

# BABA PETRUCHEVICH

The Patriotism of  
An Adopted Daughter

FIRST PRIZE STORY

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**B**ABA Petruchevich roused from an uneasy slumber by a sudden start, and looked towards the bed in the corner of the room, where her grandson, Ivan, lay tossing and muttering delirium. An hour ago she had dropped into a quiet sleep, the first she had had in days. For it was now five days since the child had begun to sick. Baba recognized the disease. In the old land children had sickened with it, and been gathered by the grim reaper in great numbers. Baba knew enough about the disease to know that Ivan was prostrated by an unusually severe attack of the measles. She was half afraid, after the lapse of this space of time, to look at the boy, lest she might find him no longer alive. But the child's bosom, under the well-patched spread, rose and fell in labored breathing, and, noting this, Baba's heart beat easier.

She sat up on the edge of the bed, and looked out through the uncurtained window. There was a crimson flush in the east, but the Day-god had not yet appeared above the horizon. The grey mists of morning were over the stretches of meadow and stubble land.

Though the prospect that spread so fair before her filled her this morning with unutterable longing and loneliness there had been a day, not long distant, when Baba had loved these quiet, restful prairies. All about her were her own people, and she had revelled in their companionship. As a people they had thought their own thoughts, and lived their own lives, and no one had cared or dared to make them afraid. The mounted police, who frequently rode through the country, had at first been an object of terror to Baba Petruchevich, for Baba had been wont in the old land to fear the strong arm of the mighty, and her fear had died a slow death. But now she knew that the police could be a kind man, civil spoken, and with no evil intention towards her.

It was a wonder to Baba that any land could abound in such freedom and safety as abounded in Canada. The pure air of these prairies seemed pregnant with the spirit of justice, and the dazzling sun smiled ever a benignant smile on a little group of alien people, who, under new conditions, were readjusting preconceived ideas of the strong arm of the ruler.

True, Baba's thoughts had often reverted, in a kind of unwilling home-sickness, to the old land. For there were still unsevered cords that bound her mother-heart to the homeland. Peter, her first-born, still lived amongst the quietudes of Austria. How often she had longed, with a longing known only to a mother's heart, that she might tell him of the freedom to be enjoyed in this fair land. Here there were no rebellious mobs of the oppressed, making the night hideous with threats, and being crushed into an unwilling and dangerous quietness by the mighty hand of the oppressor. Here the canker of discontent and quietude died in these people's hearts for want of nourishment, and in the vacated soil the seeds of a new patriotism were springing into

hideous night-mares of fear and sorrow.

And then, suddenly, her pain had been pressed even closer home. Michael, her second son, the boy who had grown big and wise in this new land, was going to fight for the land of his adoption. It was not that a patriotism did not live in the heart of Baba Petruchevich that was large enough to give ungrudgingly her best beloved for the need of her new home, but she who thought she had known the utmost price of sacrifice knew now that she had known nothing of its limits. It was required of her that she give a son to fight against a son. Her own heart became a battle

vice. And Baba had foreknown that she would not begrudge the pain it cost her.

And now the day of sacrifice that Baba had foreseen was here. But it was not the offering that she had dreamed of that was demanded of her. No, surely she had known then nothing of the limits of sacrifice. And yet the little woman, who sat on the edge of the bed, looking out towards the faintly glowing east, was shouldering the burden of sacrifice that was demanded of her, and was not turning her pain to bitterness by murmuring.

Baba rose from the bed, and crossing the room to a position in front of a shrine that hung on the wall, she bowed several

**BABA PETRUCHEVICH**—This is one of the simplest and least pretentious of all the stories submitted. It is given first place because of its directness and sincerity. It rings true.—Judge's comment.

field, but she offered it without a murmur.

Baba remembered the first time she had seen Michael in his uniform, parading with his regiment. A mighty pride had awakened in her breast. He was so tall, so handsome, and marched with such a firm and fearless tread. She felt that now she had given a worthy gift to this land that had befriended her and hers. Her own flesh and blood was one of its willing and loyal defenders. Before she had felt but as a pauper, receiving of its bounty, and giving nothing in return. But now, with a loyal and loving pride, she gave it of her best, and she felt that it was no mean offering. She had no presentiment that the war cloud would ever lower over this fair land, and its smiling plains be stained with blood of its sons. It was unthinkable to her that carnage could ever rage here, where the very existence of such things seemed denied. And yet surely a foe sometimes lurked at the gateway of the most favored lands. And when it threatened Canada Baba's son would be no laggard in his country's ser-

vice, and kissed the straw-strewn floor. Then, an upright, rigid figure, she stood for some moments with eyes upturned towards the shrine. Her face grew wondrously tender. She knew that love had not diminished. She knew that God did not slumber. The God who had given a son to save his children must surely understand the pain of a mother who was called on to give a son to oppose a son. The thought entered her heart as a healing balm.

As the morning wore on Ivan seemed to grow steadily worse. In his sane moments his dark eyes, that seemed to have grown too large, looked into hers appealingly. His pinched face was fever parched. His frequent ravings were all of his uncle Michael, the one who had been the hero of the child's life. Listening to his muttered words Baba realized that another heart was aching.

Through the long hours of the morning and the early afternoon Baba Petruchevich felt the need of appealing to some one for assistance. As far as her own knowledge went she had done everything that

could be done, and she felt that she was worsted. The disease was winning the mastery. Many times during the hours she went to the door, and looked out across the fields to where the school house stood. It was no great distance away. A few moments of good brisk walking would take her to it, and perhaps the Professica would afford her some help. The Professica who had preceded her in office had been a very wise person, and had taught Baba Petruchevich many things. But the present Professica, whose term of office had commenced only a few weeks ago, was very hard to approach. She had scarcely glanced at Baba Petruchevich the few times that Baba had passed her on the road. The woman had judged her as one with little time to devote to other than her own interests. But when four o'clock came and Ivan was still no better, Baba's anxiety was such that she would have braved any danger if she thought that in so doing she could help the sufferer.

The Professica's head was bowed on the desk when Baba entered the school room. Baba paused, irresolute, when she saw that robes were shaking the slight form. The face that was raised to hers a moment later was tear-stained, and marked with the utter abandonment of grief. Her manner bespoke no interest in her caller, indeed it was plain to Baba that she was impatient of interruption. Her whole attitude was that of the undisciplined torn with sorrow. Baba's role had changed in the instant. She recognized the fact that she, the strong, was in the presence of the weak. She would fain reach a helping hand over the barrier of chilling reserve that the Professica drew up between them.

"The Professica is feeling a plenty much hard pain in her heart."

Baba's voice as she questioned was full of a gentle sympathy, and her eyes were wondrously kind.

"Yes." The girl's tone was acquies-

cent, but her manner was non-committal. It seemed as though by that one short word she closed the subject.

They were silent for a moment, looking into each other's eyes. And then the Professica knew that the heart that beat beneath Baba's sheepskin coat was kind and sympathetic. The barrier she had erected crumbled, Baba's evident sympathy called forth the brother of weak tears.

"My brother has gone to the war," she sobbed. "You cannot know how I feel."

It did not occur to the Professica that this little foreign woman could know the meaning of such a sacrifice. Baba Petruchevich was not offended by the tone. Indeed she did not notice it.

"Ah!" The woman's voice was full of a humble pride. "Baba Petruchevich gives a one son to her new country, too. It is but plenty much right. When he comes on this land he is little, he know nothing. Now he plenty much big, plenty much wise. This is his country, he fight with all its foes. And then come to Baba Petruchevich one great pain. Peter, who was this first mine one baby is mit this country one enemy. He has not come off of the old land. Baba Petruchevich must give one son to fight against another one son. Plenty much I remember the days when both ones lay their little heads on this bosom. There was in mine heart one great joy. And mit this memory there comes one pain. And before Baba Petruchevich did not know such pain could be."

Baba's voice, intensely earnest, trailed off into silence. The Professica, her tears dried, sat gazing at her as one spell-bound. The sacrifice she had been called upon to make dwindled into nothingness in the face of this woman's infinitely greater one. She recognized the fact that this little, brave-spoken, oddly-garbed foreigner was laying a bleeding heart, unflinchingly, on the altar of her new country's needs, nor was she, by the measure of her pain, accounting that an unreasonable

sacrifice had been demanded of her.

There was no longer a cold indifference in the Professica's manner, and the eyes that looked into Baba's bespoke an almost reverential esteem. Baba saw only their kindness. She knew now that her appeal for help would not fall on deaf ears. Nor did it. A few moments later, hand in hand, Baba and her newly-found friend were making their way across the fields in the direction of Baba's home.

And Baba's faith in the Professica's ability to help the sufferer proved not ill-founded. Under her ministrations the boy grew hourly easier. Baba, the tension of anxiety somewhat lessened, could no longer fight off the sense of drowsiness that oppressed her. Her troubles were forgotten in sleep.

But no feelings of drowsiness came to the Professica. She sat, bolt-up-right, on the uncomfortable home made chair in the middle of the room, and studied the face of the sleeping woman. Relaxed in sleep it indexed less of the glorious courage of the woman, but the ravages of pain were plainly traceable. Where the girl wondered, had this woman gained so exalted a patriotism. She glanced again at the straw-strewn floor, at the roughly plastered but glittering white walls, at the rude furniture, at the row of brilliant-colored sacred pictures that circled the room close to the ceiling. It was a humble cot, bare of comforts to a degree that she would have recoiled only as the result of poverty, and its mistress was but an unlettered peasant. But she knew now that this hut was the abode of one of her country's most loyal daughters.

And the girl who went back to her work in the morning no longer cried out weakly against her burden of sacrifice, but bore it bravely, knowing that another accounted it no mean thing to serve this fair land with her best gifts, and that though this woman's heart might bleed and break it would not falter.