one young officer its sole escort, few dared go to the Schultz place for the funeral. The two girls, Annie and Linda, were there as in duty bound, with their husbands, and James McGovern, the only Scotchman in the county, came stumping fiercely on his lame leg. Carrie had fitted herself out in black, and the grandmother was still there, mumbling and shrinking into her bonnet. The house was shining and ready, with a row of chairs set 'round the parlor. But the wagon with the coffin had driven down the long lane between the cottonwoods and the young officer had stepped out on the porch, and the men from town who had volunteered as pall bearers were just ready to lift the body, before Henry Schultz appeared. He came around the corner of the porch in his overalls and boots. He said terrible things to

the young officer. He tore the great flag from the coffin and trampled it and threw it away. And then he went back again to his field and ploughed all day until dark.

The young officer was very kind. He put his arm around Carrie and took her into the house, and when they brought in the coffin, he held her while she looked at Johnny. And Johnny lay white and smiling in his uniform, not at all thin for he had been sick only four days, with his big blue eyes just closed and his brown hair brushed back from his forehead.

It was three days later when the insurance man from town, Art Fedderman, drove out to settle about Johnny's insurance. There was a thousand dollars coming for Johnny. Art brought the new lawyer, young Harvey, with him. Art was getting pretty fat and puffy what with big land deals and maybe a bottle under the seat, and perhaps he didn't care about coming alone.

Carrie told him Henry was in the barn mending harness — it was rainy that day — and sure enough, there they found him with the golden dust from the mows sifting around him.

"Well, Mr. Schultz, this is too bad," said Art. "It's too bad."

"What do you want?"

"Why — the insurance, you know, Mr. Schultz. Johnny's insurance."

"Then say the insurance, the thousand dollars. Three days in his grave and you just getting here."

"My God, three days, Mr. Schultz! Is there an-

other company, only but just the Mutual, that comes around with a check in three days?"

"Then let's see the check."

They settled somehow about the insurance—young Harvey took himself off to the car—and Art came out of the barn looking mottled and shaky and was for driving straight off. But Carrie called to them to come in to dinner—it was past noon and raining—and young Harvey said, "Better take a bite. You look done."

They ate alone at the table in the dining room with the grandmother shriveled in her corner and Carrie waiting on them, back and forth, between the table and the stove in the kitchen. Art kept a look-out through the window toward the barn: and even when they were through and going out to the car, he said in a whisper, "Start her up, Harve. I want to get out of here."

"What's the matter?" young Harvey asked as they turned out of the lane of cottonwoods on the public road. "Out of his head?"

"Is he? Say, he darned near put me out of mine. What d'you think he thinks this check is I brought him from the Mutual—twenty payment life he carried for the kid? Thinks it's Gov'ment money. Got it all mixed up with War Risk Insurance and that stuff. Laughed his head off—d'you hear him? My land, the barn shook. 'Two weeks they had him,' he says, 'and it cost 'em a thousand dollars! And it's not for his mother,' he says. 'Don't you believe that.' Raved around about Johnny's being mur-

dered. 'Stole him, stole him!' he yelled. Turned a man's blood cold. And then, by George, if he wasn't going to strangle me getting me to promise I wouldn't tell he had the money. Said the Red Cross and that gang would be right on him, and he had to pay for Johnny's farm — some deal he had on up in Minnesota. Kept on telling how poor he is, how he has to work now Johnny's gone. Oh, he's a bug all right! And yet, you know — poor old nut — a man feels sorry for him.' The car slid around another turn in the road, and Art, recovering, became reflective. "Yes, sir, he must have thought a lot more of that kid than anybody knew about. Kept talking about his legs. Says his mother says he worked too hard when he was a kid and it made him short. And if he hasn't got it half in his head the kid ain't dead! Yes — told me a dozen times. 'They're hiding him,' he says, 'his mother and that Klinefelter girl. They've sneaked him off to school. Always at me about school — school.' Smart boy, Johnny Schultz was. Well —" Art sighed and reached a fat hand under the seat. "Poor devil, it's his own loss. But I'd hate to live with him."

"Yes."

And the two fell silent: not thinking perhaps of the lost crazed man in the barn, sitting in his rain of golden dust; but of Carrie going back and forth, back and forth, between the table and the kitchen stove: and of the grandmother mumbling in her corner. And of the silence in the house, and the long cold winds in the cottonwoods.