Norwegian Short Stories

Volume I

Edited by
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Tom DuBois Tanya Thresher
Faith Ingwersen Kirsten Wolf
James Leary

Judy Anderson, Academic Department Specialist
Email: jlander3@wisc.edu

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WITS
Department of Scandinavian Studies
University of Wisconsin–Madison
1306 Van Hise Hall
Madison, WI 53706

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FOREWORD

The modern short story developed as an art form during the early nineteenth century. In Norway the first experiments in the genre were made by Mauritz Hansen (1794–1842), but his enormous production contained little that was originally Norwegian. During the almost four hundred years of political domination by Denmark, the literary language and tradition identified with Norway had been gradually replaced by the Danish; and for several decades after 1814, when Norway had declared itself independent, the intellectual life of the young nation was dominated by political and economic problems. It was not until the 1840s, with the breakthrough of Romanticism, that the course of Norwegian literature was given a new cultural foundation. Of special importance to the development of the short story in Norway was the publication of *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Norwegian Folktales, 1842–44) by P. Chr. Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, which brought the oral narrative tradition of the country to the attention of the educated public. A few years later Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson patterned his rural stories after the folktale and medieval saga in language and narrative form, thus preparing the ground for a uniquely Norwegian prose style. Of equal importance was the search for a new written language based upon the dialects of rural Norway and Old Norse, culminating in Ivar Aasen's *Prøver af Landsmaalet* (Samples of Norwegian Landsmaal), 1853. This essentially synthetic language (after 1929 called Nynorsk) became the preferred idiom of a whole new generation of writers who had their roots in the village milieu. Their fiction often mirrored a concern with nature and local traditions, as well as with social problems seen in a rural context.

Besides the oral tradition, foreign impulses were shaping the Norwegian short story throughout the century. The discussions of the theory of the genre by Goethe and the German Romantics and their successors had left their mark, for example, on the works of Mauritz Hansen. For the next generation the rural stories of the Dane Steen Steensen Blicher and the impressionistic style of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales provided important models. Later in the century the influence of the French short story, notably that of Guy de Maupassant, became important, as the elegant *Novelletter* of Alexander Kielland demonstrate. But also Russian, English, and American masters of the short story, among them Edgar Allan Poe and later Mark Twain, made their contribution to the development of the genre in Norway.

Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Jørgen Moe

THE SMITH THEY DIDN'T DARE LET INTO HELL

(1843)

Once in those days when Our Lord and St. Peter were walking on earth, they came to a smith. He had made a contract with the devil that he should belong to him after seven years, if during that period the devil would make him the master of all master blacksmiths, and to that contract both he and the devil had signed their names. And therefore he had written in big letters over the door of his shop: "HERE LIVES THE MASTER OF ALL MASTERS!" When Our Lord saw the sign, he went in. "Who are you?" he said to the smith. "Read above the door!" the smith answered, "but if you can't read, you'll have to wait until someone comes who can help you." Before Our Lord could answer, there came a man who asked the smith to shoe his horse. "May I shoe the horse?" Our Lord asked. "Go ahead and try," said the smith; "even if you bungle the job, I can always set it right again." Our Lord went outside, and taking off one of the legs of the horse, he placed it on the forge until the shoe was glowing hot. Then he sharpened hooks and calk and bent the nails, and then he put the leg on the horse again as good as new. When he was done with that, he took the other foreleg and did the same, and when he had put it on again, he took the hind legs, first the right one and then the left, put them in the forge and heated the shoes until they were glowing, sharpened hooks and calk, bent the nails and put the legs back on the horse. All this time the smith was standing there watching him. "You're not such a bad smith after all," he said. "You think so?" said Our Lord.

A little later the mother of the smith came to the shop to tell him to come home for dinner. She was very old, her back was bent and her face wrinkled, and she could barely walk. "Now watch closely!" said Our Lord. He took the woman, put her in the forge, and hammered her into a beautiful young maiden. "I've told you once, and I'll tell you again," said the smith, "you're not a bad smith; it says above my door, "HERE LIVES THE MASTER OF ALL MASTERS," but I'll say it straight out: you learn as long as you live." And with that he went home to eat dinner.

When he had been back at the smithy for a while, a man came riding up who wanted to have his horse shod. "That'll be done in a jiffy!" said the smith, "I've just learned a new method of shoeing a horse; it comes in handy when the day is short." And then he started cutting and breaking until he had torn all four legs off the horse; "for I don't know why I should fiddle with them one by one," he said. He put the legs into the forge, as he had seen Our Lord do, threw on a pile of coals, and told his hired hands to blow the bellows bravely. But it turned out as might be expected: the legs burned up and the smith had to pay for the horse. He didn't like that very much, but just then an old woman happened by, and so he thought, "if you don't succeed first time, try again." So he took the old woman and put her in the forge, and no matter how she cried and begged for her life, it didn't help. "You just don't know what's good for you, as old as you are," said the smith; "in a moment you'll be a young maiden once more, but I won't even take a penny for it." But it didn't turn out any better with the old woman, poor thing, than with the horse. "That was badly done," said Our Lord. "Oh, I don't imagine there'll be many people asking about her," the smith answered; "but the devil ought to be ashamed of himself: he doesn't much live up to what's written above my door." "If I were to give you three wishes," said Our Lord, "what would you wish for?" "Why don't you try me?" the smith answered; "then you'll find out." So Our Lord granted him three wishes. Then I wish first of all that anyone I ask to climb up in that pear tree by the wall of my shop has to remain sitting there until I ask him to come down again," said the smith; "and next I wish that anyone I ask to sit in that armchair there in my shop, has to stay put until I ask him myself to get up again; and finally I wish that anyone I ask to crawl into the wire purse I have in my pocket here, has to stay in it until I give him permission to come out." "You have made wishes like the bad man you are!" St. Peter said; "more than anything else you should have wished for God's mercy and friendship." "I wouldn't dare to reach that high," said the smith. Then our Lord and St. Peter said farewell and went on their way.

Time passed and when the seven years were up, the devil came, as it said in the contract, to fetch the smith. "Are you ready now?" said the devil, poking his nose in through the door of the smithy. "Oh, I really should finish hammering the head of this nail," answered the smith, "but climb up in the pear tree out there and get yourself a pear to munch on; you're probably both hungry and thirsty from being on the road." The devil thanked him for the offer and crawled up into the tree. "Well, come to think of it," said the smith, "I won't be able to finish the head of this nail for at least four years, for it's a hell of a hard piece of iron; you can't

come down in the meantime, so you might as well make yourself comfortable and take a rest." The devil begged all he was worth to be allowed to come down again, but it didn't help. In the end he had to promise not to come back before the four years were up, as the smith had said. "Well, in that case you can come down again," said the smith.

When that time was past, the devil returned to fetch the smith. "But now you are ready, I guess," he said, "now you have finished the head of that nail?" "Yes, I got the head done all right," the smith answered, "but still you have come just a little early, because I haven't sharpened the point yet; never before have I forged such hard iron. But while I hammer the point, you might just sit in my armchair over there; I imagine you are tired." "Thanks for the kind offer," said the devil. But hardly had he settled in, when the smith said again that, thinking about it, he really wouldn't be able to get that point sharpened for another four years. At first the devil asked quite politely to be released from the chair, but then he got mad and began threatening. But the smith excused himself as well as he could, saying that it was the fault of the iron, it was so damnably hard, but wasn't he sitting quite comfortably in the armchair? And, after all, he would let him go in four years to the very minute. There was nothing the devil could do; he had to promise not to get the smith for another four years. And then the smith said: "Well, now you can get up again," and the devil took off as quickly as he could.

Four years later the devil came back once more to fetch the smith. "But now you're done for sure," the devil said as he stuck his nose in through the door of the smithy. "All done!" answered the smith; "now we can leave whenever you want. But," he continued, "there is one thing I have been wondering about; is it true, as people say, that the devil can make himself as small as he wants to?" "Of course it is!" answered the devil. "Oh, could you do me one favor then and crawl into this wire-mesh purse and check whether it is sound on the bottom," said the smith; "I'm afraid I'll lose my travel money." "Happy to oblige!" said the devil. He made himself small and crawled into the purse. But as soon as he was inside, the smith closed the purse. "Yes, it is sound and tight everywhere," said the devil inside the purse. "Well, it's good of you to say so," answered the smith, "but a stitch in time saves nine; I think I'll re-weld the seam a bit, just to be on the safe side," and with that he placed the purse in the forge and heated it until it started to glow. "Ow! Ow! Are you mad; don't you know that I am inside the purse." "Well, I can't help you," said the smith, "there's an old proverb, you know, that you've got to strike while the iron's hot," and then he took his big sledge hammer, put the purse on the anvil, and hammered all he could. "Ow! Ow! Ow!" the devil screamed inside the purse. "Dear friend, just let me out, and I'll

never come back." "Oh, well, I think the seams are pretty well welded now, so you can come out again!" And with that he opened the purse and the devil took off so fast, he didn't even dare to look back.

But after a while it occurred to the smith that he might have made a mistake in making the devil his enemy; "because, if I don't get into heaven," he thought, "I might end up without a roof over my head, since I've fallen out with the one who rules in hell." And so the smith thought he might just as well try to get into either hell or heaven; then, he'd know where he stood, and taking his sledge over his shoulder, he went on his way. When he had walked a good while, he came to the crossing where the road to heaven branches off from the one going to hell. There he caught up with a tailor who was scurrying along carrying his pressing iron in his hand. "Hello!" said the smith, "where are you off to?" "To heaven, if I can get in," the tailor answered, "and you?" "Oh, I guess we won't keep company for long," the smith said; "I was thinking I'd try hell first, I'm somewhat acquainted with the devil." So they said farewell and each went on his way. But the smith was a strong and husky man who walked much faster than the tailor, and so it didn't take very long before he stood at the gate of hell. He asked the guard to report that there was someone outside who wished to have a word with the devil. "Go out and ask who it is," the devil said to the guard. "Greet the devil from me and say it's the one with the purse; he'll know what I mean," the smith answered, "and ask him nicely to let me in right away, because I've been working in my smithy until noon today, and then I have walked all this way." When the devil got that answer, he ordered the guard to lock all nine locks on the gate of hell, "and put on another padlock," said the devil, "because if that man gets in, he'll turn hell upside-down." "I won't get any shelter here," the smith said to himself when he heard them locking the gate; "I guess I'll have to try heaven." And with that he turned around and went back to the crossroads, and there he took the same road as the tailor. And because he was mad at having walked that long way back and forth for nothing, he strode along as fast as he could and reached the gate of heaven at the very moment St. Peter opened it a little crack to let the skinny tailor come in. The smith was another six, seven steps away from the gate. "It's best to hurry," he thought, throwing his sledge into the crack of the door just as the tailor slipped through. But if he didn't get in through that opening—well, then I don't know what's become of him.

Original title: "Smeden som de ikke turde slippe ind i Helvede."
Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

A DANGEROUS WOOING

(1856)

Once Aslaug became a young woman, there was not much peace to be found at Huseby, because the village's finest lads wrestled and fought night after night. It was worst on Saturday nights, but Old Knut never went to bed without his leather pants on and a birch rod at the foot of his bed. "Since I've got a daughter, I'll look after her," he said.

Tore Næsset was only a tenant farmer's son, but, even so, there where those who said he was the one who visited the Huseby daughter most often. Old Knut didn't like that, and said it wasn't true, "because he had never seen him there." People smiled to themselves and thought that if he had looked up in Aslaug's room instead of tussling with all the ones traipsing about the grounds, then he would have found Tore.

Spring came and Aslaug went out to the shieling with the livestock. When twilight sank upon the valley, the mountains stood cooly in the sun's glow, the cowbells clanged, the sheepdog barked, and Aslaug called and blew her horn in the meadows, then the fellows grew heartsick as they worked down in the valley. The first Saturday evening each one tried to get up there faster than the others. But they came down even faster, because up at the shieling there was a lad behind the door and he met each one that came and gave them such a thrashing that they always remembered the words he said: "Come again next time, and I'll give you some more."

As far as anyone knew, there was only one in the parish who owned such a fist and that was Tore Næsset. All the rich farmer's sons didn't think it was right that a tenant farmer's son should block the way to the Huseby shieling.

Old Knut thought so too, when he heard about it, and he also thought that even if no one else could get the best of Tore, then he and his sons would give it a try. Knut was, of course, getting older, but even though he was around sixty years old, he liked to fight a bit with his eldest son when a party grew too dull.

There was only one path to the Huseby shieling and that ran right through the farm. The next Saturday evening, Tore was on his way to the shieling and sneaking through the farm. When he came to the barn, a

man charged into his chest. "What do you want with me?" said Tore and struck him to the ground, so that his ears rang. "You'll see," said another behind him who grabbed him by the neck, and that was his brother. "Here comes the third," said Old Knut and went to work on him.

Tore grew stronger in the face of danger. He was as limber as a willow twig and struck so it smarted. He danced and bobbed. Where the fists flew, he wasn't. When they least expected it, they got a punch. They gave him a beating in the end, and then some, but Old Knut often said, that he had never fought a tougher man. They kept it up until blood was spilled, but then Knut said, "Stop!" and added, "If next Saturday evening you can slip by the Huseby wolf and his pups, you can have the girl!"

Tore dragged himself home as best he could, and when he got home, he went to bed. Much was said about the fight at Huseby, and everyone said, "What business did he have there?" Only one person did not say so and that was Aslaug. She had waited for him that Saturday night, and when she heard what sort of treatment he had gotten from her father, she sat down and cried, saying to herself, "If I can't have Tore, I'll never be happy again."

Tore stayed in bed all day Sunday, and he felt he needed to stay there Monday too. Tuesday came, and it was such a beautiful day. It had rained during the night, and the mountain was wet and green. The window stood open, and the scent of leaves floated in, and someone was calling up there. If his mother had not been in the room, he would have cried in frustration.

Wednesday came and he still lay in bed, but on Thursday he started to wonder if he might not be well by Saturday. On Friday he got up. He remembered well the words her father had said: "If next Saturday evening you can slip by the Huseby wolf and his pups, you can have the girl!" He looked towards the Huseby farm over and over again. "I won't get anything more than a beating there," thought Tore.

There was only one path to the Huseby shieling, as has been said before, but a clever man could slowly make his way there if he didn't take the smooth path. If he rowed out past the point, and tied up the boat on the other side of the mountain, there was always a way up, even though it was so steep that not even a goat went there if it didn't have to, and goats aren't bad mountaineers.

Saturday came and Tore walked outside all day. The sun shone and glittered in the bushes and everything called from the mountain. He still sat outside the door when evening approached, and a damp mist crept up towards the meadows. He looked up and saw the Huseby farm, and so he set out with his boat and rowed around the point.

Aslaug sat at the shieling, finished with her chores. She thought about the fact that Tore could not come that evening, so all the more would come in his place. Then she let loose the sheepdog and told no one where she was going. She sat down in a place where she could see over the valley, but then the mist rose and she was no longer in the mood to look down there, because everything reminded her of Tore. She moved on and without really thinking about it walked to the other side of the mountain and sat down to look at the sea. It was so peaceful to gaze out over the sea!

Then she felt like singing. She sang a song with long notes and the sound carried far into the quiet night. She was happy with her song and sang another verse. Then it seemed that somebody answered her from far below. "Oh dear, what can it be?" thought Aslaug. She walked over to the edge and put her arm around a straight birch that leaned, trembling above the brink. She looked down, but she didn't see anything. The fjord lay still and peaceful; not even a bird was swimming there. Aslaug sat down and started singing again. Then she heard a voice answer her with the same song, closer than the first time. "Someone must be there, after all." Aslaug sprang up and leaned over the edge. She saw a boat tied up at the bottom of the cliff, and it was so far down, that it looked like a little shell. She looked along the cliff and saw a red cap and beneath it a man who was climbing his way up the almost smooth rock. "Oh dear, who could that be?" wondered Aslaug, let go of the birch and jumped a long way back. She dared not answer herself, because she knew who it was. She threw herself on the grass and grabbed tufts with both hands, as if it were she who could not lose her grip. The grass roots loosened and she screamed aloud and prayed to God Almighty to help him. Then it occurred to her that Tore's actions were a challenge to God and so no help could be looked for there. "Just this once," she prayed, and she hugged the dog as if it were Tore she had to hold fast. She rolled with him across the grass and it seemed as though time stood still.

Then the dog got away from her. "Woof, woof!" it called over the brink and wagged its tail. "Woof, woof!" it said to Aslaug, jumping up on her. "Woof, woof!" it called down the cliff again, and then a red cap came over the edge, and Tore lay in her embrace.

He lay there for a few minutes without being able to say a word, and when he finally spoke, he made no sense.

But Old Knut at Huseby, when he heard about it, said something that did make sense: "That fellow's worth having. The girl shall be his."

Original title: "Et farligt frieri." Translated by Susan Brantly

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

TROND

(1857)

Alf was the name of a man of whom much was expected by his fellow villagers because he excelled most of them in work and in common sense. But when he was thirty years old, the man went to the mountains and there cleared a place for himself some twenty miles away. Many wondered how he could stand keeping his own company, but they wondered even more when a few years later a young girl from the valley wanted to join him there, and she had been the most lively at their get-togethers and dances.

The villagers called them the "forest folk," and the man got the name "Alf in the Woods." People stared at them in church or at work. They didn't understand Alf, nor did he bother to explain. The woman came to the village only a couple of times, and one of those was to baptize her child.

This child was a son they called Trond. As he got bigger, they felt they needed help, but since they didn't have the money to hire a grown person they got what they called a half: they took a fourteen-year-old girl into their house to look after the boy while they, his parents, were out in the fields.

She was a bit simple-minded, and the boy learned quickly that what mother said was easy to grasp, but what Ragnhild said was hard. He didn't talk much to his father and was rather afraid of him, because everything had to be so quiet when his father got home.

Then one Christmas Eve—two candles were burning on the table and Trond's father was drinking something from a bottle that was white—he put the boy on his lap, looked at him sternly, and shouted, "Humph, boy!" Then he added in a milder tone, "You're not that afraid; can you take a story?" The boy didn't say anything, but looked at his father with big eyes. Then his father told him about a man from Våge by the name of Blessomen. He was in Copenhagen, this man, to get justice from the king in a law suit, but the matter drew out, and suddenly Christmas was upon him. Blessomen didn't like that at all; and as he was walking around in the streets, wishing that he was at home, he saw

a big fellow in a white jacket walking in front of him. "You walk fast," said Blessomen. "I have a long way home tonight," said the man. "Where you off to?" "To Våge," the man answered and walked on. "Oh, that's good," said Blessomen, "because that's where I want to go." "Then you can stand on the back of my runners," answered the man and turned into a side street where the horse was waiting. He got up into the sled and looked back at Blessomen, who was climbing up on the runners. "You better hold on tight," he said. Blessomen did, and he needed to, because they weren't really driving on the ground. "It seems to me you're driving on the water," said Blessomen. "I am," said the man, and the water was foaming around them. But a little while later it seemed to Blessomen that they were no longer driving on the water. "It seems now we're going through the air," he said. "Yes, we are," said the man. But when they had traveled a bit further, Blessomen thought that he recognized the village they were driving into. "It seems to me that this is Våge?" he said. "Yes, now we are there," answered the man, and Blessomen thought that the trip had gone fast. "Thanks for the ride," he said. "Thank you!" said the man and added, as he laid the whip to his horse, "You'd better not turn around and look after me!" "No, no," Blessomen thought and plodded on home over the hills. But suddenly there was so much noise and crashing behind him that it seemed as if the whole mountain was going to fall down, and all of the countryside was lit up. He turned around and saw the man in the white coat driving through crackling flames into the mountain, which arched above him like an open gateway. Then Blessomen got a bit tired of his traveling companion and wanted to turn his head back. But as it was turned, so it stayed, and never did Blessomen get his head to sit straight again.

Never in his life had the boy heard anything like it. He didn't dare ask his father, but the next morning he asked his mother whether she knew any more fairy tales. Yes, she did, but they were mostly about princesses held captive for seven years, until the right prince came along. The boy believed that everything he heard and read about lived close by.

He was eight years old when the first stranger he ever met walked through their door one winter evening. He had black hair, and that Trond had never seen before. "Good evening!" the stranger said in a brusque voice and came in. Trond was afraid and sat on a stool by the fire. His mother asked the man to sit down; then she got a better look at him. "But dear me, isn't it Fiddler-Knut?" she said. "Yes, it is. It's been a long time since I played at your wedding." "Oh, yes, it has been a while. Are you going far?" "I was playing during Christmas on the other side of the mountain, but on the way back a sort of illness came over me; I had to

stop here and get some rest." The mother brought him food. He sat down at the table but did not say, "In Jesus' name," as the boy had always heard. When he had eaten, he got up. "Now I feel better," he said; "let me lie down for a while." And he was put into Trond's bed.

Trond was bedded down on the floor. As he was lying there, he got cold on the side away from the fireplace, and that was his left side. He knew this because that side was bare to the cold of the night, for, of course, he was lying in the middle of the woods. Why was he in the woods? He rose up and saw the fire burning far, far away, and he was lying all alone in the forest. He tried to get home to the fire, but he couldn't move. Then he became terrified; monsters might come, trolls and witches; he had to get home to the fire, but he couldn't move. His fear grew even more; he pulled himself together with all his strength and shouted "Mother!"—and woke up. "Dear Child, you're having a bad dream," she said and picked him up.

He shuddered and looked around. The stranger was gone, and he didn't dare ask about him.

His mother came in dressed in black and went to the village. When she came back, she was accompanied by two other strangers, also with black hair and flat hats. They didn't say "in Jesus' name" either, and they spoke softly with his father. Then they followed him to the loft and came out carrying a large box between them. They put it on a sled and took their leave. Then his mother said, "Wait a moment, take that little box he had." And she went inside to get it. But one of the men said, pointing at Trond: "Let him have it." The other one added, "Make as good use of it as he who is lying there now," and he pointed to the large box. Then they both laughed and went on their way. Trond looked at the small box. "What's in it?" he asked. "Take it inside and open it up," said his mother. He did, and she helped him open it. Then joy washed over his face; he saw something light and fine lying there. "Take it!" said his mother. He touched it with a finger but pulled back in fear. "It is crying!" he said. "Don't be afraid," said his mother, and he put his whole hand around it and picked it up. He weighed and turned it, laughed and touched it. "Dear me, what is it?" he asked; it was light like a plaything. "It is a fiddle."

And that is how Trond Alvsson got his first violin.

His father could play a little and taught him the beginnings. His mother could sing tunes from the time when she used to go dancing, and he learned them but soon made up his own. He played all the time he did not read; he played so that his father one day said that he was wasting away. Everything the boy had read or heard about went into his fiddle. The soft, fine string was his mother; the one close by, which always followed his mother around, that was Ragnhild. The coarse string, which

he played more rarely, that was his father. But the last, serious string he was almost afraid of, and he gave it no name. When he played a false note on the treble string, then it was the cat; when he made a mistake on his father's string, it became the ox. The bow, that was Blessomen riding from Copenhagen to Våge in one night. And every tune meant something to him. The one with the long and serious notes was his mother in her black dress. The one that stuttered and jumped was Moses stammering and striking the cliff with his staff. The one he played softly, with the bow lying lightly on the strings, that was the forest sprite gathering her cattle in the fog, where no one could see her.

But his playing carried over the mountains and aroused his longing. When his father one day told about a young boy who had played at the market and earned a lot of money, Trond waited for his mother in the kitchen and asked whether he couldn't go to the market and play for people. "What are you thinking of?" said his mother, but she talked to his father about it right away. "He'll get there soon enough," the father answered, and he said it in such a way that the mother didn't ask him about it again.

Soon thereafter the father and mother were talking at dinner about some settlers who had moved to the mountains and were going to get married. They didn't have a fiddler for the wedding, the father said. "Couldn't I be their fiddler?" the boy whispered to his mother when she came back to the kitchen. "You're still so little!" she said; but she went back to the loft, where his father was standing, and told him. "He has never been to the village," she added, "and has never seen a church." "I don't understand why you ask me," said Alf. But he didn't say anything else, and so the mother thought that she had his permission. So she went over to the new settlers and told them about the boy. "The way he plays," she said, "no little boy has ever played before"— and, yes, the boy was to come!

What joy at home! From morning to night Trond played and practiced new tunes, and at night he dreamed about them. They carried him over the mountain tops to far away lands, as if he were riding on sailing clouds. His mother sewed new clothes for him, but his father stayed away from the house.

The last night he could not sleep but thought up a new tune about the church he had never seen. The next morning he was up early, and his mother got up to give him food, but he could not eat. He put on his new clothes and took the fiddle, and it seemed to him that a light was shining before his eyes. His mother followed him outside to the doorstep and followed him with her eyes as he walked up the hillside. It was the first time he had left home.

The father climbed quietly out of bed and went to the window. He stood there looking after the boy until the mother moved outside the doorway; then he returned to bed and was lying there when she came in.

She kept walking around him as if there was something she needed to say. And finally she came out with it: "I think I have to walk down to the church and see how it goes." He didn't answer, and so she thought it was settled, got dressed and left.

It was a beautiful sunny day as the boy walked up the hill. He listened to the birds and saw the sun glisten on the leaves as he walked with his fiddle under his arm. And when he came to the house of the bride, he didn't have eyes for anything but what was in his head; he saw neither the bridal finery nor the wedding party. He only asked if they were going to leave soon, and that they were. He walked in front with his fiddle; now he played the whole morning into it, and it echoed among the trees. "Will we see the church soon?" he asked to the back. For a long time the answer was no, but finally someone said, "just around that crag there, then you'll see it!" He put his newest tune on the fiddle; the bow was dancing, and he looked straight ahead. There was the village before him!

The first he saw was a wispy, light fog, almost like smoke, lying on the opposite mountain side. He drew his glance back across green fields and large houses with windows on which the sun was burning; everything glittered, almost like a glacier on a winter day. The houses became bigger and bigger, and there were more windows, and there, to one side, were huge, red houses. Below them horses were tethered; small children in their Sunday dresses were playing on a hill; and dogs were sitting there, watching. But over it all hovered a great sound that shook him, and it seemed that everything was moving in rhythm with that sound. All of a sudden he saw a tall and proud house, stretching up to the sky with a high, shining stave. And a hundred windows glistened in the sun, so that the house stood as if in a flame. That must be the church, and the sound must be coming from there! Around it stood a great crowd of people, and they all looked alike! He right away connected them with the church and felt a respect, almost like fear, even for the smallest child. Now I must play, Trond thought, and began. But what was the matter? The fiddle gave no sound. There must be something wrong with the strings. He looked, but there wasn't. "Perhaps I am not pressing down hard enough," and he pressed down, but it was as if the fiddle was broken. He exchanged the tune that stood for the church with another, but that didn't help either. Not a sound, nothing but whining and wailing. He felt cold sweat trickle down his face; he was thinking about all the clever folk standing there and perhaps laughing at him, who could play so beautifully at home but couldn't make a sound here! "Thank God that

Mother isn't here to see my shame," he said quietly to himself as he was playing among the people; but look, there she stood in her black dress, and she moved further and further back. Then he suddenly saw the black-haired man who had given him the fiddle; he was straddling the top of the spire. "Give it back to me!" he shouted and laughed and stretched out his arms, and the spire swayed up and down with him. But the boy put his fiddle under his arm. "You're not going to get it!" he shouted, turning and running away from the people, out between the houses, over fields and meadows, until he could not run any further and fell down.

There he lay for a long time with his face to the ground, and when he finally turned around, he heard and saw only God's infinite sky passing over him with its never ending sound. This terrified him so that he had to turn his face back toward the ground. When he again lifted up his head, he saw the fiddle lying there by itself. "It's all your fault, all of it!" the boy shouted, and he lifted it up to smash it, but then he stopped himself and looked at it. "We've had many good hours together," he said and fell silent. But after a while he said, "The strings have to be cut; they're useless." And he pulled out a knife and cut. "Ow!" said the treble string, whimpering. "Ow!" said the next one, but the boy cut. "Ow!" said the third one, making a heavy sound, and he stopped at the fourth one. He felt a deep sorrow; the fourth string, the one he had never dared to give a name, he did not cut. Now he felt that it somehow wasn't the fault of the strings that he couldn't play. Then his mother came walking slowly up the hill to take him home. But an even greater fear took hold of him; he held the fiddle by the strings he had cut, raised himself up, and shouted down to her: "No, mother! I will not come home before I can play what I have seen today!"

Original title: "Thrond." Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

THE FATHER

(1858)

The man, about whom this story is told, was the most powerful man in his parish. His name was Thord Øveraas. One day he stood in the pastor's office, tall and serious:

"I have had a son," he said, "and I want to have him baptized."

"What will be his name?"

"Finn, after my father."

"And the godparents?"

He gave the names of some of his kin and they were the most important men and women in the village. "Is there anything else?" asked the pastor. He looked up. The farmer hesitated a little:

"I want to have him baptized by himself," he said.

"You mean on a weekday?"

"On next Saturday at noon."

"Is there anything else?" asked the pastor.

"No, nothing else." His hand touched his cap, as if he meant to leave.

Then the pastor stood up. "Just one more thing," he said and walked over to Thord, took his hand and looked him straight in the eyes.

"May the Lord grant that the child will be a blessing to you."

Sixteen years after that day, Thord stood in the pastor's office.

"You're holding up well, Thord," said the pastor. He saw he had not changed at all.

"I have no complaints," answered Thord.

The pastor remained silent at this, but asked after a short pause, "What errand brings you here this evening?"

"Tonight I've come about my son who is to be confirmed tomorrow."

"He is a bright boy."

"I did not want to pay the fee before I heard where he ranks among the confirmed."

"He is first."

"I see, and here are ten daler for you."

"Is there anything else?" asked the pastor and looked at Thord.

"No, nothing else." Thord left.

Another eight years passed, and a great commotion could be heard outside the pastor's office. Many men had arrived, and Thord entered first. The minister looked up and recognized him:

"You have quite a company with you this evening."

"I want you to read the banns for my son. He is going to marry Karin Storliden, the daughter of Gudmund, whose standing here."

"She is the richest girl in the parish."

"That's what they say," answered the farmer, smoothing his hair back with one hand. The pastor sat thoughtfully a while. He said nothing, but wrote the names up in his books, and the men signed their names. Thord lay three daler on the table.

"I'm only entitled to one."

"I know, but he is my only child. I want to do things right." The pastor accepted the money.

"This is the third time you have stood here on account of your son, Thord."

"But now I'm finished with him," said Thord, closed his wallet, said goodbye, and left. The men followed slowly after.

Fourteen days after that day, father and son rowed on a quiet day over the fjord to Storliden in order to discuss the wedding.

"This cushion isn't lying straight beneath me," said the son and stood up in order to adjust it. Just at that moment, the board he is standing on slips. He flails about with his arms, yells and falls in the water.

"Grab the oar!" called his father. He stood up and stretched it towards him. But after his son had swum a few strokes he stiffened.

"Wait a bit!" called his father. He rowed over. Then the son flips onto his back, takes a long look at his father, and sinks.

Thord couldn't believe it. He held the boat still and stared at the spot where his son had sunk, as though he might come up again. A few bubbles rose to the surface, then a few more, and, finally, a big one that burst—and the water was once again smooth as a mirror.

For three days and three nights people saw his father row around the spot without eating or sleeping. He dragged the water for his son. On the third day in the morning he found him and carried him over the hills to his farm.

It was probably a year since that day. Late one fall evening, the pastor hears someone shuffling by the door in the entryway and fumbling slowly for the latch. The pastor opened the door and in walked a tall, bent man, thin with white hair. The pastor looked for a long time at him before he recognized him. It was Thord.

"Is it you coming so late?" said the pastor and stood quietly before him.

"Oh, yes, I've come late," said Thord and sat down. The pastor sat down as well. As he expected, Thord was quiet for a long time.

Then Thord said, "I have something with me that I want to give to the poor. It should be made into a fund in my son's name." He rose, lay the money on the table and sat again. The pastor counted it.

"That is a lot of money," he said.

"It is half of my farm. I sold it today."

The pastor sat for a while in silence. Finally, he asked gently, "What are you going to do now, Thord?"

"Something better."

They sat a while, Thord with his eyes on the floor, the pastor with his eyes on him. Then the pastor said slowly and deliberately, "Now I think, that your son has finally become a blessing to you."

"Yes, I think so now myself," said Thord. He looked up and two tears fell heavily down his face.

Original title: "Faderen." Translated by Susan Brantly

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

THE EAGLE'S NEST

(1860)

Endregårdene was the name of a little isolated village surrounded by tall mountains. The bottom of the valley was flat and fertile, but was crisscrossed by a broad river that came from the mountains. This river ran out into a fjord that came all the way up to the village, so one could see quite a distance. The man who had first settled the valley had come rowing up the Endre fjord. His name was Endre, and his kin now lived here. Some said that he had fled up there because he had killed someone, and that is why his kind were so dark. Others said it was because of the mountains that shut out the sun at five o'clock on Midsummer Day.

Above the village perched an eagle's nest. It was situated on a cliff face up the mountain. Everyone could see when the mother eagle sat on her nest, but no one could reach it. Her mate sailed over the village and suddenly dove down after a lamb, or after a kid. Once it had even carried away a small child. So, the village was not safe as long as there was a nest on the mountain. The story was told that in olden days, there were two brothers who had climbed up and torn the nest down. But these days there was no one good enough to climb so high.

Whenever two people met in Endregårdene, they spoke about the eagle's nest and looked up. They knew when the eagles had returned for a new year, where they had struck, and the damage they did, and who had been the last one to try to climb up there. Young men practiced climbing from the time they were small boys in both mountains and trees, so that they might some day reach the nest and tear it down like the two brothers.

At the time of this story, the most gifted lad in Endregårdene was named Lejf and he was not one of the Endre kin. He had curly hair and small eyes, excelled at all kinds of sports, and was a favorite with the girls. He announced early on that he would one day reach the eagle's nest. The old folks thought he shouldn't say it out loud.

That annoyed him and even before he had reached adulthood he set about it. It was a clear Sunday afternoon at the beginning of summer.

The eaglets were probably just hatched. People had gathered in a large crowd beneath the cliff to watch. The old folks warned him against it; the young folks egged him on. He listened to no one but himself and waited until the mother eagle had left the nest. He lept up and hung from a tree several meters above the ground. It grew in a crack, and along that crack he began to make his way up. Pebbles loosened under his feet, dirt and gravel rained down, but otherwise, it was rather quiet. Only the river could be heard with its constant muted roar. Soon the mountain grew steeper. He hung for a long time from one hand, searching with his foot after a foothold he could not see. Many, especially the women, looked away and said that he would not be doing this if his parents were still alive. He found a foothold, and searched again, now with a hand, now with a foot. He slipped, but grabbed hold. Those who stood below heard everyone gasp. Then a tall, young girl stood up, who had been sitting alone on a rock. They said that the two had been engaged since childhood, even though he wasn't one of the Endre folk. She stretched out her arms and cried, "Lejf, Lejf, why are you doing this?" Everyone turned to look at her. Her father stood close by and looked disapprovingly at her, but she didn't notice. "Come down again, Lejf," she cried. "I, I love you and you have nothing to gain up there." One could see that he hesitated for a moment or two, but then he continued farther upward. He was sure of foot and hand, and so things went well for a while. Soon he began to grow tired, because he paused frequently. A little stone came rolling down like a portent, and everyone standing there followed it with their eyes all the way down. Some could no longer stand it and left. Only the girl remained standing high on her rock, wringing her hands and looking upward. Lejf grabbed for another hold with his hand, and it slipped. She saw it so clearly. He grabbed with his other hand, but that slipped too. "Lejf!" she screamed, so sharply it cut into the mountain and everyone else screamed too. "He's slipping!" they cried and stretched their arms up towards him, both women and men. He slipped and took sand, rocks, and dirt with him. Slipped, kept slipping faster. People turned away and heard a rustling and a scraping on the mountain behind them. Then something heavy fell down like a big lump of wet earth.

When they turned around again, he lay there, torn and unrecognizable. The girl lay across the rock. Her father carried her away.

The young people who had urged Lejf to climb, did not now dare to help him, since he was not very pleasant to behold. So the old folks had to tend to it. The oldest of them said, as he set about it, "It is a good thing that something hangs so high, not everyone can reach it."

Original title: "Ørneredet." Translated by Susan Brantly

Camilla Collett

DIFFERENT PLEASURES

(1860)

It was cold outside and it was cold inside. But when thoughts are gloomy it is still better to take a walk than to sit still with them. And so I went out. I was deeply despondent. I thought of the time when I had no worries and of the many, many who had given me their love and who now had left on the journey from which there is no return—ah, down to the last. I thought of the time when everything was so warm and bright. I walked in cozy security and was surrounded by warm hearts. And now! Cold and desolate was my room, people were cold; the whole world was cold, like the winter day that held the town in its grasp. Then I thought of the dream I had had that night. I dreamt that my husband had returned and had bought an armload of firewood for me. I did not see him; he had just taken care of the firewood and left again. Dreams are so strange. One becomes like a child again. One can be happy about the saddest things and be desolated by something that is nothing at all. In this way, in my dream, I was so deeply and profoundly moved over the fact that he had bought firewood for me. I saw in that simple chore—one that I certainly am not fond of myself—a deep expression of all the tenderness and love he had shown me down here, and which he, would oh so gladly continue to show if it had only been possible for him. The firewood had cost eight marks just like in the old days, and strangely enough, that thought mixed itself into my emotions, so that I felt he could at least have told me where he got it at that price. I thought of all this while I walked through the town and turned off on the road that leads by Grøningshav down to Pipervik.

On the corner, just at the base of the hill, stood a beggar. Long before I reached him I could see that he wanted to present himself as such. Consequently I had plenty of time to arrange my face and assume the expression with which one passes by a beggar. One could call that face the face of society. It must be a strange face to look at, but no one really gets to see it except the beggars. "Give him something!" you feel inside. "Don't give him anything!" is what society has dinned into you. "Give him something," says a memory from childhood in which your

mother and father assured you it was nice to give, and you read the first story about that in your new picture book. "Give him something! Give him something!" cries the heart. "Maybe he has four hungry children at home. Maybe he has…"

"Nonsense," says experience, "he is a lazy dog who doesn't want to do anything—and whom I have to feed," interjects society curtly. And you walk by with your society face on. And so I walked by and continued lost in my sad dream up the hill and towards the bank square. As I reached the top of the hill I remembered the beggar again. He had only begged with his eyes, not stretched a hand forward, and his face had not expressed either disappointment or insult when he received nothing, only a—I could almost call it a rather contented resignation, as if he wanted to say: "That's fair enough."

And I fell back into my thoughts, and I thought about so much, among other things, pleasure. And it occurred to me that it is strange that the people around me say one thing is a pleasure and I say another is a pleasure, and they only want to prove to me that what they think is a pleasure to them is also a pleasure to me. But I do not want at all to prove to them that what is a pleasure to me is also a pleasure to them. In short, we do not agree. And now I want to wish for something. It is not worthwhile to wish for something small; if you are going to make a wish, it might as well be for something big. And now I want to wish for something that I think is a pleasure, a real pleasure, one that one can take pleasure in. I think that it goes along with wishing that one looks upward. It is as if one knows that there is not a lot to expect from the place one is walking.

And therefore I looked upward, like I used to when I was little. Then I often walked and stared at the sky, until I bumped into walls and poles. And look! The same scene I had experienced repeated itself up there. There I stood in the beggar's place and I saw the Lord coming. I wanted to ask Him, I thought, one can ask Him for something big. But the Lord walked past. He walked past, long past. He had his strictest society face on. Oh, it's only fair, I thought. You can't fool Him. He knows His people, and He knows that we don't give each other much pleasure. If He gives anything, He gives it out of pure charity. He pities us. Oh, if he pitied you, walked back to you and suddenly lay a gift in your hand and said: "This is for a great, a real pleasure, one that you think is a pleasure."

And I turned around and walked back to the place where the beggar had stood. He was no longer there, but he stood near a small shop, in order to make, as it is called, a purchase. He fished in his pocket for a long, long time, but with a face that expressed the most confident certainty. "Yes! It should be there," he said, "I've had nothing else on my sinful body today…." And in the same moment he found the shilling, and the purchase was made. I walked up to him and gave him a mark. His face expressed near terror. He looked at me, looked at the mark. Finally, he seemed to recognize me. He tilted his head thoughtfully, as if he contemplated the hidden connection between him, the mark, and me. I asked him if he had a wife and children. No, he did not have any. He had been a chimney sweep once, but he could not stand the air in the chimneys. He felt that he got so strange in his head. But now he intended to become a carpenter, when he got some "materials." He saved money for "materials." Oh, it had been for a long time too, since he was a chimney sweep, but he could not stand the air in the chimneys, etc. Thereupon, he drew forth a purse that looked like it once had been made of leather and placed the mark in it and shut it tight. He did it deliberately and with a certain formality, just about like when one lays the cornerstone to a great building. I said a few words to him that society would surely have approved of, and continued once more up the hill lost in my dream. I had almost forgotten the great pleasure I was going to wish for. Now I first needed to choose what kind of pleasure it would be.

At dusk, I returned and walked by the place. About thirty paces in front of me I saw a figure on the street. It was right in the middle of the road, or, more exactly, it did not keep to the street or to the middle, but moved in peculiar swings from one side to the other, just as when children set a pendulum in motion. At first I thought it was someone who was looking for something, but when I came up to the side of the figure I saw that it was the man from the hill, he who saved money for "materials." Finally, he recognized me; he nodded to me with the mildest smile. Yes, he was certainly truly happy.

Then I had to smile, and the laughter opened one of the deepest wells in my soul, which for so long, so long had been closed, and see, there was real pleasure. There was no other place to find it, and from the bottom of my heart I thanked God, who had given me this pleasure, and I was happy when I came home.

Original title: "Forskjellige Glæder." Translated by Susan Brantly

Alexander Kielland

THE SPIRIT OF THE BALL

(1879)

She had climbed up the smooth marble staircase without difficulty, effortlessly, carried only by her great beauty and her good nature. She had taken her place among the halls of the rich and the powerful without having to pay for admission with her honor and good reputation. No one could say where she had come from, but it's whispered that it was from far below.

As an orphan in an outlying district of Paris, she had starved away her childhood in a life between corruption and poverty that only those who are familiar with the experience can grasp. The rest of us, who have our knowledge from books and accounts, must use our imaginations to help get an idea of the hereditary misery in a large city—and yet perhaps the most frightful pictures that we paint for ourselves pale when compared with reality.

Of course it was only a matter of time before corruption would seize hold of her—as a wheel of a machine seizes hold of someone who comes too close—after whirling her around in a short life of shame and humiliation—with a machine's cold calculation, spitting her out in some corner where she might unknown and unknowingly end this travesty of a human life.

Then, as sometimes happens, she was "discovered" at the age of fourteen by a rich and reputable man as she ran across one of the city's better streets. She was on the way to a dingy back room in the Rue des quatre vents where she worked for a lady whose specialty was creating floral arrangements for social balls.

It wasn't only her extraordinary beauty that captivated the rich man, but her movements, her very nature and expression in her half-developed features. Everything seemed to suggest that here a battle was being fought between an originally good character and an emerging indolence.

And since he could afford the impulsive wishes that come with great wealth, he decided to try and rescue the poor child. It wasn't difficult to bring her into his possession; she hadn't belonged to anyone. She

was given a name and was placed in one of the best parochial schools, and her benefactor had the pleasure of watching the evil spirits start to die away and disappear. She developed a charming and somewhat indolent character, a serene, blameless nature and an uncommon beauty.

When she grew up, he married her. They had a very good and peaceful marriage. Even though there was a great difference in age, he had complete confidence in her and she had earned it.

Married couples don't live in such close quarters in France as we do here: their expectations are therefore not as great and their disappointments less.

She wasn't happy, but content. Her character was well suited to being grateful. Wealth didn't bore her; on the contrary, many times it delighted her in an almost childlike way. But no one suspected this, for her conduct was always one of confidence and dignity. It could only be assumed that something wasn't proper about her origins. But when no one answered, the questions stopped: people have so many other things to think about in Paris.

She had forgotten her past. She had forgotten it in the same way that we forget the roses, the silk ribbons, and the faded letters from our youth because we never think about them. They lie locked in a drawer that we never open. And yet—if some time we should happen to cast a glance into that secret drawer, then we would immediately notice if a single one of these roses or the smallest of ribbons were missing. For we remember everything exactly as it was. The memories are just as fresh—just as sweet and likewise bitter. In this way, she had forgotten her past, locked it up and thrown the keys away.

But every now and then, she would dream about terrible things during the night. She felt once again how the old hag she used to live with shook her shoulders and sent her out on cold mornings to the lady who sold the floral arrangements. Then she would sit up in her bed with a start and stare out into the darkness with deathly angst. But then she would feel the silk comforter and the soft pillows, her fingers would touch the rich ornamentation on her magnificent bed, and as a little sleepy cherubim slowly drew aside dream's heavy covering, she enjoyed to the fullest extent that strange and inexplicable comfort we feel when we realize that an evil and hideous dream was only a dream.

Leaning back in the soft cushions, she drove to the great hall of the Russian ambassador. The closer one comes to one's destination, the slower the pace becomes, until the carriage reached the steady line where the movement was only step by step.

On the large area in front of the hotel, where there was rich illumination with torches and gas flames, a large crowd of people had gath-

ered. There were a few people walking by who stopped to see what was happening, but mainly they were the working class, unemployed, impoverished women and ladies of doubtful character, standing tightly packed together on both sides of the line of carriages. Snide remarks and crude jokes in the lowest of Parisian language rained down on the refined attendees. She heard words which she hadn't heard for many years, and it made her blush because perhaps she was the only one in that entire long line of carriages who understood these coarse expressions from the dregs of Parisian society. She began to look at the faces around her. It seemed as if she knew them all. She knew what they were thinking, what was going through all of these heads so tightly packed together, and little by little a swarm of memories flooded her mind. She resisted as well as she could, but she wasn't quite herself that evening. So then she hadn't lost the key to that secret drawer. Reluctantly she took it out and the memories overwhelmed her. She remembered how often, while still just a child, with jealous eyes she had devoured the elegant ladies all nicely decorated driving to the balls or the theater, how often she had wept in bitter envy over the flowers she carefully arranged for the adornment of others. Here she saw the same greedy eyes, the same unquenchable, hate-filled envy.

And the dark, serious men who, with a half-contemptuous, half-threatening glance, eyed the equipages—she knew them all. Hadn't she herself as a little girl laid in the corner wide-eyed, listening to their talk of life's injustices, of the tyranny of the rich, of the working classes' right that he only had to stretch out his hand and grab? She knew that they hated everything—from the well-fed horses and the proper coachmen to the polished, glistening coaches. But mostly those who sat inside—these ravenous vampires and these ladies whose jewelry and adornments cost more gold than an entire life's work would bring any one of them.

And as she contemplated the procession of carriages that slowly made its way through the crowd of people, another memory was conjured up, a half-forgotten image from her life as a schoolgirl at the convent. She was abruptly moved to think about the story of Pharaoh, who wanted to pursue the Jews through the Red Sea with his chariots. She saw the waves as she always had imagined them, red with blood and as a wall on both sides of the Egyptians. Then Moses raised up his voice—he stretched out his hand over the waters and the Red Sea's waves crashed together and swallowed Pharaoh and all of his chariots. She knew that the wall that stood on either side of her was wilder and more savage than the sea's waves. She knew that it only needed a voice, a Moses, to set in motion that sea of people, to send it with a crushing

force, inundating and toppling the entire glory of riches and power with its blood red waves.

Her heart pounded, she withdrew, trembling into a corner of the carriage. But it was not because of fear, it was so that those outside wouldn't see her; she felt ashamed in front of them. For the first time in her life, her good fortune seemed to be for her an injustice, something that she was ashamed of.

Was this her place in the luxurious, elegant equipage, among these tyrants and bloodsuckers? Didn't she belong instead outside with the surging mass, among the children of hate? Half-forgotten thoughts and feelings raised their heads as beasts of prey long after their confinement. She felt distant and homeless in her glimmering life, and with a kind of demonic longing, she recalled the terrible places that she had come from. She gripped her expensive lace shawl. A wild desire came over her to destroy, to tear something into pieces—then the carriage came up to the entrance of the hotel. The attendant opened the door and with her gracious smile, her quiet, aristocratic composure, she slowly stepped down. A young man, who seemed to be an attaché, rushed forward and was delighted when she took his arm, and even more enraptured when he thought to have noticed a unusual radiance in her glance, but in seventh heaven when he felt her arm tremble. Full of pride and hope, he led her up the smooth marble staircase with exquisite elegance.

"Tell me now, beautiful lady! What friendly fairy gave you this wonderful gift, while you were yet in your cradle, of having distinction in all that concerns you and in everything that you do? Even if it's nothing more than a flower in your hair, it has its own charm as though it was made wet by the fresh morning dew. And when you dance, it is as if the very floor quivers in obedience to your step."

The count was himself quite astonished with this long and successful compliment since he usually found it difficult to express himself with such fluency. He waited for the fair lady to express her appreciation, but he was disappointed. She leaned out over the balcony, where they enjoyed the cool night air after the dance, as she stared out over the crowd and the carriages that were still just arriving. She seemed to have caught none of the count's flattering words; instead he heard her whisper an inexplicable word: Pharaoh. He was just about to object when she turned around; and as she took a step toward the ballroom, she stood right in front of him and looked at him with a pair of large, strange eyes like those the count had never seen before.

"I doubt that a friendly fairy was there—there was hardly any sort of cradle at all when I was born—dear count! But what you say about my flowers and my dance shows that your perception has made a great

discovery. I will tell you a secret about the fresh morning dew that wets the flowers. It is tears—dear count! Tears that envy and shame, disappointment and remorse have wept over them. And when it seems to you that the floor quivers while we dance, that is because it's trembling under the hate of millions." She had spoken with her usual serenity, and after a courteous nod, she disappeared into the ballroom.

The count remained standing, quite perplexed. He cast a glance over the mass of people. It was a sight that he had often seen. He had said many bad, and fewer good, jokes about this multi-headed monster. But that evening, for the first time he realized that this monster was, in essence, the worst environment that anyone could imagine in which to place a palace.

Strange and disturbing thoughts swirled around in the count's brain, where there was certainly enough room. He felt quite unsettled, and it lasted an entire polka before he regained his good spirits.

Original title: "Balstemning." Translated by Casey Dinger

Alexander Kielland

KAREN

(1882)

There was once at Krarup Inn a maid whose name was Karen. She had to wait on the tables singlehandedly, for the innkeeper's wife was nearly always wandering about looking for her keys. And there were many callers at Krarup Inn—people from the district, who gathered when darkness fell on autumn evenings and who sat in the dining hall in aimless conviviality drinking laced coffees—as well as travelers and wayfarers, who came tramping in, frozen and weather-beaten, to get something hot to sustain them on their way to the next inn.

And yet Karen always managed to see to everything, though she stepped softly and never seemed to hurry.

She was small and frail, quite young, solemn and taciturn, so there was little fun to be had with her for the traveling merchants. But respectable people, who visited the tavern in earnest and set store by a cup of coffee served promptly and piping hot, were all the more appreciative of Karen. And when she made her way between the guests with her tray, the heavy wool-clad bodies moved aside with unusual agility; a path was cleared for her, and the conversation died down for a moment—they couldn't help but gaze after her, she was so lovely.

Karen's eyes were of the large gray kind that at once seem to see and to see far, far beyond; her eyebrows were highly arched, as if in astonishment.

For this reason, strangers would think that she didn't quite understand what they had asked for, but Karen understood perfectly and made no mistakes. And yet there was something strange about her all the same, as though she were looking for something from afar—or listening—or waiting or dreaming.

The wind came from the west across low plains—it had rolled long heavy waves over the western sea; salty and soaked with froth and foam, it had hurled itself in across the coast. But in the high dunes and the tall sea grass it had become dry and full of sand and a bit weary, so that when it reached Krarup Inn, it was only just able to pry open the doors to the stable.

But open they flew, and the wind filled the great room and forced its way through the kitchen door, which stood ajar. And finally the air pressure became so great that the doors at the other end of the stable burst open; and now the west wind surged triumphantly through, swung the lantern which hung from the ceiling, plucked the stableboy's cap from his head and rolled it out into the dark, blew the blankets over the horse's heads, blew a white hen off its roost and into the water trough. And the rooster let loose a terrific clamor, and the lad swore, and the hens cackled, and in the kitchen the servants choked on smoke, and the horses grew restless and struck sparks from the stones! Even the ducks, which had huddled together near the crib to be the first to reach the spilled grain, started squawking, and the wind blasted through with an infernal roar, until a couple of fellows came out from the inn, put their shoulders to the doors and forced them together again, as ashes from their great tobacco pipes flew into their beards.

Following those adventures, the wind dove headlong into the heather, coursed along the deep ditches, and took a firm hold of the mail coach, which it ran into three miles down the road from the inn.

"Always this damned fuss in getting over to Krarup Inn," growled Anders the coachman, and lashed out at the steaming horses.

For what must have been the twentieth time, the mail courier had slid open the coach window to say something to him—at first it was a cordial invitation to join him over a laced coffee at the inn, but after a while, as the courier's friendliness began to wear thin, the window opened with a bang and out flew certain remarks, about horse as well as driver, that Anders couldn't possibly profit from hearing.

Meanwhile the wind swept along the ground and sighed long and eerily in the dry heather. The moon was full, but the sky was overcast so that only a whitish mist glowed in the night.

Behind Krarup Inn lay the peat bog, dark with black patches and dangerous holes. And in between the tufts of heather a strip of grass wound its way, as though it could have been a path; but it was not a path, for it ended at the edge of a pit, which was bigger than the others and deeper too.

But on this strip of grass the fox lay flat and waited, and the hare hopped on light feet over the heather.

It was easy for the fox to reckon that the hare would not run in a large circle so late in the evening. It cautiously raised its pointed snout and made a rough estimate, and as it slunk off in the direction of the wind to look for a good vantage point from which to see where the hare would complete its circle and lie down, it considered, self-contentedly, how foxes grow wiser and wiser, while hares only become more and more stupid.

Inside the inn things were unusually busy because a couple of salesmen had ordered roast hare; besides, the innkeeper was at an auction in Thisted, and his wife was not used to dealing with matters outside the kitchen. Unfortunately, it so happened that the attorney wished to speak with the innkeeper, but as he was away, the madame had to take a long message as well as an extremely important letter, which utterly confused her.

By the stove a stranger in oilskins stood waiting for a bottle of soda water; two fish merchants, for the third time, had asked for brandy to go with their coffee; the innkeeper's lad stood with an empty lantern waiting for a candle, and a tall grave farmer followed Karen anxiously with his eyes; he had sixty-three cents change coming to him on his dollar.

But Karen went to and fro without rushing and without getting confused. One would hardly think that she would be able to keep all these things straight. Her large eyes and astonished eyebrows were tense, as if in expectation; she carried her delicate little head stiffly and motionlessly, as though to avoid being distracted from all the things she had to think about. Her blue homespun dress had become too tight for her, so that the neckband cut into her skin and made a little crease on her neck just below her hair. "These Agger wenches have such white skin," said one of the fish merchants; they were young men and appraised Karen like experts.

Over by the window a man looked at the clock and said, "The mail is early this evening."

A rumbling was heard on the cobblestones outside; the stable doors were opened, and again the wind rattled all the doors and blasted smoke from the ovens.

Karen slipped into the kitchen just as the entrance door opened. The mail courier strode in and bade good evening.

He was a tall handsome man with dark eyes, a wooly black beard and closely cropped curly hair. His long sumptuous cape, made of the King of Denmark's magnificent crimson cloth, was adorned with a broad collar of curly dog fur, which spread across his shoulders.

The meager light from two kerosene lamps hanging above the table seemed to throw itself enraptured upon the red color, which stood out brilliantly against the gray and black hues of the room. And the tall figure with the tightly curled locks, the broad collar and the long purple-red folds became—as he moved through the low, smoke-filled room—a marvel of beauty and splendor.

Karen came quickly in from the kitchen with her tray; she bowed her head so that one could not see her face as she hurried from guest to guest.

The roast hare she placed on the table between the two fish merchants, and then she brought a bottle of soda water to the two salesmen who were sitting in the adjoining room. She then gave the anxious farmer a candle and pressed sixty-five cents into the palm of the stranger standing by the stove.

The innkeeper's wife was on the verge of despair; she had, true enough, quite unexpectedly found her keys but had immediately thereafter lost the attorney's letter, and now the whole inn was in a terrible stir: nobody had been given what he had asked for; everybody tried to outshout one another; the salesmen incessantly rang the table bell; the fish merchants almost died laughing at the hare, which lay spread-eagled on the platter before them; but the worried farmer tapped the innkeeper's wife on the shoulder with his candle—he was trembling for fear of losing his sixty-three cents. And in all this hopeless confusion, Karen had disappeared without trace…

Anders the coachman sat on the coach box; the innkeeper's lad stood ready to open the doors, and the two travelers inside the coach grew impatient; the horses, too—though they certainly had nothing to look forward to—and the wind rustled and creaked through the stable.

At last the courier whom they were waiting for arrived. He carried his great cape on his arm as he stepped over to the coach and made a small apology for having kept them waiting. The lantern lit up his face, and he looked very warm—which, with a smile, he also professed to be—as he climbed up beside the driver.

The doors swung open and the mail coach rumbled on its way. Anders let the horses go at a leisurely pace; there was no longer any hurry. Now and then he glanced at the courier beside him—he sat smiling to himself and let the wind play through his hair. Anders the coachman smiled, too, in his own way; he was beginning to understand.

The wind followed the coach until the road turned, and then hurling itself out over the plain again, creaked and sighed long and eerily in the dry heather.

The fox lay waiting at its post; everything was carefully planned; the hare would be there soon.

Inside the inn Karen had finally turned up again, and after a while the confusion subsided. The worried farmer got rid of his candle and collected his sixty-three cents, and the two salesmen had thrown themselves over the roast.

The innkeeper's wife whined a bit, but she never scolded Karen; there was not a person in the world who could scold Karen.

Quietly and without hurrying she went to and fro, and that calm sense of well-being, which seemed always to surround her, again spread

throughout the cozy, dimly lit room. The fish merchants, who by now had had several brandies with their coffee, were quite enchanted with her. She had acquired rosy cheeks and a little half-concealed trace of a smile, and when she now and again glanced up, they felt a tremor run through their bodies.

But when she felt that their eyes were following her, she went into the other room where the merchant travelers were eating and began to polish silverware over by the sideboard.

"Did you see the courier?" asked one of the travelers.

"No, I only just caught a glimpse of him; he must have gone out again right away," answered the other, his mouth full of food.

"Damned fine fellow! Why, I even danced at his wedding."

"So, he's married?"

"Sure thing; his wife lives in Lemvig. I hear they have two children. She was the daughter of the innkeeper in Ulstrup, and I got there on the very evening of the wedding. It was a merry night, you can take it from me!"

Karen dropped the silverware and went out. She didn't hear what they shouted to her from the dining hall; she crossed the courtyard to her room, opened the door, and began half unconsciously to straighten the bedding. Her eyes stared stiffly into the dark; she held her head; she clutched at her breast, she groaned, she didn't understand—she didn't understand…

But when she heard the innkeeper's wife crying wretchedly, "Karen, little Karen," she sprang up, out of the courtyard, around the back of the house, out—out onto the heath.

In the faint light the little strip of grass wound its way in between the heather, as though it could have been a path; but it was not a path, let no one mistake it for a path, for it led to the edge of a deep pit.

The hare started up; it had heard a splash. It raced off as if it were mad, in great leaps; now drawn up, with its legs tucked beneath it and its back arched, then stretched out until incredibly long—like a flying accordion—it dashed off across the heath.

The fox raised its pointed snout and gazed after the hare in astonishment. It hadn't heard the splash. It had come stealthily, according to all the tricks of its trade, stalking along the bottom of a deep ditch, and since it was not conscious of having made any mistakes, it was confounded by the hare's behavior.

For a long while it stood with its head raised, its hindquarters lowered, and its big bushy tail hidden in the heather; and then it began to wonder whether it was the hares that were becoming wiser, or the foxes that were growing more stupid.

But when the west wind had run a long way, it turned into the north wind, and then into the east wind, and then the south wind, and finally it came across the sea again as the west wind, hurled itself onto the dunes, and sighed long and eerily in the dry heather. But then, missing from Krarup Inn were two astonished gray eyes and a blue homespun dress that had become too tight. And the innkeeper's wife pouted more than ever; she just couldn't understand it; no one could understand it, except Anders the coachman—and one other.

But when old people want to give the young ones a serious warning, they often begin like this, "There was once at Krarup Inn a maid whose name was Karen..."

Original title: "Karen." Translated by Petter Næss

Arne Garborg

YOUTH

(1884)

Anne Malene was a sweet child, terrible about stealing sugar. And terrible about lying. When she had been in the cupboard or pantry and helped herself to sugar and other sweet things and Mother Astrid came and scolded her, she lied so well that Mother Astrid let herself be fooled. Then the child ran out to Per and laughed and told stories and boasted because she could trick the grown-ups so well. "But when you go back in, you'll get a spanking," was Per's opinion. "No, I won't," said Anne Malene; "Mother is never in a bad mood for long."

But once Anne Malene was about to get a spanking anyway, because she had ruined a whole sugar loaf. Then she fell silent and went around with a long face. And when Mother Astrid had gotten her across her lap as one should when a child is going to get a spanking, Anne Malene got scared and begged for mercy. "Dear Mother, please don't hit too hard," she whimpered. Mother Astrid had to laugh, and with that the child escaped her punishment. After that nothing was ever said when Anne Malene stole sugar.

Little Per, the son of Tjerand on the lower farm, had a lot of trouble with Anne Malene; she always wanted to be his wife. When he wouldn't let her, he got a thrashing. But when he did let her play wife, she ordered him around and fussed at him so much that he got tired of it and said stop; then, too, he got a thrashing. But if he cried, Anne Malene was so sweet and dreamed up so many funny things that Per had to laugh, and then they laughed together. And little Per forgot his frustration and anger and gave in, playing the husband with great patience; he did so much work for the house that he should have been paid for it.

At school, too, Anne Malene got away with things just as easily; no one could be angry with her for long. She liked to be with the boys best, and they let her, because wherever she was there was likely to be some fun. Soon she became the leader of the whole pack, because those little brats didn't enjoy themselves unless she was there. There was no end to all the stupid things they would do to make themselves look like real men: they fought so their noses ran with blood, splashed around in

the rivers until they were wet to the knees, ventured out onto thin ice, clambered up onto barns and went balancing on the roof like giant birds; some of them taught themselves to swear, and a couple of the oldest even tried tobacco. Anne Malene went along with them. In the end she could say "By God" and "the Devil take me" like any boy, and she puffed on a pipe as well as the best of them. She would make such faces and was so amusing, you could split your sides laughing. Or she would make fun of them and look down her nose at them and make them as mad as little roosters.

Anne Malene never knew her lessons. And she could never sit still in school. But the teacher never said anything, and the others found that reasonable enough. When she was to be confirmed, she hadn't studied, so she didn't know her catechism either. She couldn't even manage the Ten Commandments. But the pastor saw that she was a good child—you could tell that whenever she smiled—and she had a good mind too, and always listened when he explained things to them. The good Lord would subdue her in his own good time. So she got off easy with the pastor, too, and didn't get such low marks. Then she really laughed because she thought she'd fooled even the pastor.

The church was unusually large for a country church, highly arched and built of stone. The windows seemed narrow because they were so tall; but broad stripes of white September sun streamed in through them and brought the church to life, with strong contrasts between shadow and light; and the walls, wide and naked as the walls of a jail, awakened to reveal nuances and meaning in their empty solemnity.

To anyone looking into the church from the organloft, the white streams of light seemed to divide the space into several rooms. They went right through the church like luminous walls. It was packed full of people, and hot, filled with an atmosphere of drowsiness. In two long rows along the aisle stood the confirmands, pale and tired looking. The pastor, a mild young man with a melodious tenor voice, paced back and forth catechizing about Christ, high-priest, prophet, and king. After questioning the young people on their faith—though Anne Malene got off easy—he finished with a sermon on the seriousness and responsibility of what they were about to do. It was important that they make the greatest vow of all, not thoughtlessly and under duress, but with a free and honest heart. For God hated coercion; He wanted His servants to come to him freely. The pastor held forth until all the confirmands were so tired that they only heard his words as a far-away sound, a shouting and talking from deep within a dream. Then he said amen. And a sigh of awakening and relief went through the church, and there was a noise of noses blowing, of several hundred noses blowing.

Then the pastor turned to our Lord and prayed that He would help these young people make a true promise, because if He wouldn't help them, they couldn't keep their promise. The pastor kept at it until he was hoarse, and then he figured he should be allowed to conclude. The congregation agreed, especially the young people.

The walls of sunlight had moved until they now stood at a slant through the church windows and would soon be gone. From the organ the confirmation psalm droned like a chorale, rolling and heavy in the bass, soft and sweet and a little slurred in the tenor. The congregation sang. After the psalm, the young people walked up to the altar in groups to be confirmed. The crying started and a mood of solemnity blanketed the ceremony.

There were eighty-one of them, thirty-eight boys and forty-three girls. The pastor, tired now himself, got through them very quickly, one by one. They all promised to forsake the Devil and all his works. It proceeded so rhythmically and reassuringly, it did the congregation good to listen.

Those who went first were crying. Those who followed were a little more calm, and in the end no one was crying—or listening either. The whole church was tired, and the sunbeams had disappeared long ago; the room darkened into evening.

And so Anne Malene was a grown-up. She was happy all day, because now she was free; she could get engaged at any time. Per could come whenever he wanted to.

But she wouldn't say yes right away. She'd play with him for a while; she wanted to have her youth and her freedom for a couple of years before she tied herself down. You were only young once, and you could always get engaged.

Anne Malene laughed thinking how much fun she was going to have from now until she was twenty. There were so many handsome boys to dance with; and she thought she could dance with them safely enough. Everyone knew Per would be the one to get her in the end.

At home there was food waiting, good, hearty food. And there were two aunts and an uncle, and old father Mattis paid for the whisky, and there was fun and merrymaking. Later in the evening Per came over with a few other farm boys; they had whisky with them. Per had already had a glass or two, and now they were all to have a drink with him. How amusing he was! And the things he thought up—how free it felt to be a grown-up! At last he came to Anne Malene with a glass: "you who are the youngest get the last glass," he said. "The youngest shouldn't get any whisky," was Anne Malene's answer. "By God," said Per, "you will have a drink, for this is the first time I toast you, but it won't be the last!" He

sang a little tune. "Now drink! Are you stuck up?" No, she wasn't. "Are you religious then?" "Oh!" Everyone laughed. "Or maybe you've joined the teetotalers." "Not them or anyone else." "Well, whatever you do, you'll end up joining someone in marriage! But you've got to know how to drink whisky! So, what about it?" "Oh, since it's Per who's asking, give it a try," said Astrid. "Of course you can," threw in Mattis. Anne Malene thought it strange, but extremely entertaining; she took the glass, said "cheers," and drank. "Empty your glass," said Per. No, now she'd had enough. "Enough? Already? Ha, I'd like you for a wife, if you're just as finicky with your food as you are with drink!" She put the glass down where she could find room; she had to go outside to laugh. Per followed. The others sat down to play cards.

When Anne Malene came back, she was engaged. No one was supposed to know about it; it was much more fun that way. And she drank one more glass of whisky with Per that evening. The old folks winked at each other and chuckled.

Anne Malene took her engagement lightly, and that made Per angry. She could get him into a good mood again, but not for long. Per thought Anne wasn't reliable, and then he'd start to sulk. Anne Malene got tired of that. She'd chew him out, and they would go around giving each other nasty looks. You'll be sorry for wanting to restrain my youth, thought Anne Malene.

Finally they had a serious fight. They were at a wedding, and Per thought Anne Malene was having too much fun with a young first-mate there. They had a quarrel about it and it ended with Per getting his ear boxed by his girl. And then he left.

This time their enmity lasted a long time. Almost six months, I believe. Per thought it was torture but would not give in. He was too proud. Then Anne Malene gave in. She asked him if there was any sense in being such a sourpuss. Then they were friends again for a long time. And they promised with solemn oaths that they would be nice to each other.

But to go around making nasty faces at people was not something Anne Malene could do; and hiding his jealousy was impossible for Per. So it ended with a quarrel as before. Then Anne Malene told him straight out that she was getting fed up with him. She liked happy fellows, but not a grouch like he was. Per got scared. He went to the old folks and proposed in earnest, and they said yes with pleasure. Then he told Anne Malene that now she had to be his no matter what she said. Anne Malene thought that was a pitiful thing to say and wanted to break off at once. Per begged her to reconsider. He implored her until she gave in. There was no one else she really wanted, anyhow.

Mattis Øvstegard owned a piece of woods he wanted to sell. And there was talk that he might be able to sell to the government. The new forestry assistant—a young fellow, from up north, by the name of Jens Carlstad—came around a couple of times to chat about it. The government might be interested in the strip of woods "for reapportionment," as he said, but there was some question about the price. The present government was crazy—always voting too little money, he told Mattis. Anne Malene liked the young man with his moustache and quiet smile; and Jens Carlstad, for his part, was getting to know Anne Malene before he realized what was happening. He had never known how to approach women, either at home or in the city. He was scarcely acquainted with his own fiancee—but he got to know Anne Malene at once. He thought her an amusing little girl. And it was pleasant on the farm. They offered him food and coffee, and he ate and drank and chatted with folks and had a good time.

He started coming back, time after time. He haggled with Mattis about the woods and joked with Anne Malene about calling him "Forestry assistant." Anne Malene said "Postal assistant," and turned the word upside-down in other ways and got the quiet young man to laugh like a little boy. And she set him talking, so that he, who'd been silent as a sentry all his life, began chattering away like a salesman. But Anne Malene would go along with a good joke; she wasn't afraid of strong language. She joked about things the women in town wouldn't dare mention; she was lively and happy as a kitten. But how innocent! A real child!

Jens Carlstad came the next time he suspected the old folks weren't at home. They weren't, either, and he didn't miss them. Anne Malene received him well, and they chatted about nothing for a good long time. Jens went home in a smiling mood. He had to admit he was fond of the little girl. Well, not in that way—but she was so unlike all the others. Girls weren't like that at home, least of all his sisters, the sheriff's daughters. They weren't like that in town either. And for this girl to throw herself away on a buffoon like that Per Tjerandsen…that was going too far. Especially since she didn't care about him all that much, naturally enough—Jens Carlstad smiled.

He didn't have any designs on the girl. Of course not! He was engaged and, besides, had a sense of morals. And thirdly…he appreciated Jenny. She was a spiritual person, refined, pale, interesting. Good upbringing; piano; German, English, French; artistic sensibilities, poetry and nature; that's how the girl he wanted should be. Anne Malene was only flesh, poor thing, but—well, what did he know? Though she could cheer him up. Well, of course, Jenny could do that too; she was both

attractive and kind. When he'd first fallen in love with her, she'd been a real wildcat—but she was only thirteen years old then. Since then, of course, she'd had a crush on that pianist...God knows; maybe it was then that she became so refined and more sober minded. Well, the main thing was that she'd said yes when he proposed, and she'd done that well. Good style, strictly by the book. He had not yet talked enough with her. Three times he'd given her a virtuous little kiss, or really twice, to be honest, because the one time he'd missed her mouth. That was all. But this wild little girl—hm! Who knows how it happened! But today, without a word, it just happened...he had kissed her! And he had no idea whether that kiss had been virtuous. Oh, he'd behaved like a real you-know-what. It wasn't any virtuous kiss. It was a sensual kiss...and she hadn't been angry! Any more than a kitten is angry when you stroke its back! She was a sweet child. And Jens Carlstad had felt uneasily that he was happy. Oh God, happy. Well, he'd never do it again, never. Never!

He could talk with her, perhaps flirt a little if things turned out that way, but decently. What had happened today must be forgotten and sink into the River Lethe. Yes, into the River Lethe.

He talked with Anne Malene and flirted with her, and he did it decently, but once everything went wrong. Jens Carlstad was a scoundrel! He seduced her! The poor innocent child who had trusted him so much. Now she knew what kind of man he was. Jens Carlstad was rough on himself; he swore at himself, remonstrated with himself in any way he could think of. And was happy. Happy, happy. For she loved him! That lovely little girl loved him. Oh God, he was a scoundrel.

No, he certainly was not. He hadn't seduced her. It had happened by accident, like a storm: no one knows where it comes from and where it goes. She was so sweet; much, much, much too sweet. He forgot his virtue, forgot everything. He only saw her, her, charming, enticing, her smile sweet and sinful, her bright eyes wet with radiance. He saw her through a fog, as if he were intoxicated; he hadn't known love was so powerful.

No one knew. People talked about spiritual and virtuous love, about immoral love and disease and the power of the devil, but no one knew a thing about love! For love was neither moral nor immoral; it was more powerful than death. And now he had lost her. She hadn't said a word, hadn't even looked at him. Just went away, pale, scared...she was angry, he knew it. She'd tell her parents. They'd make him marry her, there'd be a scandal, it would be all over town. And since he couldn't marry her, she'd die or end up at the insane asylum! or sink into disgrace ... oh, what a scoundrel he was! And his conscience burnt like fire.

But he was happy! He didn't believe a word of all the terrible things he'd conjured up. He knew that she loved him, and...yes, by God, it was altogether quite irresponsible.

As it turned out, she wasn't angry. He ran into her on the road one day. She turned red and he pale; they then said hello and exchanged a few words. Whether they made any sense, Carlstad couldn't remember. Suddenly he had taken her by the hand, pleading with her not to be angry. She mustn't. She mustn't. He hadn't meant any harm. What he meant was that she mustn't be angry. He withdrew his hand and said something about being careful, that he would be careful, ... and she walked off. But then she turned and smiled at him: "Bye, Mr. Postal Assistant!" and right away she was the same as before. Happy, sure of herself, innocent! She had never sinned! He'd have to reconsider. He was ashamed at having been frightened; his sin had only been a dream!

From that time on they were friends. They had a good meeting place behind a hill by a large stone; under that stone they had their post office. Their whole world was there; everything else meant nothing.

But, after all, Jens Carlstad was a moral man. And every time he went up to the stone, he told himself how wrong it was and how he had no intention of doing it. Then he did it. And when it was done, he tortured himself with pangs of conscience and spiritual flagellation and still felt like a scoundrel! He ought to kick himself!

Anne Malene didn't feel that way at all, as far as he could tell. She never had a guilty conscience; she looked her friend Carlstad in the eye just as confidently and naively as before. And was just as happy, just as pleased; there was nothing wrong. Besides, she wasn't afraid of gossip. It seemed she had no idea she was doing anything wrong.

Jens Carlstad didn't understand. It made him uncomfortable. People sinned; that's the way things were. We're all sinners. But to sin without a guilty conscience was indefensible. So he started to preach about morality to Anne Malene. He reminded her of the village, the gossip, what people would say about the two of them being friends. Anne Malene was sure she could fool the village and its gossipers; she did as she pleased. What they didn't know wouldn't hurt them. Laughing, she told him how good she was at lying and what she'd told the old folks so that she could come out here. She also told him about the lies she'd fed Per, because Per had his suspicions! He ought to realize it wasn't easy being Anne Malene either.

Jens Theodore Carlstad got depressed. This was no good. The girl believed that she could do whatever she wanted. She had no conscience. Like a barbarian, she didn't know the difference between good and evil. He would have to teach her. She had to understand what she was doing.

She had to learn about morality! He became serious and sober and told her several truths, and Anne Malene flew into a temper. "So now you're turning sour, too," she said. "Won't I get any peace with you, either? I didn't think you'd go around whining and holy and sad like a church hymnal! I liked you when you were cheerful and didn't care and were content and a real chatterbox, as quick with your mouth as a coffee mill. But now you're sighing like a dirge and lifting up your eyes as if repenting. You're as glum as Per—as silent as a fence post. Have I done anything to you? Haven't I been nice and done everything you wanted?" Yes, of course, Jens couldn't deny it. But she had to understand: their behavior was thoughtless and indecent, and their only excuse that they were young and confused.

So they became enemies. They quarreled until Anne Malene gave her friend a box on the ear. "Serves you right," she said. If he was going to behave like a preacher and a grouch full of Bible-talk, well, then he wasn't what she'd taken him for. She had plenty of time to start in with crying and funeral hymns later. Bye! With that she left.

That evening, too, Jens Carlstad managed to get home, but to his mind things looked black. If he'd had a tail, it would've been hidden between his legs. For two days he went around half mad. Couldn't hold out. But to ask to be forgiven was more than he could do. He couldn't go against his dignity as a man! When he'd tortured himself enough, he gave in. Wrote and asked for forgiveness. Then went around for a whole day kicking himself for being so weak. Come evening, he slunk off to the stone, his heart pounding and feeling uneasy, to see if there was an answer. And there was. Thank God. Oh, these dear, sweet scribblings. What holy, heavenly, absurd spelling! She was so happy to get his letter. It hurt to be enemies and felt good to be happy. He shouldn't fret about that evening—she hadn't meant anything by it. That's just the way she was.

Jens Carlstad danced home. Didn't remember his honor any more than an old button and vowed he would never quarrel with Anne Malene again. The next time they met he kissed her until it almost hurt.

But Anne Malene had to hurry that evening: "they're checking up on me," she said. "And Per's sneaking around like a black cat after a mouse and won't believe me even if I swear to the Devil that I'm telling the truth." Carlstad turned pale. "D-do you swear, too?" he asked. "No," answered Anne Malene, "not unless it's necessary." Carlstad thought that was going too far. That would have to change. Proper women never swore; it was bad to swear and vulgar; Anne Malene should never swear, nor should she lie. "I'm not supposed to lie?" asked Anne Malene. No. "Yes, but how can I meet you then?" Well...she'd have to...have to come up with something else. "Are you starting up with the sermons again?" asked Anne Malene. And then they quarreled, until Jens got his face slapped again. And Anne Malene said he ought to become a preacher instead of sermonizing to her; he couldn't make a living off that! Jens explained that it did not help his masculine dignity to have his face slapped. New hostility.

During that time Jens received a letter from Miss Jenny, and a book. He was to read this book and examine himself seriously. Then he was to tell Miss Jenny—everything he might have on his mind!

The book turned out to be "A Glove" by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Jens Carlstad read the book, and then he sat down and began to philosophize. Were women going to moralize as well now? Hm. Well. Then he'd stick with Anne Malene. She had only one moral: that she'd do what she pleased. And that was...Heavens! it wouldn't look good in a book. It was irresponsible, and it wouldn't be proper if people were that free, but then...!

Anne Malene did much that was wrong. She did everything that was wrong. And yet Carlstad would bet she was more innocent than any one of those moral women who were always talking about scandals and got red in the face if one even mentioned such an honest and useful garment as a pair of trousers. Perhaps sin didn't bother Anne Malene because she had no conscience? Didn't Saint Paul say it was the law that made people sinful? And wasn't it written that "love conceals a multitude of sins?" And Solomon said, and Goethe said, and God knows who else said that love, love, was life's...life's...so now he wasn't supposed to love Anne Malene, who was so sweet and made him happy, because all kinds of meddling people found it immoral? What did he have to do with morality? Had he taken part in signing God's Ten Commandments?

He was no scoundrel. It was foolish torturing himself everytime you did something you liked. Why shouldn't one do what one liked? Instead of always doing what you were sick and tired of? What kind of conscience was that? Was it anything but the public verdict inside yourself, this religious fear of gossip...old inherited law and order, embodiment of the majority opinion of what was nice and proper? When you were sure no one knew anything, your conscience was only a stabbing fear that they might find out. Anne Malene was right: what people didn't know wouldn't hurt them. Damned if he wouldn't join up with the Freethinkers!

In the end Jens Carlstad came to the realization that the whole affair was very strange and that he no longer understood himself. He had always been a moral man. But now he had two girlfriends, one of them slapped his face because he was too moral, the other sent him "A Glove." Of course he deserved what he got; he was the worst rascal

walking around in two pairs of shoes; but he would have to be a fool to do something about it. Why couldn't he show the girl his affection for a while? One was old soon enough, and married, too. And then it would be the same routine day in and day out, struggling to put food in your mouth. After that, arthritis; and then the coffin. We are young only this one miserable time, and then not to be allowed to be frivolous during those five or six years, either! Why didn't the Lord send us into the world already equipped with grey hair and arthritis?

Why couldn't we marry as soon as we were grown up? That was the question. Had Jens married Jenny when he was sixteen, he never would've gotten into trouble with Anne Malene. Women, though, could marry when they were seventeen, so they could escape all this!

Jens thought until he went warm and then cold but he didn't dare think his thoughts all the way through. There was a conclusion to all this that he didn't like, but two things were certain: he was a real so-and-so, and he would love Anne Malene as long as he could be near her. What was he going to do about the rest? Well, finally, it dawned upon him what he ought to do.

He sat down and wrote a letter asking Miss Jenny to read "A Glove" once again. When she had done that, she was to examine herself seriously, whether she had never loved anyone besides yours truly, J. T. Carlstad, never so much as said a kind word to anyone else. Then she was to write back and tell him everything---everything!—on her mind.

Jens Carlstad put the letter in the mail and thought he was all set. Actually, he was quite a cunning fellow. Several days later he received a "Dear John" letter breaking off their engagement. Curt and cold: it will have to be over between us.—Jenny Christiansen.

Jens Carlstad had a round, pleasant face; but now it was a little long. He was a cunning fellow. But he couldn't deny that Jenny Christiansen was cunning in her own way. Who would receive "A Glove" from her next time?

Well, there isn't much more left to tell. The young people I have told you about here are now married or engaged, all of them. Jenny is engaged to a bachelor of thirty-eight who swears he's never loved anyone before, and that may well be; he looks the part. Jens is soon to be married to a young widow with a conscience and a sense of morality; her monetary worth is 50,000 kroner. But Anne Malene is married to Per Tjerandsen.

For Per was not the sort to give up his rights. He had heard quite a lot about this assistant, and he knew very well that Anne Malene was lying when she said she didn't care about him. But Per wanted Anne Malene no matter what she said or did. One evening when he was pestering her about Carlstad, Anne Malene got mad and said straight out that she was fond of the fellow. Per cried as if he'd been whipped, and then he left. A day later she got a letter, she had to meet him at nine that evening by the big rock. This would be the last thing in the world he'd ask of her.

Anne Malene found Per Tjerandsen there with a rope in his hand. He was bareheaded and looked terrible. He only wanted to say farewell. She needn't worry. If she loved Carlstad, she'd better marry him; Per wasn't the kind to stand around and watch. He only wanted to ask her not to bear him any ill will. And so farewell and thanks for everything. He threw himself on the ground and cried. There lay the tall young man, sobbing as if his heart would break. At first Anne Malene was moved, and then frightened; and so, because of the rope, they decided to tie the knot over again. But on the wedding day it was Anne Malene who sobbed.

There were a lot of things Anne Malene hadn't thought about in her day. But one thing she did know: if she'd managed to catch Carlstad instead of Per, she'd be laughing and not crying. But the pastor gave a beautiful speech about Abraham and Sarah. And then he asked the honest bachelor Per Tjerandsen Vigmoen if he would take the honest maiden Anne Malene as his wife; Per Tjerandsen said he would. Then he proceeded to ask the honest maiden Anne Malene if she would take the honest bachelor Per as her husband, and Anne Malene said she would.

So it was done.

— She had done what she could to postpone the wedding. But Per was impossible, and the old folks sided with him. "What kind of nonsense is this?" asked old Mattis. "Do you think you'll get anywhere running around flirting with that hungry woodsman? Huh! He came here to size up the woods, he said; but I guess he had another kind of sizing up on his mind!" So Anne Malene gave in. The woodsman couldn't help her. And now, as has already been said, it was over and done with.

Six months later there was a baptism. It was a little soon, of course, but these things happen. And Anne Malene didn't bother about it. Village gossip didn't upset her. She took it very lightly.

It was decided that the little boy's name would be Tønnes; Anne Malene thought "Tjerand" an ugly name. She loved the child, but Per thought that "he resembled his mother more than his father." "The first ones often do," suggested Mother Astrid. When they took the child to the church, Anne Malene came along; she wanted to make sure everything went alright. A lot could happen to a little tot like that when its mother wasn't present.

Five children were to be baptized that day; one of them was officially illegitimate. The pastor declared that these five, like everyone else, had been conceived in sin and born in inequity and were by nature children of wrath. But through baptism they would receive God's mercy and forgiveness of sins and life and salvation and would be admitted to the communion of saints. Then he prayed to God for these His "servants and handmaidens who request the gift of Your baptism," that they may receive what they desire and that the doors may be opened to those who knock. After that he read what it said in the New Testament about baptism, and when he had explained everything for the little ones, and the sexton had said a vigorous "Amen," the holy ceremony was moved closer to the baptismal font.

"Tønnes," said the priest. "Do you forsake the Devil and all his works?" Yes. Tønnes did forsake the Devil and all his works.

"Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?" Yes. Tønnes did.

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried, who descended into hell and on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?" Yes. Tønnes believed in all of that.

"Do you believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?" Yes, Tønnes believed.

Then the priest inquired, "Will you, by virtue of your faith, be baptized?"

Yes, Tønnes wanted to be baptized. And so he was. But when he felt the water on his small and downy forehead, which hadn't been in the cold world more than two weeks, he screamed so loudly, one might almost believe he regretted having "requested the gift of baptism."

But Anne Malene thought it went well. Now everything was as it should be, she thought—everything. Both for the little boy and for her.

From that time on things went well for the young married couple on the lower farrn. At first, Anne Malene had been sad, and Per had had his suspicions. He had met the Postal Assistant on roads where that fellow, in Per's opinion, had no business. But eventually, the Postal Assistant went away; and then the child came. Now Anne Malene putters around on her farm, taking charge of the whole operation. And Per has grown to like it that way and is usually in a good mood, slaving away

for the house all he can manage. When he's drunk, he brags about his wife. He sings a little tune and says "The Devil take me if Anne Malene isn't the best wife there is!" And they say he's right.

Just the other day she was in a bad mood; she'd heard that Jens Carlstad was going to get married. But it soon passed. She is never in a bad mood for long, not Anne Malene.

Original title: "Ungdom." Translated by Leslie Ann Grove

Amalie Skram

KAREN'S CHRISTMAS

(1885)

On one of the steamship wharfs in Kristiania some years back there used to stand a grey wooden shack, with a flat roof and no chimney, no more than eight feet in length and a little shorter in width. In each of the two short walls there was a small window, one directly opposite the other. The door faced toward the sea, and it could be locked both from the inside and the outside with an iron hook fastened to a latch of the same material.

The shack was originally built for the ferrymen as a shelter in rainy weather or the winter cold. There they sat passing the time, waiting to see if someone might come and want a boat. Later on, as the small steamboats swallowed up more and more of the traffic, the ferrymen moved somewhere else. After that, the shack was used only occasionally by whoever found it convenient. The last people to use it were some stone workers one summer who ate their lunch there two at a time while they were repairing the wharf nearby.

Since that time no one had paid much attention to the old shack. It remained standing there, the port authorities did not remove it, and nobody complained about it being in the way.

Then there came a winter night in December toward Christmas. Snow was drifting down, but it melted as it fell, and the sticky mush on the cobblestones of the wharf became even more wet and greasy. Snow lay on top of the gaslights and the steam cranes like a grayish-white frayed blanket. In the darkness one could see snow hanging in the rigging of the ships like garlands strung from mast to mast. In the grey, misty air the gas flames in the street lanterns shone with a soiled, fiery yellow, while the ship's lanterns cast a muddy red light. Now and then the clanging sound of ships' bells pierced the humid air with a strident bark, when it was time to change the watch on board.

A constable patrolling the wharf stopped at the gaslight just outside the old ferrymen's shack. He pulled out his watch to check how late it was, but as he held it up toward the light, he thought he heard something like a child crying. Letting his hand sink down, he looked around to listen. No, nothing. He brought up his watch again. There was that sound once more, this time mingled with a soft "hush." Again he lowered his hand and again silence fell. What the devil was going on? He searched the area but could not find anything. For the third time he raised his watch to the gaslight, and this time he saw that it was almost four o'clock.

As he walked past the shack, he wondered a little but decided that he must have imagined it all.

After a while, as he came back past the shack, he glanced at it. What was that? Didn't he see something moving in there? The gaslights outside shone through both windows so that it looked as if there was light inside.

He walked over and peered in. Sure enough, somebody was sitting there on a bench just under the window, a small crouching figure, leaning forward, busy with something he couldn't see. One step around the corner and he stood by the door trying to get in. It was locked.

"Open up," he shouted and banged on the door with his fist.

He heard someone jump up, a stifled, frightened shout, and then it fell silent.

He knocked again with his fist and repeated:

"Open up, you in there! Open up immediately."

"What is it? Oh God, there's no one in here," was the fearful answer right by the door.

"Open up. This is the police."

"Jesus, the police! Oh, please, Sir, it's only me, I'm not doing anything, just sitting here, you know."

"Open this door right now, or there's going to be trouble. Open this..."

He didn't get any further because the door opened and the next moment he pushed into a low room where he could barely stand upright.

"Are you out of your mind! Not open up for the police! What are you thinking of?"

"I'm sorry, Sergeant—I did open up, didn't I."

"I should say so," he growled.

"It's only me, Karen," she whispered. "I'm sitting here with my baby." The constable took a closer look at her. A small thin girl, with a narrow pale face and a deep scar on one cheek, she was straight up and down like a bean pole, apparently barely grown. She was wearing a light brown outer garment, a sort of coat or jacket—its cut showed it had seen better days—and a dark skirt hanging in tatters down to her ankles. Her feet were stuck in a pair of soldier's boots without laces.

In one arm she held a bundle of rags across her body. Out of the upper end of the bundle something white was showing. It was the head of a child sucking at her meager breast. Around her head she wore a wispy kerchief that was tied under her chin, at the back of her neck strands of hair poked out. She was shivering with cold from top to toe, and when she moved, there was a squashy sound in her boots as if she were trudging in mush. "I didn't think it would bother anybody," she continued in a whining voice; "this shed, it's just standing here."

The constable felt uneasy. At first he thought of driving her out and letting her off with a warning. But as he looked at this miserable child, standing there with that little creature on her arm and cowering close to the bench, not daring in her fear and humility to sit down, he felt moved.

"But in Jesus' name, what are you doing here, my girl?"

She heard the milder tone in his voice. Her fear left her and she started to cry.

The constable pulled the door shut and locked it.

"Sit down a bit," he said; "it must be heavy, standing there holding the baby." Without a word she slipped down on the bench.

"Now then," the constable said encouragingly and sat down on the opposite bench.

"Oh God, Mr. Sergeant—let me stay here," she lisped through her tears. "I won't be any trouble, I'll clean up after myself—you can see for yourself—there's no mess—that there's bread crusts." She pointed to a bundle of rags on the floor. "I go begging during the day. In the bottle there's a drop of water. Let me stay here at night, until I get my job back —just till the missus comes home." She blew her nose in her fingers and wiped them on her skirt.

"The missus—now, who is that?" the constable asked.

"It was her I was working for. I had such a nice place with four crowns a month and breakfast, but then I got into trouble, and so I had to leave, of course. Mrs. Olsen herself got me a place at the Foundation; Mrs. Olsen, she's so nice, and I kept working for her, even though I was at the Foundation to have the child, 'cause she is all alone, is Mrs. Olsen, and she said she would keep me until I couldn't do it any more. But then Mrs. Olsen had to go away; Mrs. Olsen, she's a midwife, and then she got sick up there in the country, and now they say that she won't come home before Christmas."

"But God help me, to drag your child around while you're waiting for Mrs. Olsen, does that make any sense?" The constable was shaking his head.

"I don't have any other place to go," she whimpered. "Now that my father is dead, nobody will look out for me when my stepmother throws me out."

"But the father of the child?"

"Oh, him," she said, throwing her head back. "He won't come through."

"But you know the law will make him pay for the child."

"Yes, that's what I've heard," she answered. "But what can you do when you can't find him?"

"Just give me his name," offered the constable; "we'll find him all right."

"Well, if I knew it," she said quietly.

"What's that? You don't know the name of the father of your own child?"

Karen stuck a finger in her mouth and sucked it. Her head fell forward. There appeared a helpless, idiotic grin on her face. "No-o-o," she whispered, drawing out each letter and without taking her finger out of her mouth.

"I've never heard such foolishness in all my life," the constable said. "But, in heaven's name, how did you get together with him?"

"I met him at night in the streets, when it got dark," she said, "but it didn't take long before he disappeared, and since then I haven't ever seen him."

"Didn't you ask around?"

"I did, a lot, but no one knows what's happened to him. He's taken a job in the country, I guess, because he was working with horses or cows, I could tell by his smell."

"God help me, what a mess," the constable muttered.

"You'd better report to the poorhouse," he said louder, "so that we can straighten this out."

"No, I won't," she answered, suddenly stubborn.

"It's better to be at the poorhouse and get food and a place to sleep than what you've got here," said the constable.

"Yes, but as soon as Mrs. Olsen comes home—she's so nice—she'll take me on a monthly basis, I know it, 'cause she promised, and then I know a woman where I can get a room for three crowns a month. She'll look after the child while I'm at Mrs. Olsen's, and then I can work for her when I come back from Mrs. Olsen's. Everything will be all right, as soon as Mrs. Olsen comes home, and she'll come by Christmas, I've heard."

"Well, yes, my girl, you're grown up and make your own decisions, but you have no right to stay here."

"If I just sit here at night, what difference does it make? Oh God, let me stay here, I won't let the baby cry. Just till the missus comes—oh, please Mr. Sergeant, just till the missus comes."

"But you're going to freeze to death, both you and the child." He looked at her wretched clothes.

"It's still better here than on the street, you see. Oh, Mr. Sergeant—just till the missus comes back."

"I really ought to take you to the station, you know," the constable said, scratching himself behind his ear as he thought about it.

She jumped up and moved over to him. "Don't do it, don't do it," she whimpered, clutching his sleeve with her frozen fingers. "I beg you—in God's name —just till the missus comes."

The constable thought about it. Three days until Christmas, he reckoned.

"All right," he said in a loud voice, as he got up. "You can stay here until Christmas, but not a day longer. And remember nobody must know about this."

"God bless you, God bless you, and thank you so much," she blurted out.

"But make sure that you are out of here by six o'clock on the dot, before there is any traffic around here," he added when he was already half way out the door.

The next night, when he came past the shack, he stopped and looked in. She was sitting in a slanting position, leaning backwards against the window. Her profile, with the kerchief tied around her head, stood out vaguely against the window. The child was lying at her breast, nursing. She didn't move and seemed to be asleep.

Toward morning the temperature dropped to freezing. In the course of the next day the thermometer sank to twelve degrees below zero. It was crackling cold, and the air was clear and still. A thick layer of white frost appeared on the windows of the little ferrymen's house and made the glass quite opaque.

Christmas Eve the weather changed again. It melted and dripped everywhere. One almost needed an umbrella, even though it did not rain.

Down on the wharf the windows of the warehouses were free of ice once more, and the slush on the roads was worse than ever.

In the afternoon around two o'clock, the constable came down to the area. He had been off the past couple of nights because of a feverish cold for which the doctor had given him a sick slip. Now he had to see a man on one of the steamboats.

He happened to go by the shack. Although dusk was falling already, he saw something that made him feel uneasy even from a distance. She was sitting in exactly the same position as she had been two nights before. The same profile by the window. He didn't really reflect on it, just felt a shiver run through him. Could something have happened?

He hurried to the door. It was locked. He broke one of the windows, found an iron rod and reached inside to raise the hook from the latch. Then he went in, quietly and cautiously.

They were stone dead, both of them. The child was lying against the mother, and even in death it still held her breast in its mouth. A few drops of blood had trickled down its cheek and dried on its chin. She was terribly emaciated, but on her face lay something like a quiet smile.

"Poor girl, what a Christmas she's had," mumbled the constable, wiping his eyes.

"But perhaps this is the best for both of them. The good Lord must have some purpose with this."

He went out again, pulled the door shut and fastened the hook. Then he hurried to the station to make his report.

On the first working day after Christmas the port authorities had the old ferrymen's shack torn down and carted away. They didn't want it standing there as a hangout for all sorts of vagrants.

Original title: "Karens jul." Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Jonas Lie

THE CORMORANTS OF ANDVÆR

(1891–1892)

Outside the fishing station of Andvær lies a skerry no one can land on, no matter how quiet the sea. Breakers surround it with strong undertows and swells.

On bright summer days something like a large gold ring glistens through the foam. For a long time the people there have believed that it must be a treasure from a pirate's ship.

Sometimes at sunset there appears the mirage of a vessel with an aft castle, and lights shine from an old-time raised deck. The ship heaves as if in a storm and plows into the heavy white breakers.

Cormorants sit in a black row on the cliffs, spying for coal-fish.

People used to tell their exact number; there were never more nor less than twelve. But on a rock out in the sea foam there sat the thirteenth. One could not see it unless it rose up and flew out to sea.

The only people living on Andvær in winter after the fishing season were a woman and a teenage girl.

They earned their living watching the drying-racks to keep birds of prey and ravens from pecking at the ropes that hold the racks together.

The girl had thick coal-black hair and a pair of eyes that stared so strangely at people, almost, one might say, as if she resembled the cormorants out there.

She had not seen much else in her life. No one knew who her father was.

They lived that way until the girl was grown.

Then, suddenly, as the cargo boats began sailing to the fishing station to pick up dried cod in the summer, the young men started to underbid each other to make the trip.

Some of them gave up both their share of profits and their wages, and in the villages on the mainland there were complaints of many broken engagements.

And the cause of all this was the girl out there with those strange eyes.

No matter how unkempt she was, there was something about her that made any man she talked to fall into a daze and think that he could not live without her.

During the first winter she was courted by a young man who owned both a farm and a warehouse.

"If you return by summer and bring me the gold ring I want for my betrothal," she said, "something may come of it."

And by next summer the same young man came back.

He had a lot of fish to pick up. And she could have a gold ring as big and stylish as she wanted.

"The one I must have lies beneath the handle on the iron chest out there on the skerry," she said, "if you love me enough to get it for me."

Then the young man turned pale.

He saw the sea-bore fall and rise like a white wall of foam in the bright, warm summer day. And on the skerries the cormorants sat sleeping in the sun.

"Much do I love you," he said, "but this leads straight to the grave and not to my wedding."

At that moment the thirteenth cormorant rose from the rock in the steaming foam and flew out to sea.

The next winter the mate on a cargo boat courted the girl. He had been pining for her for more than two years.

And he got the same answer.

"If you come back in summer and betroth me with the right ring, then it will be."

He returned to the fishing grounds by Midsummer.

But when he heard where the gold ring was, he cried all day and night until the sun was dancing in the sea to the northwest.

Then the cormorant rose up and flew out to sea.

The third winter there were ugly storms and many shipwrecks. But on the keel of an upturned boat that washed ashore there hung a young man by his knife belt, unconscious.

In the boathouse, they couldn't revive him no matter how hard they tried.

Then the girl came along.

"This is my bridegroom," she said.

She put him in her lap and warmed his heart all night. When morning came, his heart was beating.

"I dreamed I was lying between the wings of a cormorant and rested my head on the down of her breast," he said.

The boy was fair and handsome, with curly hair, and he could not take his eyes from the girl.

He took a job at the fishing grounds.

But he came to see her early and late.

Then it happened with him as with others.

He could not live without her. And the day he was to sail away from there, he asked her to marry him.

"I do not want to deceive you," she said. "You have lain at my breast, and to spare you from sorrow, I would gladly give my life.

You can have me if you put the betrothal ring on my finger. But you cannot keep me longer than the span of one day.

And now I will long for you and wait for you in dread until summer comes."

At Midsummer the boy came back with his boat, alone.

Then she told him about the ring he must get from the reef.

"You have rescued me from the keel of my boat; you can put me there again," said the boy, "but I cannot live without you."

When he took his oars to row out, she climbed into the boat with him and sat down in the stern. She was pale and strange.

It was beautiful summer weather, and the sea was rolling in long shining swells.

The boy just sat there looking at her, and rowed the whole way, until the breakers roared around the skerry, and the sea crashed over the shoals, and the foam spurted high as towers.

"If you love your life, turn back now," she said.

"I love you more than my life," he answered.

But just when it seemed that the boat was going under and death was gaping, the sea suddenly fell calm, and they glided ashore without as much as a ripple in the water.

There on the skerry lay an old rusty anchor halfway out of the water.

"In the iron chest below the anchor lies my dowry," she said; carry it into your boat and place the ring there on my finger. With it I betroth myself to you. Then I will be yours until the sun dances in the sea to the northwest tonight."

It was a golden ring with a red stone, and he put it on her finger and kissed her.

On the skerry there was a patch of green grass in a cleft.

There they sat down. And they were served; he did not understand how and did not think about it in his joy.

"Midsummer Day is beautiful," she said, "I am young and you are my bridegroom. Now we will go to our bridal bed."

She was so fine, he did not know what to do, and great was his love.

But the sun began dancing out there at nightfall, and she kissed him and cried.

"The summer day is beautiful," she said, "and the evening is even more beautiful. But now it is dusk."

Suddenly it seemed that she became older and older and somehow faded away.

When the sun sank below the edge of the sea, only some crumbling linen remained lying on the skerry.

The sea was calm, and in the bright Midsummer Night twelve cormorants flew out over the sea.

Original title: "Andværs-skarven." Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Sigbjørn Obstfelder

Liv[1]

(1894)

In a large city there are dark corners, back streets with strange names, names that give an inkling of the twilight of life, where many things happen about which even books do not tell.

I live on such a street right now. It is so quiet here. Perhaps a milk cart rumbles by or a coal wagon, or perhaps a knife grinder goes from house to house. But afterwards it falls doubly silent.

I don't see any rich or "fine" people here, none of the persons mentioned in the newspapers or the government register. And yet the eyes of those I meet show so much nobility. Who knows? Perhaps those who live in those huge brick tenements have a secret of their own, a bright corner room, a canary, a cat among the window flowers, an heirloom tea service of ancient porcelain.

When I come home in the evening and turn from the boulevards into my district, my thoughts enter a different and separate world. Nothing drowns them out here.

Not far from my place is a basement cafe I frequent when dusk falls. The place is usually empty. I like sitting there, I can sit there for such a long, long time.

I hardly know why I like it. I believe that most often I don't even think, just have a feeling of peace, that everything is still now, that those great, difficult questions and terrible doubts—all that pathos—don't exist, that I am breathing quietly; and people move around me and go about their business and live without making a sound, without complaints and without expecting me to take part.

It happens that images and memories come to me, something somehow far away, the whisper of the forest, the roaring of the sea, a childhood in the sun. They don't give me pain, they no longer tear at me. No, they are like magic-lantern visions softly gliding by down there in the basement, while I slowly drink my coffee.

It is probably something like what one feels sitting in a little country church on a summer day: the doors are open, the smell of hay wafts

1. Liv, a common Norwegian girl's name, means "life."

in, and across the floor toward the altar flow colored stripes of sun. There one sits watching, and everything else becomes like a dream.

Yes, everything else becomes a dream.

*

I do know a few people in this city, but I rarely visit them. And when I do, it is with a certain fear. It is as if I'm afraid they're going to take something away from me. For a long time I stand below the windows, watching their heads outlined on the curtains and not knowing whether I have the courage to go up there into all that light.

Do I just imagine that they look strangely at me? Or is there something in the way I walk, in my eyes, something—yes, something from my back streets, my basement? I have such a need to walk quietly and speak softly. It pains me when someone shouts and roars with laughter.

Nor can I take part in their conversations. But it amuses me to sit and listen. Not that I understand what it is all about. I don't understand any longer what people are talking about. It seems to me that it has so little to do with that for which we live and die.

For me there is only a concert of voices. I see their brains working to find the right word, I hear their voices rising and falling. Now and then they get angry. Then I often almost burst out laughing.

I sit there and listen; I see their faces grow ardent, their hands raise glasses, hear them curse, laugh and strike their fists on the table.

In the end it makes me so melancholy.

*

I do not understand what is happening to me. In the evening I sit and listen to all kinds of sounds that are not there. I surely must have heard those steps before. I have already been living here for a month, and as far as I know, no one new has moved in. But I have only now noticed them.

Past the corner of the building—recently I have made no mistake about them—past my window, in through the front door, up the stairs. How light they are! She must be young.

I long to hear them also tonight. And the swishing of her skirt.

*

It annoys me, but I cannot help it: when I meet some young woman, I ask myself: is it she? And I feel certain that she isn't any of the women I have met. Isn't that strange?

I could just go out and sort of accidentally meet her in the hallway. But it seems as if something is holding me back.

When she's outside there on the stairs, I can't keep my heart from throbbing. It annoys me.

*

I have received a letter from Albert. It reminds me of the days of summer.

Yes, those days!—When the green water, steaming across the breast-like skerries, lay so clear that we could see the forests at the bottom—out there among the isles—her bare arm with the fish line; I see its grey reflection on the surface of the water.

He says she has been talking about me.

Talking about me—It's all so far away. Her red, lively cheeks, her laughing eyes sparkling with a desire to leap out into life, whatever it might bring, joy or sorrow—those bright nights at home—it has all become so astonishingly strange to me. Like a fleeting memory of childhood.

Magda. Magda.—No, I don't want to be involved in that again. I don't want to return home for many years.

The deep stillness here, it has a greater nobility and gives me more. There are many eyes in it, some clear, some glazed over—eyes that have suffered and understand. They look at me during the nights, and I feel that I belong to them.

No, Magda, you laugh in the sun and fresh air, I—I am going through school.

—When she was shouting up toward Rindal's Peak, how cheerful her voice was! Nature sang when she was singing!

*

Late at night—yes, as late as one o'clock at times—I hear bare feet tripping across the floor above me. She jumps into bed. Then she extinguishes her candle or lamp, I imagine, and lies down to sleep. Then I lie down, too. Because, when she has gone to bed, I somehow feel terribly alone, and then I can work no longer. We also get up at the same time in the morning. And perhaps we have the same thoughts at the same time.

Would she laugh if I went upstairs to tell her that I too, am lonely, and that, even if I am a man and a stranger, I still have the same joys and sorrows and longings as she?

But who's to say that she is lonely? She's out the whole day, most likely she meets someone or other. And even if she were lonely, who's to say that she's pale?—or that she has thoughtful eyes and delicate hands?

—It is already eleven o'clock. She's probably at a party. I am not at a party. Then why should she be?

Probably someone will take her home, a lover, perhaps some dashing student.

—Steps. It's she. She's alone. Oh! Why should I be glad about that?

Perhaps she's been sad this evening, walked around in wind and weather, walked around out there and cried, remembering bygone days.

She goes over to the bed right away. I cannot hear clearly, but there's something unusual happening. She's by the bed, I am sure of that, but she is not lying down.

Poor thing! I understand now:

She's lying on her knees, burying her head in her sheets, asking herself over and over again: why do I exist?

*

I have visited the lame painter today. An old building with crooked, dilapidated stairs. A couple of attic rooms with a slanting roof. How confused he got when I came! Stood there stammering and blushing, stammering and blushing.

His little wrinkled mother was pottering about there. She was so innocent, laughed about everything, kissed her son so charmingly on his sad eyes.

On the table were portraits of Russian poets and German socialists. On the walls hung paintings with dark skies, deserts, black seas at night, and melancholy, dreaming faces.

I get uneasy when his eyes rest sort of anxiously on me. I do not have any answers to his questions and sick hopes.

Sitting there those long grey days, staring through the skylight, drifting away on dim images that do not belong to the life of the workaday world—!

Sitting there asking oneself day after day: why do I live?

*

What can it be? Her steps are no longer light and quick. And I have become so restless, I cannot work.

*

It has become so deserted here—no familiar steps, no rustling of skirts! It's as if all human beings have left and the houses are standing empty. At times it seems that I hear moans and half-suppressed screams. I've been sitting too much by myself, have become nervous.

*

She did have large, thoughtful eyes—and a pale face—and delicate, thin hands.

Her name is Liv. A strange name. Very Norwegian, too. I can still see her eyes when she told me. It was as if she gazed far away toward a land lying in a hidden world of sun, to which her name was the key.

For five days and nights she's been lying upstairs, without anyone to help her or take care of her. She's a stranger here, has no parents, and probably no friends either. How long and full of fear the nights must have been!

*

At home they now think that I am well on my way to becoming an eccentric. I can tell from their letters. They're sorry I have become distracted by unhealthy and unfruitful dreams, become lost to a reasonable, comfortable life.

Good. So be it. It is not at all certain that I have a talent for anything other people consider important.

I like my withdrawn existence. And there is one human being I do mean something to. I sit with Liv during the day.

She's happy to lie there, holding my hand in hers, her eyes looking at me attentively when I speak.

Let them entertain themselves, let them sing patriotic songs!

*

Something pure and chaste has come over me. Liv's thoughts. They enclose me like a white raiment.

*

Will she die? Just now when the flowers are in bud and her own buds, too, unfold, and all that makes a woman's breast sway, everything that was promised!

When I have been outside, she has so many questions: are the swans out, are the violets blooming, is the sky clear or clouded, have people started wearing bright clothes, did I hear the starlings?

And she wants to hear about all the beautiful things I know. At dusk I sit and tell her about the bright nights of the north, the silver sheen on the mountains, waiting for the first kiss of the sun.

She has told me how she loved looking at the clouds on her way to and from work, loved seeing them drift and split and fill with many shifting colors—seeing the piles of leaves, how they grew every day,

while the treetops became more and more bare, the lacework of their branches more delicate and the air around them whiter. During the summer she often made her way through the park to breathe in a little of the scent of the flower bed and to stop for a few minutes at the pond to watch the swans, how they were gliding with proud grace.

*

I feel her soul expanding and rising up in powerful purity. Often there is something about her that makes me feel frightened and pitifully small. My chest contracts. I seems to me that I can't stay longer in this noisy world either, in all this clattering of railroads and parliament and pageants. I sink down and take her hands in humility.

She lets me hold them, and looks far away—past me.

Liv is from Iceland. She, a delicate white figure, whose hand glides like a shadow across her blanket and in whose eyes there is a gleam of something very soft, has some grating foreign r's treading heavily in her otherwise pliant speech.

Far out there in the north, she says, where a small fixed star flickers, the souls of her father and mother are waiting for her among the northern lights we cannot see here.

*

She was lying there, looking at me with one of those smiles one often sees among the sick. Then suddenly a trembling shook her, her cheeks became slowly paler, veins protruded on her forehead below her shiny black hair, her arms and head fell back exhausted and her eyes closed. Dissolved in long painful tremors, she collapsed in my arms. Then came—the blood.

After that she became quieter. She leaned against me without moving. Then she began to talk, whispering at first, gasping for air, then more strongly. She couldn't hold back any longer what she had been too proud ever to say to anyone before. From her trembling chest pressed forth burning words about her longing for men and women friends, for love, life's exultation; how her body had been waiting for the first rain drop of a kiss, how on dark evenings she had stood outside windows where there was light and music and longed to take part, to dance and be embraced and loved, to love.

Cautiously I pressed her frail and feverish body against mine. It was so quiet. No noisy light.

*

I love her soul, so mournful and full of longing. It now blossoms in her eyes and in the curves of her hand and makes her words pure.

I love those withering arms and shrinking cheeks and how her soul radiates from them all the more as they become whiter.

Perhaps it is for the best that she did not get to know life. Perhaps it is for the best that she dies before she discovers that all human joy is sickly, that the exultation behind the bright windows is filled with desperation and shame.

*

There is more around us in all that flowers and breathes than our eyes can see and our ears can hear. Just as there is sound we cannot perceive, so there is light and color we do not notice. To a finer soul those colors that to us seem delicate would be coarse; those sounds that to us seem soft would be wild and raw.

As I walked today by the sea, I felt as if the world had become new. In the misty air there were voices. They did not speak my language, nor that of the birds or the winds. The colors, too, had voices and words. They were greater and richer, and there were more of them: the green of the trees had a thousand tongues.

As they sing, and I listen, and as the song grows, there in fortissimo out across the grass, across the sea and the leaves of the beech, a word resonates in every fiber of my body and kisses me from air and fragrance: Liv!

And all the invisible, fluttering, budding, flowing souls are merged with mine in one great jubilant soul of the universe: Liv!

*

I sleep upstairs in her room now in order to be near her.

I do not sleep much. It is strange, when I wake up from half dozing and look up toward the little skylight, the sky seems closer. And I look at it differently than before. It is as if there is something there I recognize.

Now and then a voice wakes me from dark dreamings, from strange and great intuitions—it sounds so infinitely soft in the silence of the night: Are you asleep?

At times there are whispers: Our Father, Which—I feel like hiding myself then. There is something in this that both attracts and repels me, and it troubles me.

I was lying awake. I thought she was asleep. But then she said just audibly:

"Would you believe in God, if you could?"

What could I answer? Who was God? A concept. A feverish fantasy. A hallucination for pious virgins in old paintings.

"Do you know what I believe?"

I heard her raise herself up in bed and breathe heavily.

"Well, dear. I believe that God exists...because...because...it would be so bitter if He didn't exist, when I—who didn't have a very good life, and many others who had much worse lives—when we now believed, and when I think that I see Him, see Him come closer every day and every night...oh, no, it would be so terribly bitter if all that was nothing but illusion and lies.

I cannot believe that everything should be so terribly meaningless. I must know the truth; there must be something more than only this here on earth, and someone must know about it and experience it. I've always hoped that I would get to see and know more and would not remain so ignorant and childish as now; I haven't really seen anything and don't know anything—but I have always been so sure, so sure of it—and if it then should be an illusion...that would be (I sensed that she was raising her hands) so cruel, such a mockery—that this slavish little life should be all."

I felt—I could not see, it was too dark—that she had fallen back on her pillow, exhausted.

I got up and went over to her. She lay there with eyes that...have made me a stranger among the living.

*

"Do you think the snow has melted at home in your mountains?"

"If the snow has melted in your country, it will also melt in Iceland soon."

"Are you dreaming, Liv?"

"Yes."

"What are you dreaming?"

"I dream that Iceland moves in the sea one inch every night. And little by little the ice melts on the north side. After a couple of thousand years the shores will have become warm as if they had plunged into the south seas. In the place of the glacier crowfoot there will be clusters of red and purple bells on tall proud stems, and the land will be teeming with birds and insects that glitter like gold and silver. The rock-strewn slopes and blocks of ice are gone, and there are thick, heavy forests that enclose the farmsteads and keep out the wind and frost.

I'm there, too, and you. But I'm not sick any more and do not spit up blood and do not have to work for my food. No, I'm big and strong and do not have to be ashamed at your caresses. And you are sitting here

with me and telling me about everything you have thought and seen, and no traffic disturbs us, but a waterfall rocks us to sleep, while the northern lights are dancing."

*

It was around two o'clock at night. I heard her stir. I could not speak, some nameless fear had gripped me.

She staggered out of bed. Slowly, step by step, she groped her way toward the window. She put both of her elbows on the window sill and looked out. Then she came where I was lying. She lay down by my side. Her hair touched my face. I kept my eyes tightly shut.

She lay like that for a long time. Finally I could not stand it any longer. I whispered: "Liv!" She did not answer. I put my arms around her and looked into her eyes. I saw in the semidarkness that they had dimmed.

I lay there with my arms around her neck. The earth went on. People kept on sleeping.

I was alone once more, more alone than before.

*

I walk around like a sleepwalker. There are people walking around me, but they are like shadows from another world.

I should go somewhere else. But something holds me back—these streets, these houses, these lights—and I walk back and forth among them instead of leaving. I stare at everything as if it had human eyes. Is someone walking behind me?

I love the bridges on the outskirts of the city. I get there without noticing it before I am standing there, and I remain there for hours. Sometimes it occurs to me that, down there where I am looking, there is a boat, or a tree leaning toward the water. Then it happens that I am suddenly aware of the vault of the sky above me: it's the moon gliding forth, or a gust of air rushing over my head. Then someone will look strangely into my eyes, someone who just happens to be passing by.

I feel at home there in the workers' district. With their lowered faces, their deep-set eyes and protruding cheekbones the workers live and are like crustaceans that shy away from the light: I feel related to them.

The boulevards make me nauseous. Those swelling breasts, those heads held high, the clothes swinging on delightful, supple hips, the smiles—all that screams "Kiss! Live! Enjoy!"—ladies lifted by the caressing hands of men into alluring, dark coaches, the sound of kisses behind draperies, the sound of friendship toasts with cheap wine, fleshy

handshakes by fawning friends—oh, it is nauseous! Silent, petrified tears choke me; human joy is a whore filling the atmosphere with the stench of her cheap perfume.

Yes, I must go away, far, far away, to a place where only the breath of the earth and the sea rises up to the heavens.

*

Yes, I must go away. I must find absolute silence. I must get away as far as I can from tramways and asphalt streets and theaters. Because there is something I must learn.

During the nights by the great sea, will not then the words of the riddle come and sink, whispering, into my spirit, words weak and uncertain at first, like a vibration that has not yet become sound, but then stronger and stronger as everything else falls more and more silent. When all the grating noises have ceased, when I have been forgotten, and I too, have forgotten, will it then happen, will everything become clear and my soul awaken?

Original title: "Liv." Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

Hans E. Kinck

WHITE ANEMONES

(1895)

Gertrude sat in church one bright summer day with her hands folded around her hymn book; she was leaning forward a little and was thoughtful. A pale girl, around thirty, with thick yellow hair and big blue eyes that stared at the first altar step from under half-closed eye lids. She didn't dare look higher because up by the altar stood the broad-shouldered, strong son of the minister—he had come with his father today to the parish branch up in the valley and was now conducting the service. He had just crossed the mountains, from Kristiania in the east.

She didn't hear what he said; her ears were closed and a mist clouded her eyes. What happened to her the week before was after her again now; it was after her everywhere.

...Yes, the quiet summer night filled the church...miles into the mountains. Not a ray of sun among shining blades of grass, not a blush on the distant peaks—white-leafed willows asleep on the river banks.

...A grey and cool, dewy summer night.

...She couldn't sleep that night in the barn on the mountains. It was hot, she kept tossing and thinking of many things. She felt almost scared and was sorry she hadn't gone with the farmhand to the village that night, Saturday night.

...She lay in the hay listening. There was a low throbbing sound everywhere, something calling, so alive...something moving on the hillsides, pressing over the stone walls, running and leaping everywhere, tumbling into the field, one on top of the other...all kinds of living things, quiet and gentle.

...It took possession of her ear, took her whole sense of hearing. And the sound drew her over to the barn wall to peer out through a crack. There in the white and grey fog young people were gliding by, barefoot and light, swinging and turning on long supple legs, some from one direction, others from another, and at times it seemed that they rose up from the ground itself, met between haystacks, crouched down, jumped up, slipped past each other, pushed together in groups, gathered

over by the creek, which was winding its way down the hill, and multiplied and increased.

...And there by the creek the commotion really grew. Little children whispered and laughed, clung to the white-leafed willows, twining themselves around, then jumped back to the field again and danced in circles in wild abandon, ran back to the creek, group after group, out into the water, out into the grey shining water.

...And out there each one of them fastened strings until the yearning bow took sound, gliding invisibly and lightly over the creek. But the sound was hushed and low, for fingers pressed down on all the strings.

...And so they danced, wave after wave. The fiddle called them forth in ever larger groups, in the bogs, in the marsh grass, and on the shining water.

...And on the edge of the hill a face emerged...a fair man she could barely see, with a high brow and gentle eyes, soft-cheeked and smiling. She gave herself over to his gaze, and she caressed his cheeks.

...But it grew darker and darker, so the cheeks faded away and the man vanished.

...But the fiddle loomed larger; the bow became the whole length of the hill, and its body the wide lake. But many fingers pressed down on all the strings.

...No distinct hues, no distinct melody. It all merged with the grey night, all the sounds of men and animals, with the misty-grey, singing night.

...And yet the fiddle grew, the whole field became one with it, trembling softly beneath the barn. And all those impassioned youths took part in drawing the bow and plucking the strings. But always they were pressing down the strings and keeping the sound low.

...She slid down from the pile of hay and to the door, pushing it quietly open so that the cool of the summer night came washing over her.

"Oh hey, oh ho," she sang as she stood there. It took possession of her eyes, it stole her voice—she didn't know what she sang:

Oh hey, oh ho,
Oh hey, oh ho, —
Why are you stealing my sleep?
The juniper alone is sleeping on the hill.
Only the trout is burrowing in the creek!
Oh hey, oh ho,
oh—hey; oh—ho, —
who's stolen my sleep now?

It sang within her without ceasing, again and again—it was the music of the night itself over the meadow; the words came to her from there.

...Then someone came wading through the dew-drenched grass by the barn. A man stood silently in the opening, a night-grey man who slipped into the barn and pulled the door shut without a word. She didn't know him, didn't look at his face or ask his name. But it must have been one of them drawing the huge bow on the meadow...

"God help me!" she sighed as she sat in the church pew clutching her hymnal. Thinking about that summer night, she hadn't become aware that the service was already over and people were leaving. She stood up and went out, glancing at the pulpit.

She slipped out of the old church and passed by the grey stone wall, where lots of people were sitting or lying behind it sunning themselves. Mostly young people who were waiting, smiling and listening to the fiddle music that came flowing on the shimmering air from the house over on the hill, where wedding parties usually stopped in if they came from far away. The minister wanted to catch his breath first, he said, before he married them.

But out there she was again carried away by memory, so that the little fiddle was drowned out by it. The drifting mist of the summer night carried her past the churchgoers. She felt like a leaf afloat in a murmuring creek.

She didn't realize where she was going before she found herself far away at the bottom of a hill among some hazel shrubs, where the fiddle no longer could reach her. She took a few steps in the grass and sat down in the moss behind a bush, her hands in her lap.

...No, she didn't know the man in the barn that night. Didn't want to know either. She had forced herself to lie there with her eyes closed when he left in the morning.

...But then there wasn't anyone who owned a grey bag like that besides the minister's son. She had caught a glimpse of it just as he vanished down a steep slope on the way to the village. She had run to the door at the last moment, when she thought he was out of sight, to look...

She sat lost in thought, heard a bumble-bee drone past, watched the whimsical flight of a butterfly.

...The air was like a huge swell, and on it floated the low music of summer nights, washing about her eyes, lapping into her ears...then flowing by, trickling through blades of grass, swirling around trees, rippling and flowing everywhere, covering all things with a white-grey mist.

Oh hey, oh ho,
Oh—hey, oh—ho,
said the leaves, said the grass...

Suddenly it was gone—she heard the voice of the minister's son down on the path at the bottom of the hill. Before him walked the young woman from the city clad in a summer dress; she was visiting at the parsonage this summer. He followed behind, talking in a low voice.

They were probably taking a walk while the minister married the couple over in the church.

Gertrude got up, stood there listening. If felt as if he were far away and yet so strangely near...sadness and desire struggled within her and took her breath away. Her feelings soared and fell like swallows in flight.

They said little—barely whispered when he found a flower.

"Oh, how lovely! Oh, how perfectly beautiful!" she cried.

Then they both smelled it. Stopped and smelled it again, as though they couldn't get enough. And he gave it to her.

Gertrude followed them up the hill, moving softly from bush to bush. Yes, he had the high brow and gentle eyes of the summer night; he had the soft cheek and the smile about his lips!...

"Will you give me one, too?" he pleaded after a while.

"Yes, of course," she said, seeming surprised, and she hurried to find one.

They walked in silence, and she looked for a flower.

"But what kind do you want?" she asked. "A forget-me-not?" she laughed, as she plucked a blue forget-me-not from the grass.

"I want *you*!" he shouted and threw his arms around her.

She returned his embrace, held him in her arms. Gertrude heard them whisper and breathe. She came closer and closer until it seemed she could feel the heat of their bodies. Her knees and body felt weak; she sank down in the grass, couldn't stay on her feet.

The two walked arm in arm down the path. Then they turned back.

When they became aware of Gertrude, they let go of each other and fell silent. The city girl pretended to be looking for flowers in the meadow. But then they walked on slowly, as if they hadn't seen her sitting there on the slope.

"I won't say anything," Gertrude said softly as they walked by. She searched the face of the minister's son to see whether her promise made him happy. But he turned red, pretending not to recognize her, and sniffed a flower.

The city girl glanced at her: "Oh," she smiled happily, looking nonchalantly at the hills and mountains, "people'll find out anyway."

Gertrude looked after them. She wanted so much to share their secret, keep something just between the three of them, just this one thing!...

They took each other by the arm and laughed.

Long after they vanished behind the hazels, Gertrude kept sitting there, staring at the path.

...Yes, that's what people really wanted, to get married!...oh, she felt sorry for them!...A child's bitter tears in the trembling sun!...

She got up, turned onto another path, away from the farms and church. She just couldn't bear to watch them getting married there at the church. It hurt so much, so much! She couldn't ever watch anyone getting married again. Nothing but a child's bitter tears in the trembling sun!...

She turned up the valley to the mountains, the same way she had come that morning to see the minister's son and hear his voice. She didn't rest, didn't stop to catch her breath. She kept on across wet marshes, past bare knolls and up the steep hillsides. She was hardly aware of walking. A stream of dry tears lifted her up each hill.

She didn't stop until she reached the meadow in the mountains, and only then did a single, furtive tear appear in the corner of each eye. A long time she sat there, with her back to the barn, staring across the field.

...She couldn't understand how anyone could do it—get married and be content with that!...And she had thought that the man in grey had heard the other fiddle too! For what was this little wedding march when you got right down to it! It was nothing compared to the sound of that broad fiddle and that long bow, to the great wave of sound on which life itself flowed, breaking high above church and home!...

She fell quiet, and it was quiet all around her. Quiet as in a patch of white anemones deep in the forest.

She sat there until the dewy mist started to gather among the stacks of hay.

And the cool, dusky summer night fell slowly on the field, and with it came the sound of the broad fiddle and the long bow. And from lake and creek the melody came, and from the sleeping white-leafed willow:

Oh hey, oh ho,
Oh—hey, oh—ho,
Here I come with your sleep now.

Original title: "Hvitsymre i utslaatten." Translated by Henning K. Sehmsdorf

AFTERWORD

This collection of Norwegian short stories is a revised edition of *Short Stories from Norway 1850–1900* edited by Henning K. Sehmsdorf and originally published in 1986. New translations by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Alexander Kielland, and Camilla Collett have been added and some earlier texts removed. The stories in this edition represent the early development of the short story genre in Norway in the nineteenth century at a time when writers were exploring their national identity and traditions in the light of increasing industrialization and urbanization. Several tales have their roots in rural culture, while other texts show the growing concern throughout the century for social issues and the gradual shift from National Romanticism to Realism and Naturalism.

Characteristic of the period of National Romanticism that was prevalent during the first half of the nineteenth century was a desire to explore a Norwegian identity that had been little influenced by over four hundred years of Danish rule. Hence authors looked to rural traditions and oral narratives for inspiration. Typical of this endeavor is the work of Jørgen Moe (1813–1892) and his collaborator Peter Christian Asbjørnsen (1812–1885). The first to collect and publish Norwegian folktales in a form that approximated rural dialects in terms of idiom and syntax, Asbjørnsen and Moe's *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Norwegian Folktales) from 1843 was highly popular among the Norwegian reading public. "The Smith They Didn't Dare Let Into Hell," which is listed in Aarne Thompson's International Folktale Index as type 330, was originally published in this collection, although the text here is from a slightly revised version printed in the second edition of 1852. As was common for Asbjørnsen and Moe, several variants of the tale were collected in Ringerike in eastern Norway and then combined to create an artistically acceptable product. The self-confidence of the smith in this tale, who has little regard for the powers of heaven or hell, is characteristic of the Ashlad hero in the Norwegian "Wonder Tale" and is unmistakably Norwegian in tone.

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) contributed immeasurably to the development of a unique Norwegian literary style and language, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1903. He patterned his style somewhat on Asbjørnsen and Moe's tales and on the medieval

sagas of Iceland. Like Moe, he wrote in an idiom close to natural speech and took as his setting rural communities, in particular in his early works. His narrative tone and perspective reflect that of the sagas, and characters speak for themselves with little interference or reflection from a narrator. "A Dangerous Wooing" was originally published anonymously in 1856 in Bjørnson's own *Illustreret Folkeblad til Belærelse og Underholdning* (Illustrated Popular Journal for Instruction and Entertainment). It was later reworked and published in Landsmaal in *Smaastykker* (Small Pieces) in 1860. "Trond," which Bjørnson considered his real breakthrough as a writer, was first published in a Danish newspaper *Illustreret Nyhetsblad* (Illustrated News) in 1857, although the present translation is based on the slightly revised version printed in *Smaastykker*. The original includes a second so-called chapter which consists merely of the question "What happened to Trond?" a chapter Bjørnson deemed unnecessary at subsequent printings. This tale of the debut of a country fiddler at a wedding in town explores the uncertainty of the artist and the complex sources of artistic inspiration. "The Father" is a masterpiece of epic storytelling. Through this factual account of four meetings between the priest and Thord Øveraas over a number of years, the reader understands the entire life story of the father and the dear price he pays to learn humility and compassion. "The Eagle's Nest" was originally published in the New Year's edition of *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* in 1860, and later in *Smaastykker*. Reminiscent of "A Dangerous Wooing" in setting and the climbing motif, it tells of the self-sacrifice of the best young man in the village and its effect on the girl he loves.

While Bjørnson and Moe are characteristic of the National Romantic period, Camilla Collett (1813–1895) epitomizes the shift from National Romanticism to Realism with its sharp critique of contemporary society. "Different Pleasures' was first published in *Fortællinger* (Tales) in 1860, a collection started before her breakthrough novel *Amtmandens Døttre* (1854–5) that established her not only as a great novelist, but also a pioneering feminist writer. While many of the tales in *Fortællinger* have their roots in rural tradition and folktale, "Different Pleasures" reveals Collett's mastery of irony and takes a single incident during a walk in Kristiania as the starting point for a reflection on both society and the joys of life.

Similar to Collett, Alexander Kielland (1849–1906) focuses on social problems and character types and eschews individual psychology such as was common during the Modern Breakthrough period. The lack of truth and justice in both the public and private spheres is a central Kielland theme shown in the tales represented here, tales that also reveal the elegant irony and sophisticated style of the author. "The Spirit of the

Ball" is from *Novelletter* (Short Stories) (1879) and discusses the insurmountable gulf between the rich and poor. The tale foregoes the idealization of the Romantics in favor of a depiction of environment as the deciding factor in life. "Karen" is from the collection *To novelletter fra Danmark* (Two Short Stories from Denmark) published in 1882. It is both a tale of love and a satire on the themes of seduction, adultery, and suicide. The opening line of the story and its repetition at the end of the tale reflects the formulaic style of the folktale.

Arne Garborg (1851–1924), a prominent figure in Norwegian intellectual life at the end of the nineteenth century, contributed significantly to the development of Nynorsk as a rich literary language by writing almost exclusively in the dialect-based Landsmaal. A cosmopolitan spirit, he was a journalist and critic and a versatile writer of novels, plays, poetry, and short stories. His authorship best represents the struggle at the end of the nineteenth century between the old religious and idealistic ideas and the new modern thinking. "Youth" was first published in *Forteljingar og Sogur* (Stories and Tales) in 1884, and demonstrates his abiding interest in the rural environment of Jæren in South West Norway where he had grown up the eldest son of a farmer. While different from Garborg's known naturalistic style, "Youth" shows Garborg as an insightful, comic commentator on the frailty of human life.

Amalie Skram (1846–1905), like Garborg, focuses on the plight of the vulnerable in society, but she concentrates most consciously on women and children. She is the most consistent representative of the naturalist thought that heredity and environment determine the fate of the individual, and shows in her novels, many of which discuss the circumstances of women in unhappy marriages, a sharp eye for detail and an objective writing style. "Karen's Christmas" was first published in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* (Politics) in 1885, and subsequently in *Fire Fortællinger* (Four Stores) in 1892. In this story Skram directs her criticism toward a society that fails to provide even the most basic needs of individuals who have been victimized by circumstances.

The tale by Jonas Lie (1833–1908) represents the shift into the Neo-Romantic period towards the end of the century, with its interest in the irrational and intuitive side of human experience. "The Cormorants of Andvær" was first published in *Trold* (Trolls) in 1891–2, a two-volume collection of troll stories, animal fables, and fantasies representative of Lie's later authorship and its exploration of human psychology, mysticism, and spiritualism. This collection combines folkloristic material and the simple form of the fairy tale with deeply psychological characterizations and complex symbolism. "The Cormorants of Andvær" has

been referred to as an inverted tale of Eros and Psyche that shows erotic love as a natural and abiding element and source of spiritual commitment.

Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866–1900), like Jonas Lie, was most interested in a subjective presentation of the irrational sides of human nature, and the atmosphere of his texts is often more important than the action or the dialogue. Known primarily as the major poet of fin-de-siècle Norway, Obstfelder wrote in the style of French Symbolists such as Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, and is considered an important precursor to Norwegian modernism. "Liv" which was first published in *Nyt tidsskrift* (New Journal) in 1894, and later in the collection *To novelletter* (Two Short Stories) in 1895, is representative of Obstfelder's interest in erotic obsession and modern alienation as it randomly explores the anguish of a sensitive lover and his search for a spiritual home in a hostile world.

The essence of love is opposed to a bourgeois understanding of love and marriage in Hans E. Kinck's (1865–1926) "White Anemones" which was first published in *Flaggermus-vinger: Eventyr vestfra* (Bat Wings; Tales from the West) in 1895. This collection was Kinck's first endeavor in the genre and is widely accepted as the best of the twelve short story collections he published. A master of the short story genre, Kinck writes lyrical tales rich in symbolism that are influenced by painting and folklore. His stories reveal a sense of harmony between nature and internal emotions, often shown in the conflicting cultures of the rural and urban middle-classes. Characteristic of the Neo-Romantic period there is an emphasis on unconscious experience, in particular with regard to eroticism, and external reality is seen as a distortion of the hidden world of the psyche. In this tale of a brief encounter between Gjertrud and the minister's son, Gjertrud's appreciation of the mysterious beauty of the summer night is emblematic of her tacit understanding of the complexities of love.

Tanya Thresher