Tardy Awakening

and Other Stories

Steen Steensen Blicher

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PREFACE

This slim volume is intended for use in the instruction of Nordic literature in English-speaking countries. WITs is grateful to *Dansk Litteraturinformationscenter* for a grant that made it possible to remunerate the two translators for their taxing quests to convey Blicher's subtle prose into English. Charles Spetland and Frankie and Jole Shackelford deserve mention for their apt comments on the translations of "The Three Holliday Eves" and "The Hosier."

Translations of classics remain controversial; shall the translator attempt to retain the syntax of an age that revelled in elaborate sentence structure and what now seems to be overlong paragraphs or alleviate the prose for the modern-day reader by modernizing those aspects of the text. It seems that some modernizing of the text is in place, as well as in the punctuation, as long as the wording of the text is not compromised.

WITS wishes, finally, to thank Povl Christensen for permission to reproduce his woodcut on the cover.

TARDY AWAKENING

(ORIGINAL TALE)

I remember no death that has aroused a greater sensation than that of my friend of many years Doctor L. in R. People stopped one another on the street, rushed about from one house to another with questions: "Have you heard? Do you know about it? What could the reason be? Could he have done it in delirium?" and so on. He was very courteous, a generally loved and respected man, an excellent doctor with a wide practice, and—so it seemed—a happily married man and the father of six beautiful children: of whom the sons, the two eldest, were launched on their way in life; the oldest daughter was married to a fine public servant; the next oldest was newly confirmed; and the two youngest were 10 and 12 years old. In addition, Doctor L. was wealthy, kept a hospitable house, and was always a cheerful and pleasant man on social occasions. He had reached his forty-eighth year and had never been ill.

Suddenly it was rumored that he had become unwell. His patients waited a whole day in vain. People asked about him, people came to visit him—he received no one; it was said either that the doctor was sleeping or that the doctor was not well enough to see anyone. The town's other doctor—though not really called in—was at least permitted in. When he was asked about Doctor L.'s condition, he shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and declared that he did not know what the illness was. Medicine was something Doctor L. wouldn't at all use. I, his pastor, was the only one whom he had with him daily and lengthily. He didn't like seeing the children; when any of them came in, he turned toward the wall. He lay thus for eight days; on the ninth he shot himself.

Since the other doctor declared that Doctor L. had killed himself in a fit of delirium, he was honorably buried. I would have spoken a few words over his grave, but grief quickly caused my voice to break, and my tears scarcely allowed me to utter the words for the graveside ceremony.

I learned from him before his death the secret cause for his taking that frightful step. However what then was a secret could not remain one for long, since five people were sharing it; one, driven by jealousy and justifiable wrath, was not strong enough to hide the story of a crime, which might rather have been buried with the unfortunate victim and presented only before the judgement seat of He Who is eternally just.

What at that time stole sinisterly around as but a rumor passed from mouth to mouth can now be confided to paper, with the omission of the names of those concerned, for, of them, there are still living but three of Doctor L.'s children, who moreover are dwelling abroad, and his widow—the main character in that tragedy.... But I will start my story somewhat further back.

It was precisely five-and-twenty years before that distressing catastrophe that, as a graduate in theology, I accepted a home-tutoring position in R., where the school was then in ill repute. Shortly after my arrival, L. and I first met each other and did so in not exactly the most friendly way. He had shortly before established himself there in town as a practicing physician. We encountered each other at a ball. I was but a year older than he, merry and frivolous, an able and passionate dancer. I soon discovered among the ladies the best dancer, who in addition was incontrovertibly the most beautiful. Yet I must admit that she made the greatest impression on me by that first attribute. I asked her for one of the then-fashionable dances and received an agreeable curtsy. I was to lead the dance and, with a clap of my hands, had just given the sign to begin when L., whom I had never seen before, stepped over to my partner, bowed, and reminded her that she had promised him that dance. Miss W. blushed and begged his pardon for having believed that it was the next to which she had agreed; "but if my escort permits it," she added, "we could of course still trade dances."

"By no means!" answered L. rather spitefully; "I shall resign myself and accept being no. 2, all the more since I am surely but a poor dancer in comparison with this gentleman."

"Who dances better has nothing to do with it," said I, "but if you are not pleased with my partner's proposal, I ask that we may now be allowed to begin—everyone is waiting for the quadrille."

He stood right between the two of us. "Both begin and end," he answered even more sarcastically and stepped aside. When I concluded the quadrille, I saw him standing at the farthest end with one of the most awkward figures that was to be found at the ball, and I noticed that in the dance-chain he would not give my partner his hand. She smiled, scarcely noticeably, at me, and I believed that I felt a slight pressure on my fingers. The fellow was jealous, that was obvious. I thought he must have other rights than those that are given by the conventions of the ballroom. When the dance was over, I therefore went over to him and asked his pardon for my curt response. That address called forth a polite reply, and we soon clinked our punch glasses together to drink to becoming more closely acquainted.

I later danced once more with Miss W. When I thanked her at the end and perhaps with some warmth kissed her hand, I received the second pressure of her hand and returned it. I can confirm that neither my heart nor my senses were in the least moved thereby; it was only my vanity that found itself to be pleasantly flattered. Formerly, of course, in the heat of a dance and the tumult of joy, I had received such secret signs from a beautiful girl's hand, but I also knew that such an often unwitting expression of a tender and happy heart's emotion was just as fleeting as the greeting two wanderers passing by each other give and forget in one and the same moment. But when, a couple of months afterward, I learned that Miss W. had already then been L.'s secret fiancée, I placed in my remembrance a *Nota Bene* by those pressures of the hand. A free and unattached girl can dare the like—and yet she dares more than she perhaps realizes or suspects—but when a betrothed maid allows herself such a thing, she appears to be a coquette, and if she is a married woman, she will be seen by any not completely inexperienced cavalier for what she either is or will become—a whore.... Yet that was the first and last time I noticed anything suspect about Miss W., and since I was witness to her decent and respectable character and behavior, both as a maid and as a wife, I began to believe that I had been mistaken both about the meaning of the pressure of her touch and about her, someone who possibly did not even know that she gave such touches.

I have the peculiar, indeed often sorrowful experience, substantiated by all too many examples, that the first impression a human face—or, better, countenance—makes on me is reliable, is a keen insight into the soul, an exact glimpse of such a person's true character. I have often blamed myself for what I myself viewed as a fancy; I have often punished myself for my unmotivatedly strict judgements and in secret made amends to someone secretly offended when I afterwards saw behavior or action quite the opposite of that which a first impression had caused me to expect, and above all I did so when I saw not only quite another character, but quite another face as well. And yet—alas!—with grief I must acknowledge that in time commonsense reasoning sooner or later was shamed by my unwitting flight of fancy. It wasn't so much the touch of Miss W.'s hand as the first glance at her face that whispered to me: this lovely girl is not meant for just one man. In her eyes there was neither sweet yearning nor fiery invitation, neither tender concession nor great inquisitiveness; her smile was neither sweet nor roguish, and even less was it cheeky; her straight, completely beautiful figure's movements had nothing luxuriant about them, nothing that betrayed a voluptuousness of the senses, and yet there lay in that gentle, passionless face something enigmatic, something veiled; it seemed to me to

hide a deep, terrible mystery or, rather, to warn of a crime not yet conceived in thought, one that the future would first bring to light. After the passage of 25 years, I was frightfully reminded of that presentiment, so long forgotten.

If vampires were other than the miscarriages of an unbridled imagination, then I must have seen one of those creatures—outwardly living, inwardly lifeless, bodies without souls, lumps of flesh without hearts. I knew her as an eighteen-year-old virgin, as spouse and mother; I saw her in the ranks of the dancing and the praying, with cards in her hand, and with an infant nursing at her breast, at her daughter's wedding and by her husband's corpse; but she was always herself: gentle, calm, attentive, and in full control of herself. I have seen her recently—she is now not far from fifty—but she is nearly unchanged, enjoys blooming health and an always even, always undisturbed cheerfulness. The darkest days of the year (while I was living in R. after that unfortunate event) were for me the two in which I had to give her the sacrament. In my sermons I had sometimes tried to shake her conscience awake, but there was nothing to waken. If these pages should come to her eyes, I am certain that she could read them without dropping a stitch in her knitting or doing a single one wrong in her sewing.

But I am getting too far ahead in the story; I will go back again.

The acquaintance so sourly begun between L. and me continued apace and soon became a friendship that only death was powerful enough to dissolve. Three months after that ball, he confided in me that he was, and even then had been, secretly betrothed to Miss W. It struck me; I remembered the touch of her hand and asked him—however without revealing my suspicions—if he had taken counsel not only of his heart but also of his mind? If he knew her? And if he was convinced that she both would and could make him happy? His answer was the outpouring of a loving heart. He assured me that she loved just as tenderly, just as uprightly as he, but, in addition, she knew how to control herself so thoroughly that no one had ever guessed her preference; that control was so much the more necessary since her strict and hardhearted father would undeniably have broken her connection to a young person without a permanent position by which to earn his bread. As soon as L. got such a position, he would propose and didn't doubt his receiving her parents' consent.

A half year later the district doctor employed in R. died; L. became his successor, and soon afterward *Elise W.*'s blissful husband. I have never seen a happier person than he; he was nearly wild with pure delight; he could neither sit nor stand long in one place; that sweet restlessness chased him here and there, and at last—as soon as it became

just somewhat possible—back again into the fairy's enchanted circle. His patients during those honeymoon days—which became weeks and months—received only short visits and short prescriptions, but in contrast the most consoling and happy prospects, for in that period no illnesses were fatal; he was the master of both them and death. It is quite true; I remember it very well: his cures were all fortuitous; I almost believe that he cured with his happy face and brisk talk. His wife also seemed to be quite happy, but her happiness carried the mark of restraint; the wife was fully like the sweetheart, and the bridal bed had not caused any apparent change in her.

Once when he had described to me his blissfulness in lyrical terms, I could not refrain from wishing that she might share in that bliss to an equal degree. "*Wilhelm*!" he whispered, "*die holde Sitsamkeit bey Tage*"; there he stopped, lay the one hand over his heart and the fingertips of the other on his mouth, and looked elatedly up toward heaven.

"Fine, fine!" I said smiling and never demanded any further explanation. Still it appeared to me often doubtful that under that calm, mirror-smooth surface there was to be found any particular feeling; if there was any warmth in that beautiful body, it seemed to me to have to be—if that weren't a contradiction—what I would call a cold fire, or even only a dull ember that could never blaze up to a flame and perhaps could just as rarely be put out.

Eight months after the wedding *Elise* gave her husband, who was intoxicated with happiness, their first son. There was a high old time at the christening party. It was precisely in that period of our social lives when Phoebus and Bacchus were inseparable guests at every get-together, since there was always the effect of a mighty interplay between them and an irresistible influence exercised on all their adorers: the goblet had to be initiated with song, and the song was concluded with toasts. The last was for me; at the end of the party I was presented with my letter of advowson to the curacy in R. Two years later the pastor of the parish made room for me, and I then married my *Henriette*, to whom I had been betrothed from my earliest university days. We kept regular and continually very friendly company with the L.s.

His wife had given birth to their second son and mine to the first when a third family stepped into our social alliance; Lieutenant H. was stationed in the regiment garrisoned in R. He was one of the most amiable and cultured officers I have known and was married to a woman who was beautiful, wise, and cheerfulness itself.

The families of the Doctor and Lieutenant (or Captain, for he advanced quickly) lived in houses that were side by side; I, just across from that of the former. Therefore, among ourselves, we called our

closed little society the triangle; L. was the right angle; H., the acute angle H.L.C.; and I, the other, H.C.L. We customarily gathered in one of the angles every Wednesday evening; but out of turn L. and H. often gave larger parties, which were then called circles, for both men were wealthy: the first had inherited a significant amount from his father-in-law; the other, from his own parents.

We lived in a state that often seemed to me to be too fortunate to last. The Captain lacked only children, but he then had in their place an excess of mirth.

We three men indisputably had the three most beautiful and best wives in R; however, their characters and ways were extremely different, and precisely that incongruity—I believe—was the reason for the perfect harmony among them. My wife was quiet, friendly, and timid; she seemed to be subordinate to the other two, despite her basically having the deepest feeling and the clearest mind. Mrs. H. was always jolly, full of fun and whims, and she therefore always spoke for them. Mrs. L. was quiet, but her whole being had something impressive about it, something that suggested a greater superiority of mind, which, however, she never sought to assert; therefore, she was treated by the others like an older sister, although she was both the youngest and least cultured.

If similarity in character were a prerequisite for marital bliss, we six people ought to have been paired differently; there would have had to be a total interchange of partners. My steady temperament, my natural staidness, which with the dignity of my position became an even more solid attitude, would then have united me with Mrs. L. Her merry, open, dashing, and spirited spouse would have had the most similar partner in Mrs. H. And my pious, sensitive, meek wife should have been selected as the Captain's companion on life's way.

Captain H. possessed actually nothing more martial than his uniform; in civil dress he looked like a modest, bashful young secondary-school graduate. Not that he wasn't a clever officer; that was a reputation he had throughout the regiment, from high and low. At muster his company was always the most efficient, although the fellows were better acquainted with his purse than with his stick, which just dangled at his wrist for the sake of appearances. His bravery, propriety, and noble way of thinking were recognized and appreciated by everyone. In conflicts he was often chosen as arbitrator, and in that capacity he hindered many a duel. In short: he was a quite appealing man and far more dangerous to the hearts of women than he himself seemed to realize.

How we all longed for Wednesday! We gathered at teatime, dedicated a couple of hours to music, in which we all—but for Mrs. L.—took a lively and not insignificant part. After the evening meal, we three

gentlemen played a serious game of *ombre*, and the ladies had a private party, which was enlivened by Mrs. H.'s caprices and hearty laughter. More than once she had caused a *bete* or hindered a complete *codille* and chased us from the gaming table over to our fun-loving wives.

A year or perhaps more ran on in that way without anything's disrupting our pleasant harmony and common merriment. But all at once a noticeable change took place in the Captain; he was often distracted and made huge mistakes both in the music and at *ombre*; at times he was somber and terse—at times given to hilarity and unusual talkativeness, although his conversation was at the same time quite disconnected. My wife made me aware of that odd transformation and hinted to me that she feared that all was not right between him and Mrs. L. I shushed her and strove to calm her in that regard, but...I knew more than she. Against my will I had been a witness to a scene that was never wiped from my memory and that for a long time gave me enough to rack my brains over.

Preparing for a masquerade had long been discussed, and I believe that Mrs. L. was the one who had first suggested the idea. Finally everything was arranged: masks and costumes were obtained, and the evening was determined—it would be held at the club. Since I could not take part in that diversion myself, I had agreed to a game of cards with three of the town's other *ombre* players. Later in the evening I was beset by a headache, which is not unusual for me. I got someone to take my cards and would take a nap as I commonly did. I therefore bade the host to show me to a quiet, out-of-the-way room, where, it was to be hoped, a half-hour's rest would drive away my rheumatic attack. I got such a room, so far from the ballroom that the slight sound of music and noise only helped to lull me into sleep. I sought and found it in an armchair that stood in a corner by the window.

I had not slept very long before I was awakened by the creaking of the door. Two people came into the little room; I could hear that, but I saw no one, for it was quite dark. It seemed to be a male and a female, but both were masked; that I noted from the indistinctness of their voices.

"Well! and what is it you want, my sweet friend?" said he.

"Dearest," lisped a woman's voice, "you are so divine tonight."

"But, wife!" said he again, "whatever are you thinking? Do we need to steal away to meet each other as if we were trespassing?"

No answer—the sound of a kiss let me guess that they had unmasked. I sat as if on pins and needles; what should I do? Neither would my headache, which had suddenly become even more intense through that sudden awakening, allow me to come to a decision. The door creaked again, but whether they went or stayed, I didn't know.

Everything became quiet, and an argument outside in the yard was all that I heard. I sat like that for some time and listened in vain; I tried again to fall asleep. But the uproar in the yard became worse. Someone came out with a lantern or a candle that cast its light through the window and onto the sofa opposite. Unseen myself, I saw Captain H. there in Mrs. L.'s arms. A frightful mistake had thus taken place, but if it were planned by either part, I was unable then to decide.

The Captain leapt up with a shout of anguish; Mrs. L. sank back and—as in despair and shame—hid her face in both hands. It was again dark.

"God forgive us both!" he said; "eternal silence and—if it were possible—eternal forgetfulness!"

It seemed to me that she was sobbing. He let out a painful sigh and left; shortly afterward she followed, and I was alone.

I stayed there for a long time, quite confused and stunned by what I had so unwittingly experienced. When I again stepped into the ballroom, the unmasking had just taken place. The Doctor and the Captain were clad quite the same, namely, as Don Juan. Mrs. H. had on a Turkish costume; Mrs. L. had definitely been wearing the same costume when I saw her on the sofa; now she was a shepherdess—to me it was both striking and suspect. The Doctor was in a sparkling mood; he teased Mrs. H. and maintained that she had met him alone in the hall and had embraced him thinking that he was the Captain; the latter was standing with them and tried to laugh, but the attempt was unsuccessful and ended in a forced cough. Mrs. L.'s face didn't change in the least; she smiled as calmly as she usually did at all her lady friends' playful remarks. I began to distrust my own eyes: if she were guilty, how was it then possible for her to maintain such a—I might say—hellish calm? The Turkish woman in that room could surely have been another who resembled her; my headache had perhaps robbed my senses' of their sharpness; and so on. Briefly put: I had nearly won back my belief in her innocence when my wife—a keen observer—said to me in confidence sometime afterward that she feared "her earlier uttered suspicion was not quite without basis." It was readily apparent that, since the masquerade, there had occurred an essential change in the Captain: he was often preoccupied and sunken deep in thought; he had lost his usual earlier cheerfulness and replaced it with an odd mirth that burst out spasmodically and often without reasonable cause. The reason for that change—qualms over his undeniable wrongdoing—was of course well known to me, but I kept silent about it to my wife. I sought to defend Mrs. L. but didn't enter upon any explanation concerning the Captain.

"Dear wife!" said I, "be careful about suspecting someone! That is quite unnatural for you.... Do you know something? Have you seen something?"

"Only a single glance," answered she, "but it was a glance that caused him to blush and me to pale; we must therefore both have understood it! It was fast, like a distant lightening flash in a cloud at night, but one clear enough to give light. The two of them were alone in the room, and, with my face turned toward a mirror, I saw it."

I shook my head, as if I didn't believe her and requested silence on the subject: "We won't even talk about the matter between ourselves," said I, "for how easily can you not make a mistake in your surmisings; after all, a glance can have several meanings—why, then, assume the worst?"

She also shook her head, and then that subject was not brought up—for 20 whole years.

In the meantime my wife and I long continued our secret and quite solitary observations, but nothing—not even the least thing—was discovered. After awhile the Captain rewon, not his previous cheerfulness, but nevertheless a certain bearing in his character that had a more serious—perhaps duller—streak. Of course he was also becoming older each day, and to be sure, the sweet hope for a father's joys were fading more and more for him. Time, which rolls us along on our course, wears away all our youthful feelings' sharp corners, and we unnoticeably reach either firmness or flexibility, strength or stupor, until after awhile all passions leave us in order to begin their game with younger and softer hearts.

The triangle remained undisturbed, the circles, too. We gave our concerts, we played our *ombre*. Our children grew up, increased our voices in the former and took our places in the latter when the newspaper demanded a share of our attention.

The Doctor's two oldest sons had become graduates in medicine and surgery; mine in theology; his oldest daughter was married, and mine engaged, when the volcano, which so long and so secretly had smoldered in the dark, burst the crust of its concealment, and by its unexpected eruption destroyed the earthly bliss of two families.

I had come home from a journey that had occupied several days, when my wife received me with the sorrowful news that the Major was very ill. I threw off my traveling clothes and rushed over there. He was asleep. His wife, with a worried look and clasped hands, stood by the head of his bed; a pained smile was her greeting to me. I approached quietly and whisperingly asked about the dear sick man's condition. She simply shook her head and continued to look at him through her gath-

ering tears. His sleep was restless: his lips and fingers were in constant movement, and his eyes rolled ceaselessly beneath their lids.

I sat down to await his awakening. In the meantime his wife's aunt told me the cause and course of his illness: "Three days ago he had caught a cold at the military drills, had become hot, and had drunk cold water; shortly after his arrival home he had felt ill, had to take to his bed, had constantly grown worse and worse, and every afternoon had a fever attack. Our friend the Doctor, who visited him several times a day, was reassuring all right—as he always was—but had still looked somewhat alarmed." Mrs. H. then gave her a sign to look after something or other, and she went out.

Shortly afterward, the Major awakened; his glance was distraught; it was immediately noticeable that he was not conscious of his actions. He looked at his wife and, terrified, threw himself toward the back of the bed:

"*Elise*!" he began (the Major's wife was named *Charlotte*), "Elise! what do you want of me? That's enough now...; it's all too much. If the Doctor or my wife found you here in bed with me, what would they say? Go! Go! and let me be!" He stretched out both hands before him, as if to shove someone back.

The glance of the Major's wife met mine...; she changed color. The sick man continued to fantasize: "It was an unfortunate whim with that Turkish costume; I certainly didn't know that you weren't my wife." Mrs. H. listened with anxious attention; I clearly saw that she didn't grasp his meaning.... I understood him all too well; the scene at the masquerade was vivid in my memory.

I went over to his poor wife and grasped her hand: "Compose yourself, dear lady!" I said; "Your husband's illness should now be at its height...; he is raving." She answered only with a deep sigh.

"Hush! hush!" he whispered. "We can be heard down below here. Why, you know, *Elise*, that this storeroom is just above the mangling room, and what if someone discovered the secret door in the summerhouse...." The Major's wife desperately clutched the bedpost; she paled..., and her face underwent a terrible change.

"My dear lady!" said I, acting as if I noticed only the one reason for her agitation, "wouldn't it be right to send someone for the Doctor? His presence would perhaps calm us—this crisis is surely not as dangerous as it seems." She answered with a nod and went quickly out.

The sick man's eyes fell closed...; he slumbered, but uneasily. I looked out into the yard: Mrs. H. was hurrying with quick steps over to the mangling room. The military equipment storeroom was actually just above it, and the summerhouse in the Doctor's garden, which was two

stories high and built of planks, immediately adjoined it...; a frightful suspicion gripped me and was not far from becoming a certainty. During summers I had often drunk tea and played *ombre* in that same summerhouse and well remembered that one could very clearly hear when anyone was inside the equipment storeroom. The patient's fantasies were undoubtedly based upon a sad truth.

While Mrs. H. was out—quite certainly, after the obtained intimations, to make investigations—the Doctor came back on his own. With an alarmed look, he walked over to the bed, observed the sick man, took his pulse, looked worriedly at me, and shook his head.

The Major awoke...; he stared fixedly and in horror at the Doctor.

"What!" he burst out, "what does this mean? You made me think that your husband had journeyed to see someone ill out in the country and would be away tonight, and here he stands before me in the flesh. Why would you fool me? Why would you give the agreed upon signal? Didn't you fasten the red bow to the summerhouse curtain? Go! Go and sleep with your own husband! Your daring goes all too far, and a pitcher can be taken so often to the well for water that at last it is taken home without a handle."

I stood as if on hot coals. I pulled the Doctor with me over to the window; I wanted to prevent him from hearing and noticing more.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"He is fantasizing greatly," answered he; "the illness is not taking a turn for the better."

"His notions are purely fallacious," I continued.

"Oh, no!" shouted the Major, who had heard what I had said; "I know quite well what I'm saying, and I declare to you once and for all, Mrs. L., it must now be over between us! It is a sin against both your husband and my wife, and neither of them deserves it from us."

Then the Doctor began to take notice; he cast a quick glance out at the summerhouse, the topmost window of which one could see from the sick man's room. I followed his eyes, and...behind the window stood the Major's wife clenching her upraised hands, but at the same moment she also disappeared. Heavens! So she must have found the secret passageway that the fever-ridden man had mentioned. He again dropped off to sleep.

The Doctor paled. I grabbed his hand and whispered: "For God's sake! Dear friend, you would surely never pay attention to what a person says in delirium? Why, in such a paroxysm of fever a patient can imagine the most unreasonable things in the world."

He looked at me pensively but did not answer. In his glance lay something that could be construed as, "You don't mean what you're

saying." At that moment the Major's wife came in. She was flushed...; her visage expressed nearly the same frenzy as the sick man's. The Doctor walked over to meet her with calm composure, consoled her, and asked a few questions concerning the patient. She answered them cursorily and carelessly; her uneasy glance passed back and forth between them. However a stream of tears soon eased her anguished heart; she rushed over to the bed, threw herself down on her knees, and pressed the sick man's hand against her breast.

"O, God!" she prayed hastily and softly, "grant him life just this once, so that he can accept my forgiveness if he is guilty and my amends if I am wronging him." (I really heard only half the words, but I could add the rest; however, they all missed the Doctor's ears, for he was not paying attention.) "Indeed, my unhappy one," she continued and pressed her forehead against his hand, "you are the seduced, but she..." at that she leapt up and turned to the Doctor. I grasped her hand and squeezed it hard.

"At this moment," said I, "it is up to the Doctor alone to speak; dampen your fear and your pain...if you truly value your husband's life!" I added so softly that he couldn't hear it. She composed herself and kept back the pernicious words that already hovered on her lips. Hers was one of those fortunate temperaments that combined with hot passions a quick observation and a bright mind, which the first were never quite able to cloud; her heart was tender, but in no way weak. Alas! Yet it was not strong enough to withstand the far more dangerous trial to which it was subjected soon afterward.

I was sent for; I had to leave on official business. She followed me out, and there I sought with all my power to calm her with regard to her husband's obscure fantasies. "Since I, too, have been a witness to them, you will not consider it as meddling in marital relations for me to speak of them. I can observe with a calmer and more certain glance that which could easily blind and confuse a loving eye. Verisimilitude is not always verity, and many other possible contingencies can be found than the worst. For Heavens's sake! Use your otherwise always so clear mind! Spare yourself and your ailing husband! And above all don't let yourself show the least thing in front of the Doctor! There might otherwise occur a double misfortune and that perhaps from just a mistake." Sighing, she pressed my hand and went back into the sickroom.

I had much to do; my absence had caused business to pile up; that was in the forenoon, and I was not free until on toward evening. I wanted again to go over to the Major's but decided after all first to speak with the Doctor in his own house, in order to hear his real and unadulterated opinion of our friend's illness.

His wife was out in the country with their now grown-up daughter, the next oldest; the two younger ones were invited out in town. The maid said to me that the Doctor was in his study. I went up there.

He was standing with his face toward the door and with his back against his escritoire; he was wadding up some papers in his left hand and clenching his right convulsively against his breast; his face was that of cold, dumb despair, for which entry is closed to both hope and fear. My heart turned to ice; I immediately saw that everything had to have been discovered, and suspicion ripened into certainty. He looked fleetingly at me, as if he didn't know me.

How shall consolation be able to find entry to a heart that misfortune's winter storm has encompassed with its icy shell? I lifted up my hands in prayer, to that Lord whose mercy begins there where hope ends.

I know of nothing more difficult, no more miserable task than that of consoling those who have most need of consolation, that is, they who are unable to console themselves. To say to someone whose whole earthly bliss all at once has been destroyed, "Be a man! Fight! *tu contra audentius ito*!" is the same as calling to someone who has fallen and has broken a leg, "Come over here to me; then I will get you up!" Or to one who, without being able to swim, has fallen into a rushing stream, "Use your strength! You can surely save yourself if you only will."

Some console with the hope the unfortunate one has lost; others with time, the pain of which he is not able to tolerate; and still others act like Job's friends—who might much better have kept to their silent compassion and sympathetic tears—since they hint at God's punishment for past overt and covert sins; instead of pouring balm upon the wound, they drip poison therein. Verily! The sufferer can answer them in the bitterness of a heart rent asunder: "I have heard many such things as these: miserable comforters *are* ye all. Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye *do*: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you."

When aching constricts the breast, when it cannot even be gotten off one's chest through one's lips, what can then thaw a frozen heart if it is not a sympathetic friend's silent tears? Mine ran in a flood and wet his hand, which I had drawn from his own bosom to mine. Then, in that unhappy man, too, there opened those springs through which both sorrow and happiness empty themselves; he leaned his brow against my breast and cried like a child.

But not for long; he again jerked his head up, and the tears returned to their secret caverns. "Here! here!," he yelled, as with wild vehemence he pressed the papers into my hand, "they are prescriptions,

legibly written—clearly understandable—specific remedies against fictive fancies. love, belief in womanly virtue, friendship...," and he threw himself on a chair, gnashed his teeth, and let out some sounds that resembled laughter.

While I read the papers—letters, the content of which shall be reported below—he stared unceasingly at me, with what I might call envious glances and such a repellent, bittersweet smile as that often seen long after on the faces of those who have frozen to death.

The letter that lay on top and, just like the other two, was addressed of course to the Major but had neither date nor other signature than "Your ••i•• (Elise)" was undoubtedly the latest and went like this:

> Yes, my beloved, I cannot, I will not conceal from you that beneath my all too weak heart I bear a secret token of our secret love. My conscience accuses me of a wrong against my husband, but love knows but one wrong—unfaithfulness to the beloved; it has but one duty—to do everything for that precious object of affection, to devote to it both body and soul; yes, if it is demanded, to sacrifice both of them. *Frans*, you were childless; it offended my heart! If I have forfeited my bliss in the beyond, I did it to give you joy here. Now, beloved! I have nothing more to give you.

The other was obviously written soon after that unfortunate masquerade. "Done is done," she wrote,

> but fate, dim fate itself is that which, without our knowledge and will. has brought us together. It has itself united us...so who will now divide us? I feel it, I know it; since that night I am yours forever: I have received a new heart, a new soul. I am completely changed; my thoughts, my wishes, my longing have but one goal—you, you beloved, adored man! Oh, hate me not! Scorn me not! It is not sensuality that draws me to you; no, my love shall be pure, but I must speak to you, to pour out my anguished heart, to make amends for a wrong for which fate alone must answer. I don't know what I am writing.... I will be waiting for you at 11 o'clock this evening—my husband is in the country—take pity on
>
> Your unhappy ••i••

"Secrecy," went the third, but in sequence assumably the middle one,

> is the life principle in love; without that the myrtle lacks both root and top. If only anyone knew that I loved you, if only you were my legally espoused husband, I would indeed believe that the impossible could be realized. But what a temple for our secret joys! An attic full of soldiers' coats and tow cloth!
>
> This evening my husband journeys to P. At 11 o'clock all are in bed except she who awaits you with a burning heart. The sun first rises at 7 o'clock. Ah! It will be a long time before I say, "*Frantz! Frantz! Steh auf! der Morgen graut.*"

When I was finished with the reading and the last letter fell from my shaking hand, L. arose, grabbed me by the shoulders, and asked with a penetrating look, "Well, good preacher man?"

"How," I asked, "have these letters come into your hands? Are they really authentic?"

"As authentic," he cried, "as *cortex peruviana selecta*, but not quite so beneficial to one's health, and I have them straight from Mr. Paramour himself."

(The unhappy Mrs. H. later told me how it had happened. When the Doctor had come again in the afternoon to look after the sick man, the latter again began to fantasize and did so still more clearly than before; at last he had ordered her—whom he constantly assumed to be the Doctor's wife—to bring him a certain drawer from the escritoire; in the drawer was a false bottom; by pressure on a peg it had sprung open, and the letters come to view; he had hastily handed them to her with the words, "Here, *Elise*, are your letters! Tear them up or burn them!" Mrs. H. tore up some other papers, went over behind his bed, and read the notes. No longer able to control herself, she had turned them over to the Doctor, and then the die was cast for that cruelly deceived man.)

"My poor, pitiable friend!" sighed I, "what decision will you make now? What will you do?"

He let go of me and walked around the room with quick steps and clenched hands. "What will I do?" he repeated many times.

"First of all," I again began speaking, "these damning letters surely ought to be destroyed?"

"Destroyed?" he yelled, "these letters?"; he snatched them quickly to him; "What! these sweet, blessed tokens of love!" he clutched them with a lover's ardor to his breast. "No, Pastor! I cannot part with them; they shall accompany me into the grave and from the grave up there where all such bonded pledges one day shall be redeemed."

"Oh, my friend, my friend," said I, "were they not already registered there long ago? Why do you want to be her accuser? Neither revenge nor judgement belongs to you, but to a God whose justice is transcendent to our quickly dying passions."

He stopped, long looked up at heaven, and thereupon gave them back. "Here," he said calmly, "keep them! Destroy them! But promise me first that, when I am dead and gone, you will show them to her!"

I promised it but added, "Why, dear Doctor, do you want to talk about death? Your blow has been hard, frightful; you are losing a wife whom you love—an unworthy, contemptible creature—but do you not still have your children?"

He looked fixedly at me and roared out a wild laugh: "Whose children? My children? ...no, the Major's children...."

"The two oldest," I broke in, "were, after all, born before he came to town, and no one, with merely a fleeting glance, can be in doubt about the identity of their father."

"And the others?" he asked, smiling bitterly, "which of them, how many of them are mine? Haven't you read the letter, and doesn't it seem to you that they are the spit and image of him? ...oh...!" he struck his brow with his fist and again walked around in the room with heavy tread.

I was silent; I didn't immediately know what to answer, for when I thought about it, I found that he wasn't far wrong, chiefly as far as the married daughter was concerned. Her similarity to the Major was unmistakable. "Fantasies," I at last said, somewhat slowly and half in doubt, "can also cause..." "Hah!" he cut in, "we don't need to use fantasy in this case; after all, the whore confesses it herself."

At that moment the two youngest daughters came in and hurried over to embrace him. But he then slowly stepped as far back as he could go, put out his hands to ward them off, and stared at them with horror and disgust in all his features. The poor little girls grew afraid, trembled, burst into tears, and threw their arms around each other's necks; they feared they had done something wrong. I took them in my arms, and my tears fell on their golden locks. Then his hardness was also dissolved into compassion; the old tenderness returned and chased—for awhile—doubt's demon out. He sat down, took them on his knees, and caressed them after turn; the little ones then wept with happiness.

I believed that I dared leave him in that more desirable mood, in order to take care of my unfinished business. I left him to his good heart's more tender feelings and the Merciful's mighty workings of grace.

When I visited him on the following morning, he lay in bed unclad, but awake. The next youngest, the twelve-year-old daughter, sat with him and wanted to press upon him a cup of tea. He refused it and looked at both of us somberly, coldly, and as if nearly estranged from us. With entreating expression, I pointed at the little one, and then he took the cup, put it to his mouth, and tasted; but, as if it had been bitter medicine, he again let it rest on the down comforter. In order to get the

girl away, I asked her to bring lunch and then sought by friendly address to open anew the poor man's constricted heart.

He pushed the cup from him and folded his hands. Either he didn't hear me, or he didn't understand me. "My life," he softly and slowly said after awhile, "has reverted to the One who gave it...; the poison is working; I have emptied the chalice to the last drop! And for me there is no other antidote to be found than death. I have awakened from a long, sweet dream; I have gotten—as it often happens to the insane—a moment of clarity, the approaching dissolution's certain harbinger. O, my God, my God, only take me away from here before that serpent returns!" He closed his eyes, as if he feared the sight of her. "I loved so tenderly, so faithfully," he continued after a pause, "with my whole heart, soul, and mind; for twenty years I imagined I was dwelling in an earthly paradise but wandered on a volcano, which was secretly burning beneath my feet...; that thin shell, which divided heaven and hell, has now broken, and I have sunk into the flaming chasm... ; merciful God, let my body be consumed, and take my wretched soul!"

I prayed with him for his strength and patience; I consoled him with God's almighty goodness, with the thought of his two promising sons and of a more tolerable future in separation from that disgraceful person. He gently shook his head: "I can't live in that world," said he, "where she breathes; we can no more share the same sun. Separation from table and bed and house and land of birth—it is all nothing...;light and dark, life and death, time and eternity must lie between us; before that we will not be apart."

The oldest daughter (I unfortunately dare not say *his* daughter) came in with her two-year-old child on her arm. The lass reached out for the assumed grandfather and babbled that appellation which was formerly so sweet to him. With sign of rending inner pain, he turned his face away. The saddened mother put the child down, and tears rolled from her eyes. I had to lead both of them out and draw on all my art and ingenuity to calm the poor woman. I succeeded only in part...; she sensed an imminent misfortune.

As far as my time allowed it, I remained with my unhappy friend, was his guard, attendant, and consoler during the following seven days. I had a heavy duty: to look after him, to prevent all visits, and to calm the children.

The other doctor came unbidden a couple of times, but after awhile, when he was given nothing to do, he stayed away.

I wrote to the sons in Copenhagen; I hoped that their proximity would have a beneficial effect on the poor sufferer...; they came only

early enough to accompany his lifeless body to that longingly desired and violently appropriated resting place.

With each day my friend became more quiet, somber, and taciturn; it seemed probable to me that he was hatching one or another terrible plan.

The eighth day after the sorrowful discovery, the Major passed away; ever since the event he had lain as in a doze and without having regained consciousness. I brought the news to L.; he received it indifferently and said only, "We will soon meet."

The next day Mrs. L. was expected back. I asked her husband what was to be done at her arrival and if it weren't best that she be sent off? He answered that he was completely prepared for her coming and that everything would probably happen as it should. I became suspicious and showed it. With a calm smile he gave me his hand and said, "If I now with certainty have a presentiment of my death, would you then begrudge me the fulfillment of the only wish my broken heart still has left? The chains that bound me to life are loosening link by link...; there is only one left; as soon as I see her, that will break."

There was a double meaning to those words; I ought not have directly assumed the worst. However I continued to point it out, and brought up all the reasoning of common sense and religion. Alas! Common sense accomplishes nothing with a despairing heart, and religion manages only to console him whom it has formerly guided. And Doctor L. had been either too irresponsible or too happy to possess any deep religious feeling. He had indeed belief, but a mild belief that was never tested and strengthened by great anguish or adversities. He was a son of joy, and separated from one who had been his constant companion on life's way, he had to become an easy prey to sorrow—to that most terrible of all passions against which the weak human soul here has to struggle.

I stayed with him until late at night. When I was about to go, he stretched out his arms to me and pressed a farewell kiss on my lips. A couple of tears still shone in his dull eyes, and with his voice nearly breaking he said only these words: "Thanks!...Farewell in the meantime!"

I walked home and lay down half-clothed and with the decision to return to him early next morning, partly to watch over him, partly—if possible—to prevent a meeting between him and his faithless wife, or anyhow at the very least to be a surely quite necessary third party at that same meeting.

But exhausted from the vigil as I was, I slept too long, and none of my family had the heart to disturb that rest. I was awakened by the fearsome message that Doctor L. had shot himself. I rushed over there;

he still lay in that bloody bed with his breast pierced. None of the family was in there, but the other doctor, the mayor, and the maid were. The last had been present when the deed was done. She told that, with the Doctor's permission, she had spelled me in my vigil over him and that his wife, who had been advised of her husband's illness by the oldest daughter, had rushed in to town and at dawn had unexpectedly stepped into his room. As soon as he saw her, he had risen up in his bed; said some words in a language that the maid didn't understand; and thereupon, taking a pistol out from under the down comforter, had fired it off against his breast.

I won't talk about the wretchedness that followed. At the beginning of this account I briefly suggested how the crime of a lascivious and conscienceless woman brought ruin over two families and a sorrow to many others that long and deeply pained them and has never been quite forgotten.

Translated by Faith Ingwersen

THE HOSIER

"The greatest sorrow far or near,
Is to lose the one, you hold most dear."

On occasions when I have roamed out on the great moors where there is only the brown heather around me and the blue sky above me; when I have wandered far from people and the monuments to their earthly trifles here, which after all are only molehills that time or some restless Tamerlane one day will level; when I drifted light of heart, free as the Bedouin whom no house or tightly restricted field pins to a spot, but who possesses *everything he sees*, who is not a dweller, but roams *wherever he wishes*; and when my wide roaming eye glimpsed a house on the distant horizon and thus was rudely interrupted in its easy flight, sometimes there arose—God forgive me this fleeting thought, for it was nothing more—the wish: if only this human dwelling didn't exist! For there lives also pain and grief, there is quarreling, arguing about Mine and Yours! Alas! The carefree desert is both mine and yours, belonging to everyone and to no one.

A forester is said to have proposed razing the whole settlement, planting forests on the residents' fields and in their abandoned villages. The far more brutal thought has occurred to me at times: what if there still had been heather-covered moors, the same as thousands of years ago, undisturbed and untouched by the hands of men! But, as I said before, I did not mean this seriously. For when I was worn out and weary, suffering from heat and thirst, and with painful longing I thought of the Arab's tent and coffee pot—then I thanked God that a heather-thatched house, though miles away, promised me shade and refreshment.

I found myself thus many years ago, on a still and warm September day, far out on this same moor which in the Arabian sense I call my own. No wind moved the blushing heather and the air was thick and drowsy. The distant hills which bounded the horizon seemed to swim like clouds around the vast plain. They assumed many marvelous shapes of houses, towers, castles, people and animals, but all were of an obscure, formless outline, changing unpredictably like dream images:

soon a cabin was transformed into a church, and this in turn to a pyramid; here rose a spire, there sank another; a person became a horse, which in turn became an elephant; here rocked a boat, and there a ship with billowing sails.

For a long while my eyes were diverted in contemplation of these fantastic figures—a panorama which only seamen and inhabitants of the desert have the opportunity to enjoy—when I eventually, feeling tired and thirsty, began to search amongst the many false dwellings for one that was real. I wished fervently to exchange all my magnificent fairy castles for just one human cottage. I succeeded, for soon I discovered an actual farm without spires or towers, whose outline became clearer and sharper the nearer I approached, and which, flanked by stacks of peat, looked much larger than it really was.

The occupants were unknown to me. Their attire was poor, their domestic possessions modest; but I knew that residents of the moor often conceal precious metal in a small unpainted chest or paltry cupboard, and a thick wallet inside a patched coat. Thus upon entering, when my glance fell upon an alcove stuffed full of stockings, I presumed quite right that I had come upon a prosperous hosier. (In parentheses it should be said that I do not know a hosier who is poor.)

An elderly, gray-haired, but still vigorous man arose from the table and offered me his hand with the words: "Welcome! May I ask where my good man hails from?"

One does not take exception to so unrefined and straightforward a question! A heath farmer is as hospitable, but a little more curious than a Scottish laird; and after all, one cannot blame him for wanting to know whom he is hosting. When I had told him who I was and where I had come from, he called to his wife, who soon laid out what she had in the house and urged me to eat and drink, although my hunger and thirst made all such urgings superfluous.

I was in the middle of my meal and engaged in a political discussion with my host, when a young and exceedingly beautiful peasant girl came in, whom I certainly would have described as someone who has escaped from cruel parents and a loathsome marriage, and is a young noble woman in disguise—if her reddened hands and plain peasant speech had not convinced me that no such travesty had taken place. She nodded in a friendly manner, cast a quick glance under the table, went out, and soon came back again with a bowl of milk and bread which she placed on the floor with the comment, "Your dog could perhaps also use something." I thanked her for her consideration. But her attention was directed only to the large dog, whose greedy appetite soon emptied the bowl, and who thanked her in his own way by rubbing against her—and

when she nervously lifted her arm in the air Chaseur misunderstood this motion, rose onto his hind legs and forced the screaming young girl backwards toward the alcove. I called the dog off and explained to her his good intention.

I wouldn't have brought such a trivial incident to the reader's attention except to illustrate this observation: that everything is becoming to a woman of beauty. For this peasant girl in all that she said and did displayed a certain natural grace that could in no way be attributed to calculated coquetry, unless one would call this a natural and inborn instinct.

When she had left the room I asked the couple if she was their daughter. They answered in the affirmative, and added that she was their only child.

"You won't keep her for very long," I said.

"God help us! What do you mean?" asked the father; but a sly smile showed that he quite understood what I meant.

"I imagine," I replied, "that she hardly lacks for suitors."

"Well!" he growled, "Suitors we have enough of. But whether they amount to something, that's what we should talk about. To propose with a pocket watch and silver-plated pipe isn't enough—there's more to driving than saying giddyup!" he continued, propping both his fists on the table and leaning over in order to look out the low window. "If it isn't one of them coming now—a sheep herder who's just crawled out of the heather—ha! One of those fellows who runs around with a few dozen stockings in a knapsack—the dumb dog! Proposing to our daughter with two bulls and two and a half cows—watch out for him! A beggar!"

This outpouring was not directed at me, but the one who was approaching, on whom his glowering stare had focused as he made his way along a heather path toward the farm. He was still far enough away that I had time to ask my host about this young person and learned: that he was a son of their nearest neighbor—who, it should be noted, lived more than a few miles away; that the father owned only a small place for which he still owed the hosier two hundred dalers; that the son had peddled woollen wares for some years, and finally ventured to ask for the lovely Cecil's hand in marriage—but had gotten a flat refusal.

As I listened to this narrative she had come in, and her worried glance, alternating between the father and the wanderer outside, made me guess that she did not share the old man's view of this matter. As soon as the young peddler stepped in the door, she disappeared out another; yet not without a quick, but tender and aching glance.

My host turned toward the man who had just entered, gripping the table top with both hands as if he found it necessary to have support, and answered the young man's "God's peace! and good day!" with a

curt "Welcome!" The man stood for a while letting his eyes wander over the room, and then he extracted from his inner pocket a pipe, from his back pocket a pouch, tapped out the pipe on the stove by his side, and filled it again. All of this proceeded slowly, as if at a measured pace, and my host remained immovable in his assumed position.

The stranger was a very handsome fellow, a genuine son of our Nordic nature, which grows slowly, but with power and tenacity. He was blonde, blue-eyed, ruddy cheeked, with a down-covered chin that had yet to feel the razorblade, even though he was surely twenty years of age. As a peddler he was dressed with more style than a peasant farmer, more even than the rich hosier, in a frock coat and wide breeches, a red striped vest and with a blue flowered cotton kerchief around his neck—he was not an unworthy suitor of the beautiful Cecilia. I was pleased, furthermore, by his gentle and open face that spoke of honesty, patience and perseverance—a main feature of the North Cimbrian national character.

Time passed before anyone would break the silence. Finally it was the host who opened his mouth, inquiring in a slow, cold and indifferent manner, "Where does your travel take you today, Esben?"

Upon being addressed he leisurely lit his pipe, drew on it with long puffs and answered, "No further today, but tomorrow I'm off to Holstein." At that there was another pause, during which Esben looked over the chairs, chose one and sat down.

In the meantime the mother and daughter had entered. The young peddler nodded to them with an unchanged expression of such complete calm that I would have believed that he was quite indifferent to the beautiful Cecilia, if I hadn't known that love in such a breast can be powerful, however still it may seem; that it is not a flame that blazes and sparks, but an ember that warms steadily and long. Cecilia sat down with a sigh at the end of the table and began knitting ardently. Her mother condescended with a low, "Welcome Esben!" from the spinning wheel.

"I suppose that will be for business?" the host now said.

"That may be," answered his guest. "We'll have to see what can be earned in the south. I ask only that you do not hasten to marry Cecil away before I come back, when we can see how my luck has gone."

Cecil blushed but continued to stare at her work. The mother stopped the spinning wheel with one hand, lay the other in her lap and stared stiffly at the speaker. But the father said as he turned toward me, "While the grass grows, the steed starves! How can you demand that Cecil wait for you? You may be gone a long time—it could be that you never return."

"It will be your fault then, Michel Krænsen!" Esben cut in, "But I tell you this: If you should force Cecil to choose another, you will

commit a grave sin against both of us." With that he arose, extended his hand to both of the old folks and bade them a terse farewell. To his sweetheart he said, in a slightly milder and gentler tone, "Farewell Cecil! and thank you for everything! Think well of me if you can—God be with you! And with you all! Farewell!"

He turned toward the door, putting away his pipe, pouch and tinderbox, each piece in its proper pocket, took his walking stick and wandered off without turning once to look back. The old man smiled as before; his wife gave a sigh and put the spinning wheel in motion again; but tears ran down over Cecilia's cheeks.

Here I had the most tempting opportunity to explain the principles that ought to govern parents with respect to their childrens' marriages. I could have reminded them that wealth is not sufficient to ensure wedded bliss, that the heart must also be heard—that everywhere prudence recommends we look more closely at integrity, diligence and competence than at money. I could have pointed out the father's harshness (for the mother appeared at least to be neutral) toward his only daughter. But I knew the peasant too well to waste words on this subject. I knew that wealth counts for everything in this class—and perhaps it is not so different on other levels of society? Furthermore, I knew the farmer's steadfastness, which borders on obstinacy, on this point—and that in arguments of this kind with his superiors he will often yield and act as if he has come around to their view so one is tempted to believe that he is convinced and won over, just when he is even more determined to do as he pleases.

Moreover there is still a consideration that prevents me, unbidden, from sticking my finger between a knife and a wall, between a door and door casing, between a hammer and anvil, namely this: perhaps wealth is after all the most reliable of all earthly goods? Those at least which according to the classification of Epictetus, "are not in our power." Is not wealth a sufficient surrogate for all earthly splendors? An undeniable representative for food and drink, clothing and home, for esteem and friendship, and even to a certain degree, love? Is it not ultimately money that provides the greatest pleasure and the greatest independence? That compensates for the most wants? Is not poverty the rock upon which both friendship and even love may often be wrecked?

"When the manger is empty, the horses will bite" says the peasant—and what do others say when the blush of love has evaporated and the honeymoon is over? Of course it would be best if Amor and Hymen could always walk side by side, but they would nevertheless still want to have Pluto allied with them.

According to this view of *the world, as it is*—perhaps a more rational one than some would expect or like in an author of fiction—one will

find it consistent that I did not involve myself in Esben and Cecilia's romance, especially since it is quite possible that it could be a purely rational calculation on Esben's part, based less on the daughter's beauty and feelings than on the father's well-stocked alcove and heavy cupboard. And even though I knew that pure love is not merely poetic invention, I admitted even then that it is more often found in books than in reality.

So when the lovely Cecilia had gone out—presumably to vent her feelings in private with even more tears—I casually made one observation: that it was a shame that the young lad was not better off, since it seemed that he was a good-natured person and cared for the girl. "If it happens," I added, "that he sometime should return home with a good sum of money..."

"...and it belonged to him," old Michel replied slyly, "then that would be another story."

I returned to my deserted and carefree heath. Far off in the distance I could still see Esben and the smoke rings from his pipe. Like the smoke, I thought, his grief and love may evaporate—but poor Cecilia? I glanced back yet again at the rich hosier's farm and said to myself that had this place not existed there would be fewer tears shed in this world.

Six years passed before I returned to this part of the moors. It was the same still, warm September weather as during my last visit. Thirst drove me to look for a house, and it happened that the hosier's was the nearest one. Upon recognizing the good Michel Krænsen's lonely dwelling, I came to think of the beautiful Cecilia and her sweetheart—and curiosity about the results of this idyllic heath story drove me as strongly as my thirst. Under such circumstances I am quite apt to anticipate the true story—I make my guesses, I imagine how it could be and should be, and test how closely my reckonings agree with the turns of fate. Alas! Most often my conjectures deviate widely from reality! Thus it was here also: I had imagined Esben and Cecilia as man and wife—she would have a baby at her breast, grandfather would have one or two older ones on his knee, the young peddler himself being the enterprising and happy manager of the enlarged hosiery business—but it turned out quite differently.

Just as I was to enter the cottage I heard a soft female voice singing what I at first took to be a lullaby. Yet the sound was so melancholy that my great expectations were already dampened considerably. I remained standing and listened—the song's words were a lament of hopeless love. The phrases were simple yet truthful and moving; but I remembered only the refrain from the end of each verse:

"The greatest sorrow far or near,
Is to lose the one, you hold most dear."

With dark foreboding I opened the door to the front room.

A middle-aged, large and stout peasant woman who was sitting and carding met my eyes first; but she was not the one who sang. The singer had her back to me. She sat rocking rapidly back and forth, moving her hands as if she were spinning. The first woman rose and welcomed me, but I walked past her to see the other's face.

It was Cecilia, pale but still lovely—until she lifted her gaze to mine. Alas! Then I could see madness shining out of her dully gleaming eyes, out of the sickly sweet smile on her face. I also noticed that she had no spinning wheel in front of her, but what she imagined herself to be treading must be made of the same stuff as Macbeth's dagger.

She stopped both her singing and her airy spinning and asked me eagerly: "Have you come from Holstein? Did you see Esben? Is he coming soon?"

I understood how I was trapped, and answered just as quickly, "Yes, now he won't tarry much longer. I'm to greet you from him."

"Then I have to go out and meet him!" she cried happily, leaping up from her little stool, and springing to the door.

"Wait just a little, Cecil!" said the woman and laid aside her carders, "and let me come with you!" At this she winked at me and shook her head—but her facial expressions were unnecessary. "Mother!" she called loudly towards the kitchen door, "there's someone here. Come in! We have to go now." She ran after the mad girl, who was already out in the farmyard.

The old woman came in. I didn't recognize her at first, but assumed correctly that she must be the unfortunate girl's mother. Grief and age had taken its toll on her. She didn't remember me either from our last meeting. But after greeting me with, "Welcome! Sit down!" she asked the usual question, "May I ask where my good man hails from?" I told her and reminded her also that I had been here a number of years ago. "Dear God!" she cried and clasped her hands together, "is that you? Please, have a seat at the end of the table while I make some sandwiches—perhaps you're thirsty as well?" Without waiting for an answer she hurried into a small side room, and soon was back with both food and drink.

I was certainly eager to learn more about poor Cecilia, but a presentiment of something quite tragic dampened my curiosity and prevented me from directly asking about that which I both feared and wanted to hear. "Is your husband not at home?" was my first inquiry.

"My husband?" she said. "Our Lord took him some time ago. Yes indeed! It will be three years on Michaelmas Day that I have been a

widow—quite some time! Please! Don't refuse the food—though it is only peasant food!"

"Thanks all the same," I answered, "but I am more thirsty than hungry. So your husband is now passed away—that must have been a great loss and a great sorrow for you."

"Oh yes!" she sighed with tear-filled eyes, "but it was not the only sorrow—Dear God! Didn't you see our daughter?"

"Yes!" I answered, "she seemed to me a little odd."

"She is completely mad," she said, bursting into tears. "We have had to hire a person just to watch her, and she can't do much else. She should really be spinning and knitting a little, but that hasn't happened, for she has to run with her at least sixteen times a day, whenever she remembers Esben."

"Where is Esben?" I interrupted her.

"In the kingdom of God," she answered. "So you haven't heard? God save us! He died a pitiful death. Such misery has never been heard of before. Now you mustn't put on airs—eat and drink as much as you please! Yes indeed! I have suffered some since you were here last. Times are also difficult—it's over with stockings, and we have to keep a stranger to look after everything."

When I understood that her grief over the past, together with her cares for the present, were not so great that she could not bear to tell me of her tribulations, I bade her do so. She yielded willingly to my request and gave me an account that I—with the omission of irrelevant digressions—would like to reproduce as well as I can in the narrator's own plain and simple style.

"We and Kjeld Esbensen," she began, after pulling a chair to the table, sitting down and arranging her knitting, "have been neighbors since I came to the farm. Kjeld's Esben and our Cecil were good friends before we knew it. My husband wasn't very happy and neither was I, because Esben didn't have much and his father had nothing at all. But we thought anyways that the girl would be smarter than to go after such a green lad. Sure, he peddled a few stockings and earned some shillings—but how could you live off that? Then they came to us and proposed. My husband said no—which was not so strange—and with that Esben left for Holstein.

"Of course we sensed that Cecil was a little sad—but we didn't pay any attention to that. `She'll surely forget him,' my husband said, `when the right one comes along.' It wasn't too long, either, before Mads Egelund—I don't know if you know him? He lives a few miles from here—he came and proposed with a farm with no debts and three thousand dalers earning interest. That would certainly do. Michel said

yes immediately. But Cecil—God help us! She said no. My husband got angry and kept scolding her.

"I thought he was too hard. But that blessed man wanted to decide himself—so he and Mads' father went to the minister and had the banns read. It went well for two Sundays—but on the third, when he said, `Is there anyone who objects,' Cecil stood up in her chair and cried, `I do. The banns have been read three times for me and Esben in Paradise.' I hushed her but it was too late. Everyone in the church had heard her and looked over at our pew—we suffered such a disgrace! Still, I didn't think she had gone from her senses at that time. But before the minister had left his pulpit she began to rattle off about Esben and Paradise, about the wedding dress and the bridal bed, and so on and so forth—oh, it was all mixed up.

"We had to get her out of the church. Dear Michel scolded her and said that it was just a prank of hers. God save us from such pranks! It was dead serious—crazy she was, and crazy she remained."

At that the narrator let her knitting fall into her lap, took the skein of yarn from her left shoulder, unwound it a few times and looked at it from all sides. But her thoughts were far away. After several minutes of this she pressed the skein to her eyes, hung it back on its hook, and started knitting rapidly again as she thus connected the loose threads of her mournful story.

"Everything she said made it sound like she was dead and had come to Paradise, and there she was to marry Esben as soon as he was dead too. She kept this up both day and night.

"Dear Michel sensed then how things stood. `It's God's will,' he said, `and no one can resist His will.' But he took it hard anyway, and I know myself how many long hours I have lain in bed and cried when everyone else was asleep. At times the thought occured to me that it would have been better if those two youngsters had been allowed to marry. `Maybe,' said my husband, `but that wasn't to be.'

"For the first few months she was completely unmanageable and we had a difficult time with her. Later on she became calmer and spoke very little. But she sighed and wept all the time. She wouldn't do anything, because `in Paradise,' she said `every day is the sabbath.'

"This went on for at least six months. Esben had been away in the south about twice as long, and no one had heard either good or bad news from him. Then it happened one day as we sat here, dear Michel and Cecil and I, that Esben walked in the door. He had just returned from his trip, had not even stopped at home, and didn't know how things were until he laid eyes on the girl. Then he could see plainly enough that she was not all there.

"`You have tarried a long time,' she said, `The bridal bed has stood ready for ages. But tell me first: are you dead or alive?'

"`Dear God, Cecil!' he said, `You can certainly see that I am alive!'

"`That's a pity' she answered, `because then you can't enter into Paradise. Please, lie down and die as soon as you can! For Mads Egelund is watching to see if he can't come in first.'

"`This is a sorry state,' he said, `Michel! Michel! You have committed a grave injustice toward us. I am now a man of five thousand daler. My uncle in Holstein has died with no wife, and I am his heir.'

"`What was that?' said my husband. `It's a shame that we didn't know about this a little earlier. But give yourself some time! The girl can surely still recover.'

"Esben shook his head and went over to our daughter to give her his hand. `Cecil!' he said, `speak sensibly now! Both of us are very much alive, and when you are reasonable your parents will give their permission for us to marry.'

"But she threw both her hands behind her back and cried, `Get away from me! What business do I have with you? You are a living person, and I am an angel of God.'

"He turned around at this and burst into bitter tears. `God forgive you, Michel Krænsen!' he said, `for what you have done to us two sinners.'

"`Calm down!' said my husband, `it can turn out well. Stay here for the night and let's see what she has to say in the morning.'

"It was evening and stormy weather moved in with thunder and lightning, the most dreadful I've ever seen—just as if the world was coming to an end. Then Esben agreed to settle down with us, and as soon as the weather let up a little he laid down in the front room. We went to bed too. But for a long time I could hear through the wall how he sighed and wept—I think he also prayed to God in heaven. Finally I dropped off too. Cecil was sleeping in the alcove just across from mine and Michel's here.

"It must have been an hour or so after midnight when I awoke. It was quiet outside and the moon was shining in the window. I lay and thought about the misery that had come over us. The furthest thing from my thoughts is what I'm going to tell you now.

"It occured to me that it was very quiet over by Cecil. I couldn't even hear that she was breathing, and I didn't hear anything from Esben either. I felt that something was not quite right. I crept out of my bed and went over to Cecil's. I looked in and felt for her, but she wasn't there. I became anxious then and hurried out to the kitchen, lit a lamp, and with that I went into the front room. Oh God help us and have

mercy! What did I see there? She sat in Esben's bed and had laid his head in her lap. But when I looked more closely, he was as white as a ghost. His face and the sheets were red with blood. I screamed and dropped to the floor, but Cecil waved to me with her one hand and patted his cheek with the other. `Hush! Hush!' she said, `now my beloved is sleeping the sweet sleep. As soon as I've buried his body the angels will carry his soul to Paradise, and there our wedding will be held with great splendor and joy.'

"Oh! Merciful God and Father! She had slit his throat—the bloody razor lay on the floor beside the bed."

At this point the unhappy widow hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly, while horror and grief crushed my breast. Finally she regained her composure and continued as follows:

"There was great sorrow and crying both here and at Esben's. But what's done cannot be undone. When they drove him home to his parents—they thought he was safe and sound in Holstein—well, there was such wailing and screaming, as if they had lost their farm. He was a good fellow and had just come into such wealth, and then to die a pitiful death at such a young age and at the hand of his sweetheart.

"Dear Michel couldn't forget it either—he was never quite himself after that. A few months later he became ill, and then Our Lord took him.

"That very day he was buried Cecil fell into a deep sleep, and slept for three whole days and nights. When she woke up she had regained her senses. I sat by her bed, expecting that Our Lord would release her from this world. But just as she was lying there she gave out a deep sigh, set her gaze on me, and said, `What has happened? Where have I been? I've had a strange dream. It seemed to me that I was in heaven and Esben was with me. Dear God, Mother! Where is Esben? Haven't you heard from him since he left for Holstein?'

"I didn't exactly know how I dared answer her. No, I said, we don't know much about him.

"She sighed! `Where is Father?' she asked next.

"Your father is in good hands, I answered. God has taken him to heaven.

"Then she wept. `Mother! Let me see him!' she said.

"You can't my child! I answered, because he has already been buried.

"`God have mercy!' she screamed, `how long have I been sleeping then?' From this I understood that she herself didn't know the condition she had been in. `If you have awakened me Mother,' she continued, `then you have done me no kindness. I was sleeping so sweetly and

dreaming so beautifully. Esben came every night and visited me in shining white clothes and with a red string of pearls around his neck!'"

Here the old woman fell again into melancholy thoughts, and only after several deep sighs did she begin again.

"That poor child had regained her senses. But God only knows if that was better for her. She was never happy but always quiet and sad. She didn't speak unless she was spoken to and went diligently about her work. She was neither sick nor well.

"Her recovery soon became known around the neighborhood, and three months later Mads Egelund came to propose to her for a second time. But she wouldn't have anything to do with him, not on any account. When he understood then that she disliked him, he became gruff and mean-spirited. The hired hands and I and everyone else who came here were very careful that we didn't give the slightest hint about how she herself in her demented state had killed poor Esben. And she surely thought also that he either was dead or had married someone in the south.

"One day while Mads was here, pressuring her strongly to give him a yes, she finally answered that she would rather die than marry him. He says straight out that he wasn't so eager for someone who had slit the throat of her first sweetheart. And with that he tells her everything that had happened. I'm standing out in the kitchen and heard part of what he said. I throw down what's in my hands, run in, and scream at him, Mads! Mads! May God forgive you! What have you done? But it was too late—she was sitting on the bench, her face as pale as the whitewashed walls, and staring stiffly ahead. `What am I doing?' he said. `I'm not saying anything that isn't true. It's better that someone tell her than make a fool out of her and let her sit and wait for a dead man her whole life. Thanks anyways, and farewell!'

"He left. But she had lost her senses again, and will probably never be right in this life. You can see for yourself how she is: whenever she is not sleeping she sings that song that she wrote herself, back when Esben left for Holstein, and she thinks that she is spinning for the bridal sheets. Otherwise she is pretty calm—thank the Lord! And she wouldn't hurt a fly. But we still don't dare let her out of our sight. God have mercy on her, and release us both from this soon...!"

Just as she spoke the last few words the unhappy girl came in with her attendant. "No," she said, "he is not to be seen today. But tomorrow he'll certainly be here. I have to hurry if I'm going to be done with the sheets." She sat down quickly on her little stool and with her hands and feet in rapid motion she began her mournful song again. A long, deep sigh preceded each refrain: "The greatest sorrow far or near, is to lose

the one, you hold most dear." Her beautiful, pale face sank down to her breast then, and her hands and feet rested for a moment. But soon she quickly sat up straight, began another verse of her song, and put the phantom spinning wheel in motion again.

Deep in mournful thoughts I wandered away. My soul had taken on the color of the wilderness. My imagination was completely preoccupied with Cecilia and her ghastly fate. In every distant mirage I thought I could see the hosier's daughter, how she sat and spun and rocked and moved her arms. In the the golden plover's melancholy whistle, in the solitary wood lark's monotonous, lamenting warbles, I heard only the truth and sorrow of the heartfelt words of so many thousand broken hearts:

"The greatest sorrow far or near,
Is to lose the one, you hold most dear."

Translated by Paula Brugge

THE THREE HOLIDAY EVES

(A JUTLAND ROBBER STORY)

EASTER EVE

If you, dear reader, have ever been at Snabeshøy, where the regional courts were held in the old days, then you have been able to see a little to the south from there a small, scattered group of farms that is called *Uannet*. Here there lives, and has never lived other than farmers.

A few hundred years ago a man lived there whom they called *Ib*. What his wife was called I have never been able to find out, but this much I know: that he had an only daughter whose name was Maren, and she was known as Ma-Ibs. She is said to have been a nice and tidy woman, and wherever she went the young lads gazed longingly after her. But she herself looked at no one but Sejer. He was also an only child and his father also lived in Uannet.

As I am now going to tell, it happened on an Easter Saturday that a man came to Ibs. He was dressed as a farmer and moreover was a big man, erect and a little vain-looking, quite self-assured, about thirty years of age. There was no one at Ibs who knew him, but he said that he was a Skovlouring, that he recently had taken over his father's farm, and that he was going north now to sell coal. He had silver buttons on his coat and vest, so it was easy to see that he was no beggar fellow. They gave him both food and drink and pretty soon he began to talk about this and that.

He said to Ib, and smirked a little as he did so, "My mother is getting on in years and I'll soon be looking to "take one in." Do you have any idea where I might find a capable woman? Money is really no object, for that we can settle on. But she should have quick and skillful hands—and she can't be too old either."

Ib put on a simple expression, but was sly. He scratched himself behind the ear and said, "Hm! Such a woman doesn't grow out of the heather every day," and he shot a glance at his daughter as he chuckled.

But the daughter couldn't bear *this* talk, and made up an errand to get out of the room.

When the fellow got up to leave they asked him what his name was. "Indeed!" he answered, "my father was called Ole Brødløs, and I'll probably be known by the same name." And so he left. But when he had gone a ways from the farm he meets Ma-Ibs who had been over with Sejer, and he says to her then, "It's no use wasting words. I've come here solely for your sake. Come Whitsuntide I'll be here again, so you can think it over in the meantime. For now I bid you farewell!"

Ma-Ibs wasn't too happy about *that* suitor. When she came into the house, she sat down at the end of the table, hands in her lap, and sighed from the bottom of her heart. "What's that supposed to mean?" asked the father.

"I don't like this Skovlouring—or whoever he is," she answered. "Can't it ever happen that Sejer and I can marry?"

"Yes, but with what?" said the old man. And so that talk was over. Father and daughter both took up their knitting.

A little while later Sejer comes in. "God's peace," he says.

"Thank you," they reply.

"Now I'm on my way up to the manor house," he says, "to speak with the master, for there's no use arguing about it any longer."

"It will all be the same" says Ib, "The master is angry with you and you'll be taken as a soldier."

"That may very well be, " says Sejer, "but now I have to at least try." And so he left.

And then he comes to Annsbjerg and goes in through the gateway and meets the master himself, a man otherwise called Jørgen Marsviin. "Are you here again about renting a farm?" he says. "It won't do you any good—I've told you that often enough."

"Oh yes, master!" says Sejer, "But I beg you to hear me."

Then the master looked at him angrily, drew his eyebrows down and wrinkled his brow, and one would have thought that he was going to fly at him and hit him in the face. But then he seemed to have a change of heart and looked more calmly on him, and says, "Listen! There are these robbers who have both plundered and killed people for a long time, and people say that they have their den some place on the moors. If you can find them for me and bind them, then you'll not give me a shilling for a rent contract, and you will have Ma-Ibs, and on top of that a carriage and two horses here from Annsbjerg. Now you know where I stand."

"God have mercy on me!" said Sejer, as he slunk away quite dejected and dispirited. He ate nothing that evening, and Ma-Ibs was also feeling "less than good." It was an awful holiday eve for them both.

WHITSUNTIDE

Time passed then from Easter until Whitsun. And with the two young people it was the same as it had always been—they didn't become downcast, for they placed their hope in the future, or rather with Him, who determines the future.

On the Saturday before Whitsun, Sejer went over to Ibs—and I believe he often did—to find out if she would be allowed to come with him to Annsbjerg Forest the next afternoon, after they had been at Sørslev Church. For there was an old custom in those parts—and still is, I imagine—that people would gather there in the forest on the first day of the holiday and enjoy a dance.

That Saturday that we now speak of, when Sejer came over to visit his sweetheart, she had already dressed herself up. "Good day, Maren!" he says, "what is happening today that you would look so nice?"

"It occurred to me," she says, "that I should pay a visit to the mistress and see if I could get her to put in a good word for us with her husband."

"Well!" he says, "that could perhaps be a good idea. I'll follow you and wait outside while you're in there." And so they left.

When she went up to the manor he sat down on a stone at the entrance. And then a lumber wagon came driving up with a large oak log that was going to the sawmill. But the horses were so small and worn out that they gave out in front of the entrance. The man—he was a farmer who had been told to do this job—began to whip the nags, but they couldn't pull the wagon. Then the forester came and scolded him, and the bailiff came, and finally the honorable and noble Jørgen Marsviin. And they all grumbled and groused about the farmer because he had come to the manor with such nags. But I imagine they were the best that he owned.

Sejer sits looking at this. And now and then he smirked at all the commotion going on. The master saw this and he says, "What are you laughing at?"

"I think," he says, "that the load isn't any heavier than what I could pull alone."

"Hey! Unhitch them!" the master yells to the driver. And when that was done he says to Sejer, "*You* take hold now! And if you can pull the wagon, then I'll give you all that lies on it. But if you can't manage then you'll have to get up and ride the wooden horse."

At that the the lad began to make excuses and said that this was only a joke of his. But the master told him that he wanted to break him

of the habit of joking around *him*, and one of these two things he *would* indeed do.

"Fine, fine!" said Sejer, "if I have to, then I *shall* do it." With that he went to the wagon, took off the pole, grabbed the traces, bent over and pulled—and the wagon followed right behind him. But he pushed so hard on the ground that his wooden shoes fell to pieces.

"You're no weakling," said the master—and he wasn't one himself, either, since they still say of him that when he rode out the gate, he could grab an iron ring at the top of the gateway and lift his horse off the ground with his legs. "Take the log! And see how you'll get it home! And as far as the rent goes, we'll let time tell."

Then it was Sejer who was happy. And he thanked them and pushed the log off the cart, sat down on it and looked into the gateway after his Maren. It was a long while before she finally came. But she looked solemn.

"God help us poor wretches!" she said, and it was all she could do to keep from crying, "We can never have one another."

"Those are some nasty words that you're saying," says Sejer, "The master had almost promised me that out here. What's wrong with him now?"

"The mistress seemed the same," she says, "but now you'll hear what kind of luck I've had. When I came up the steps and into the narrow passageway, along comes a nice-looking gentleman toward me and he looks at me in a strange way—I couldn't get around him, for he stood right in my way—and then he says, "You are"—and how he could swear—"the most beautiful girl or woman, whatever you are, that I have seen in this land. Listen here! Could you become fond of me?" "No," I say, "that I cannot." "When you *want* to," he says, "then you also *can*—I am a baron."—now I can't remember what it was he called himself—"Just come back here this evening and my servant will take care of you and show you to me." "No," I say, "that is a sin—and I also have a sweetheart, and I can't make a fool of him." Then he took a handful of money out and showed it to me, but I slipped around him and went in to the mistress.

She was gracious toward me, and the master came in and he acted as if he would grant my prayers. But then this baron comes in and stands watching it all, and he says, "If it's a decent fellow that she wants, then he should refuse her, because she's a lewd little thing. I saw how she stood and flirted with one of the servants out here in the hallway."

When that wretch had lied like that about me, the master and mistress scolded me and ordered me to leave and never show myself in front of them again.

"Dear God, Maren!" said Sejer, "is that all that you get for your virtue and loyalty toward a wretch like me! But our Lord still lives! We won't lose heart. I feel certain that we still will have each other—even if there should be as many masters and mistresses as there are leaves in the Annsbjerg Forest."

Ma-Ibs sighed as if her heart would break, but said nothing. He didn't say anything more before they had come to Uannet and were going to part ways, each to their own house. Then she says, "Good night, Sejer! And thanks for all you've done!"

"Likewise Maren!" he says, "You're suffering because of me. I'm afraid that I can never make this up to you again—but our Lord will."

"Do *you* want to go to the dance in the forest tomorrow?" the girl asked him.

"Do you?" he asked.

"No," she said, "I don't want to."

"I don't either," he said.

"Good night then!" she said and gave him her hand.

"Good night!" he answered, and with that they parted.

But there was more heartache awaiting poor Maren before she could calm down. When she came in, *he* was sitting there, that Skovlouring Ole Brødløs. "Is that you, my little girl!" he says, "Have you thought it over?"

"Thought about what?" she asks.

"Have you forgotten *that*?" he says. "It wasn't longer ago than Easter—it was about coming with me. And look here! So that you don't think I'm just courting with thin beer and crusts of bread I want to give you these as engagement gifts." He then brought out a heavy silver necklace with a heart-shaped pendant of the same metal. "Had you known the woman who wore this while she was alive, then you wouldn't scold her for being a poor farmer girl!"

With these words he gave such a peculiar look to the father that the daughter was gripped with a hidden fear. The old man was startled and didn't know if he should believe his own eyes. No one said a word.

"Now! Will you have it?" Ole repeated.

"No," the girl stammered, and wanted to leave to seek solace with her sweetheart. But that horrible suitor grabbed her arm with one hand, and hiding the necklace with the other he said, "If I come a third time, I won't take no for an answer." And without further goodbye he took his cap and stick and went his way.

"The boy is here with the cows now," said Ib, and sat down on the stool. Ma-Ibs went out to milk them, but she didn't sing as she usually did when she worked. Sejer was watering his father's horse, but he

didn't whistle as he usually did. This was another terrible holiday eve for both of them.

CHRISTMAS EVE

It was dusk when an old beggar came staggering into Uannet to beg for a little something in God's name. He came by and by to Ibs. They asked him to sit down by the kitchen door, "and then he would get a little to chew on" and a little for his sack.

When he had gotten this he complained that it was so late, and so cold for him to get much further that evening, and he asked them for a bed for the night. They agreed to this and showed him into the oven that still had some warmth from the day's baking. The old man crawled in, and there he lay.

Night was drawing near. They had eaten their sweet porridge and all that came after that, and the animals had gotten their last feeding, and the front door to the house was bolted, and they had sung a Christmas hymn as they usually did, and prepared themselves for the night.

But now you will hear what that old man did: he crept out of the oven and unbolted the outer door and took off the hook, and no sooner had he done that than there came five big strong men. And they burst into the house, along with the old man. But now he could walk just as lively as they. For I can tell you: it was *the* robbers that the man from Annsbjerg had wanted Sejer to find and bind, and the old man was the father to the other five.

It looked grim for the poor people there at Ibs. The man and his old wife and his daughter were so struck with terror—for they believed that their lives would end—that they could scarcely beg for mercy.

The largest and oldest of the young robbers—and it was he, the Skovlouring—was the spokesman and said, "Now, set out what you have! Then we can talk about the other matter later." Ma-Ibs grasped the door latch but the robber said, "Stay where you are! And let the old hag go get something for us! Otherwise you might get it into your head to run off, and we should after all "have a little use of you" and "have a little fun," when we've eaten and drunk."

The girl sank down on the stool, nearly fainting of fright. Ib sat on the edge of the bed and laid his hands together, saying a prayer to the Lord who has the power to save those whom he will. The old woman put everything on the table that they had to eat and drink, and it was amazing that she could manage this.

But now you will hear even more. Ib had a cowherd who was just a young boy. He lay in a bed behind the stove and hears all of this. He quietly sneaked on a pair of socks and pants and goes out with the old woman as she stepped aside to light the lamp which one of the robbers had blown out by accident. He rushes over to the next farm and in to Sejer to tell him what was going on at the other house.

Sejer wasn't slow in making plans. "Take the mouse-eared horse of ours!" he says, "and ride as fast as you can to Annsbjerg! And tell them what's happening here and that they have to hurry. They can maybe still catch all the robbers before they escape again.

The lad was out and on the horse and gone. Sejer took an iron club in his hand and hurried over to Ibs. There he found all six of the scoundrels sitting on the bench with their backs to the windows. "What kind of a man are you?" they yelled at him, "You must want to have your stomach ripped open!" With that they got up and tried to grab him.

But he was too quick and grasped the edge of the tabletop, turning the oak table over on them and squeezing them in against the wall with its far edge. "Now I'm going to see if I can squeeze *your* stomachs," he said And while he held them tight with the one hand he swung his club and promised them that he would break any arm that moved. The oldest tried to push the table over again anyway, but he quickly got such a blow to his arm that it dangled at his side. Now they all sat as still as mice and only begged Sejer not to squeeze them so hard.

Ib had also found some courage and grabbed an ax, with which he stood on one side of Sejer—and Sejer's sweetheart was on his other side with the fire poker. And so things stood, and it wasn't too pleasant for either party. The robbers were tormented by fear of how this "squeeze" would end and they couldn't imagine what Sejer intended to do or how soon it would all be settled. This made the torment even worse.

Ib and his daughter were also uncertain, for Sejer couldn't very well blurt out what or whom he was waiting for. And you can imagine that it was a long wait for him, because if those from the manor waited too long or didn't come at all—the boy could well have fallen on the way—what then?

Finally the man from Annsbjerg came in with seven or eight fellows, and he was not bringing up the rear when the door flew open. There they stood: it was quiet in the room, and even though there was moonlight outside they couldn't see anything clearly inside, because the light had been overturned along with the table.

Then Sejer yelled, "Where are some pine splints? Light a few of them from the fireplace!"

"Some are lying in the wood box," the old woman yelled.

Someone did as he asked, and then it became light. "Can you see here, master?" said Sejer, "now I have *found* them and *bound* them—in a way. If you want them more soundly tied I see that there's a rope hanging over in the corner."

They grabbed this and cut it into as many pieces as there were robbers. Then they pulled them out from behind the table one by one and bound their hands behind their backs, and also tied their legs, and flung them onto the floor in a row. Then the master began to question them: where they were from? where they had their den? if there were more of them? And much more. But he couldn't get as much as half a word from them.

Then he threatened them with horrible tortures. The old robber spoke then, not to him but to his sons, "Just let him do what he will! For he has the power now. But whatever he does against us, we will do to him and his people. The three back home in Bakken wouldn't forget either him or the other good people of Uannet. So now you'll keep your mouths closed until the rope around your neck opens them!"

This threat was to no avail, for when the holy days were over Jørgen Marsviin had them put on the rack, first the old man and then the sons. They all held out except the youngest. He confessed all their crimes as well as where their lair was. That same day this den was hunted down and they captured the robber wife and her two sons, who were hung along with the other six.

In the den there was found a horde of silver and gold, and among this a ring that was recognized as being one that had belonged to the man whose lies had caused Ma-Ibs such distress. Now she was repaid for that: the master himself held the wedding for her and Sejer, and gave them everything that he had promised before, and gave them also no small part of the treasures that were found in the robbers' den.

Strong-Sejer (his nickname after this) lived with his wife for many, many years. And all their children, and their children's children, kept this nickname. But now I daresay the name has died out, just as has the powerful master's noble name and lineage. But *that* holiday eve that I have told of ended happily at Annsbjerg, and even more so in Uannet.

Translated by Paula Brugge

THE PASTOR IN VEJLBYE
A CRIME STORY

From Sheriff *Erik Sørensen*'s Diary, Together with Two Accounts by the Pastor in Aalsøe

A.
ERIK SØRENSEN'S DIARY

In the name of Jesus! So now, after God's gracious decree and my dear patron's preparation, I am undeservedly promoted to sheriff and district judge over this people. May the great world's Judge give me the wisdom, justice, and grace to administer my demanding position thus: "...everyman's judgement cometh from the Lord," Proverbs 29: 26.

• • •

It is not good for man to be alone. As I am now able to sustain a wife, I ought to look around for a helpmeet. The daughter of the pastor in Vejlbye has a good reputation with all of those who know her. Since her sainted mother's death, she has managed the house with great sense and economy. And since there are no other children than she and the University Student, she can expect a goodly coin or two when the Old Man some day passes on.

• • •

Morten Bruus from Ingvorstrup was here today and wanted to give me a fatted calf; but I recalled Moses' words: "Thou shalt take no gift...." Bruus is a person who likes legal action, who is a great trader and a great boaster; I want no dealings with him, except when I sit before him in the seat of judgement.

• • •

I have now asked the advice of God in heaven and then that of my own heart; and it seems clear to me that Mistress *Mette Qvist* is the only person with whom I would want to live and die. Beauty is deceptive, and

loveliness is a thing of vanity; otherwise, it is both certain and true that she is the fairest of womankind that I have seen in all my days.

• • •

That Morten Bruus is to me a downright disgusting person...; I scarcely myself know why, but when I see him, something like a bad dream washes through my mind, but so darkly and dimly that I cannot even say if I have ever dreamt of him. Could also be a sort of foreboding. He came here again to offer me a pair of dappled grey horses, with black heads, tails, and fetlocks—wonderful animals, and a steal! But precisely that was what struck me: I know that he got them singly, for 70 dollars in all; he would let me have them for the same amount, and paired they are worth 100 dollars between brothers. Is not that, in a way, bribery? Undoubtedly, he is again planning a lawsuit...; I will not have his dappled horses.

• • •

Today I was on a visit to the pastor's in Vejlbye. He is most certainly a god-fearing and upright man, but authoritative and testy: he tolerates no contradiction; and careful of his coin, that he is besides. There was a farmer with him just then who wanted to have a reduction in his tithe. The man was a sly fellow, for his tax cannot be that high; but Master *Søren* gave him such a talking to that even a dog would not have taken a piece of the pastor's bread from him; and certainly the more he scolded, the more vehement he himself became. Oh well, Good Lord! Every person has his faults. He means no harm by it, for immediately afterward he ordered his daughter to give the man a sandwich and a glass of good beer.... She is a particularly affable and beautiful girl. She greeted me in such a friendly and respectful way that my heart was really moved, and I was unable to say a word to her.... My main farmhand has worked there for three years: I shall just subtly question him as to how she is toward their people, as well as to whatever else he might know about her. One often receives the most reliable information from the staff.

• • •

What do you know! Farmhand *Rasmus* tells me that this Morten Bruus not so long ago went courting at the parsonage in Vejlbye, but received a rejection. The pastor liked the idea well enough, for Bruus is a wealthy man, but the pastor's daughter would have none of it. Master Søren, of course, is supposed to have spoken sternly to her in the beginning, but later, when he saw that she was so averse to the courtship, she got her way after all. Her refusal was not from arrogance—says Rasmus—for

she is just as humble as she is good; and she will readily admit that her own father was peasant born, just like Bruus....

• • •

Now I know what the dappled Ingvorstrup horses were doing here in *Rosmus*: they were supposed to draw the judge away from the straight path of righteousness. It concerned *Ole Andersen*'s peat-bog and meadow—that plum was certainly worth the polished apple; No, no! my good Morten! You just don't know Erik Sørensen. "Thou shalt not wrest the judgement of the poor."

• • •

Master Søren from Vejlbye was here for a little visit this forenoon. He had welcomed into his employ a new coachman, *Niels Bruus*, brother of the man at Ingvorstrup. That same Niels is reputedly lazy and in addition impudent and cocky. The pastor wants to have him punished and put in the dungeon but lacks the necessary witnesses. I advised him that he had to dismiss the fellow or suffer through with him until the legal Moving Day. In the beginning he answered me somewhat brusquely, but when he heard my reasons, he admitted I was right, yes, even thanked me for my good advice. He is a testy man, but not difficult to reason with when he has time to collect himself. So we parted as good friends. Not a word was said about Mistress Mette.

• • •

I have spent a very pleasant day at Vejlbye parsonage. Master Søren was not at home when I came, but Mistress Mette received me in a most friendly manner. She sat spinning as I stepped through the door, and it seemed to me that she grew quite flushed.

It was really peculiar how long it took me to find something to talk about. When I am sitting in court, I am never lacking for words; and when I have in a sneak for interrogation, I do not need to search long for questions; but before this gentle, innocent child, I stood as crestfallen as a chicken thief. Finally, I tried to talk to her about Ole Andersen's lawsuit, about his peat-bog and his meadow; and I do not know how it happened that the conversation turned from the meadow to flowers. One word then led to another about roses and violets and daisies, until she got me to go along out into the garden to look at her profusion of flowers. With that, the time passed until Master Søren came home, and then she went into the kitchen and did not return before she brought in supper.

Just as she stepped through the door, the pastor said to me, "It would certainly not be too early for you also to be thinking of entering the holy state of matrimony." (We had namely sat discussing the splen-

did wedding that had recently taken place at Høgholm Manor.) Then Mistress Mette again grew as red as dripping blood. Smirking, her father said, "One can see that you, my daughter, have been standing before the hearth."

I have taken that good man's advice to heart, and, in God's name, it will not be long before I go courting there, for I consider the father's words as a subtle hint that he would like to have me as a son-in-law. And the daughter—why, I wonder, did she grow so red? I dare, surely, to take it as a good sign?

• • •

So now the poor man can keep his peat-bog and his meadow, but the wealthy man has certainly become sorely aggrieved because of me. Before the verdict was read aloud, he stood glancing quite scornfully over at the wretched Ole Andersen. With the words, "It is the decision of the court," he looked about to all sides and chortled as slyly as if he were quite certain of winning. And that he surely was, for I am aware he has let it be known that "it was ridiculous for *that ragamuffin* to think he could win over *him*." It happened though, anyhow.

When Bruus had heard the verdict, he squinted his eyes and pressed his lips together, and his face turned as white as chalk. But he controlled himself and, as he walked out, said to his opponent: "Congratulations on the deal, Ole Andersen! That puddle of peat will not break me; the Ingvorstrup steers will still get all the hay they can eat." I heard him outside roaring with laughter and, as he rode away, cracking and cracking his whip, so that it echoed in the woods.

Being a judge is indeed a heavy burden. For each verdict announced, one can count on an enemy more. Oh, but if we could still keep conscience for a friend! "Endure all things for conscience' sake!"

• • •

Yesterday was the very happiest in my life; then, my betrothal celebration was held at Vejlbye parsonage. My future father-in-law spoke on the words, "I have given my maid into thy bosom," Genesis 16:5. He expounded on them quite movingly, on how he would now transfer to me his dearest treasure here on earth and that I must be kind to her in all things (which I will be, so help me God!).

I would never have believed that serious, indeed, quite harsh man could have ever been so softhearted: tears at last welled up in his eyes, and his lips trembled, as when one is trying not to cry. My sweetheart wept like a child, especially when he started to speak of her sainted mother. And when he then said the words, "Thy father and thy mother shall forsake thee, but the Lord shall take thee up," I also burst into

tears. I thought of my own dear parents, they whom God long ago had taken to Himself in the everlasting habitations, but still He had since quite mercifully cared for me, poor child that I was.

When the betrothal vows were made, I received from my sweet darling the very first kiss. May God grant her soul joy! She loves me boundlessly.

At table there were high spirits. Many of the pastor's sainted wife's relatives were invited; none of his, for they are but few and far removed and live all the way up by the Skaw. There was no stinting on wine or food, and after the table was cleared, there was much dancing, right until the clear light of day. The pastors from Lyngbye, from Aalsøe, and from Hyllested were also present; the last became so encumbered that he had to be taken to bed. My future father-in-law also drank enormously, but it never showed on him, for he is as strong as an ox and could likely drink all the district's pastors under the table. I was quite aware that he wanted to have the fun of getting me a little tipsy, but I was careful—mainly because I am not at all fond of strong drink.

Our wedding will take place in six weeks. May God grant it His bountiful blessing!

• • •

It was a bad accident that my future father-in-law should have gotten that Niels Bruus in his employ! He is a crude fellow, a worthy brother of the Bruus at Ingvorstrup. He should be given his wages and have his backside slammed by the gate on his way out—far rather that, than one's fingers having to be dirtied on such a jackass. But the good pastor is quite hotheaded and contentious, and two hard stones do not grind well together. He absolutely wants Niels to serve out his time, and it means of course nothing but daily chagrin. The other day he gave Niels a box on the ear; whereupon, the fellow threatened, "the pastor will be paid back for *that* all right," but no one was there except the two of them.

I have called Niels before me and have both admonished him and threatened him. He answered me with what amounted to nothing at all—there is malice in him.

My sweetheart has also beseeched her father to get rid of him, but the pastor won't hear of it. I scarcely know how it will go when she moves over to my place, for she spares the Old Man for much trouble and knows how to smooth everything over in a very good way. She will most certainly be to me a well-beloved wife—"as a fruitful vine by the side of my house."

• • •

It went badly, and that was just as well: now Niels has run away. My dear father-in-law is as angry as a hun, but I quietly rejoice that he has thereby gotten away from that wicked person. True enough, when the opportunity presents itself, Bruus will try to avenge his brother, but we have law and justice in the country, and there is justice enough for us all.

The pastor had put Niels to digging up a part of the garden. As the pastor came out to take a look at him, Niels was standing very comfortably resting against the spade and cracking nuts that he had picked, but he had accomplished nothing. The pastor chewed him out; he answered brusquely that he hadn't been hired as a gardener. With that he got a couple of blows across the mouth, and therewith he threw down his spade and cursed grossly back. The Old Man then was like fire, grabbed the spade, and gave him some swipes with it—that, he shouldn't have done, for a spade is a bad weapon to strike with, even more so in wrath and by a robust man. The rogue let himself be felled, as if he were dead, but when the pastor became frightened and lifted him up, he leapt up over the fence and, next, over toward the woods. Such is the way my father-in-law himself told me that unpleasant story.

My betrothed is still peculiarly uneasy over it all: she is afraid Niels will avenge himself in one way or the other, harm the animals; yes, perhaps set fire to the farm. With God's help there is no need to fear!

• • •

Only three weeks more, then I shall escort my sweet betrothed into this house as my wife. She has already been here and looked everything over, both out and in. She was exceedingly well satisfied and praised our order and neatness. Her only sorrow was that she will have to leave her father, and he will certainly miss her. But I will do what I can to compensate him for his loss: I will make a trade with him, and he shall have my good Aunt *Gjertrud* in return. She is an accomplished woman around a house and still active enough for her age.

My betrothed is simply an angel; everyone says so—I will undoubtedly be a man blessed—May God be praised!

• • •

It is really puzzling where that fellow can have hidden himself! Or can he have fled the country? In any case it is an annoying story: there is mumbling everywhere among people. Calumnies that I can imagine have their source at Ingvorstrup. In the meantime it would be awful if they should come within earshot of my father-in-law. If only he had followed my advice! For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. But I am only a lay person and dare not make so bold as to correct a servant of God's Word, in addition to which the pastor is really

much older than I. Now I will hope that the talk may die down of itself. Tomorrow I will go to Vejlbye to discern whether or not he has heard anything about the gossip.

• • •

The new bracelets I have gotten from the goldsmith are very lovely and will quite certainly please my dearest Mette, if only they fit her, for the measurement was taken very secretly and hastily with a blade of grass. My aunt will be praised for the furnishings of the bed; the fringes are particularly beautiful.

• • •

My dear father-in-law was quite downcast and ill at ease...; I have never seen him so before. Busybodies have unfortunately already brought him the stupid rumor, which is now common gossip here in the area. Morten Bruus has proclaimed "that the pastor will have to bring my brother back even if he has to dig him up from the ground." It can be that his brother is lying hidden at Ingvorstrup...; gone he is and no one has heard or seen anything of him since that day.

My poor betrothed is grieving all too much; she is tortured by forebodings and dire dreams.

• • •

God have pity on us all! I am so possessed by terror and sorrow that I am scarcely able to guide my pen. At least a hundred times it has fallen from my hand. My heart is so oppressed and my thoughts so divided that I hardly know where I shall begin. It all seems to me to have come about in a single moment, just like a thunder clap...; the time is out of joint for me; evening and morning are the same; the whole gruesome day is a quick lightening flash that has actually burned down the proud edifice of my wishes and hopes. An honorable man of God, my betrothed's father, in bonds and prison! ...And as a murderer and malefactor! I have only this one hope left, that he still may be innocent, but unfortunately that hope is only a straw for the drowning. A heavy suspicion rests on him—and to think that I, wretch that I am, shall be his judge. And the daughter, his daughter is my betrothed bride! My Lord and Savior, have mercy on us!—I can't go on.

• • •

It was yesterday—that unfortunate day!—at approximately a half hour before sunrise, that Morten Bruus came into the yard here and had with him *Jens Larsen*, a cottager in Vejlbye, together with the shepherd's widow and her daughter, *ibidem*. Morten Bruus said to me that he strongly suspected the pastor in Vejlbye of having killed his brother. I

answered him that I had well heard the same talk but considered it to be a foolish and malicious fiction, that the fellow had run his way, just as the pastor himself had assured me.

"If it were so," said he, "that Niels would flee, he would surely have first come to me and let me know; but that the case is quite different, these good people can bear witness to, and therefore I ask that you officially question them."

"Consider well," said I, "consider well, my dear Bruus—and you other good folk, do so, too!—before you accuse an honorable and reputable pastor and spiritual mentor! If you cannot prove anything, which I greatly doubt, it can cost you dearly."

"Pastor or no pastor," shouted Bruus, "it is written: You shall not kill! It is also written: Authority beareth not the sword in vain. We have, after all, law and justice in the land, and a murderer cannot escape his punishment, even if he has the prefect of the diocese as a son-in-law."

I acted as if I had not noticed the jibe and said, "Well, then, let happen what will! What is it you, *Kirsten Madsdatter*, know about this case that causes Morten Bruus to accuse your pastor? Tell now the pure truth as you would swear to it before the Omniscient's seat of judgement and as you will have to confirm later by legal oath!"

And then she gave the following explanation: the day on which it was said that Niels Bruus had run from the parsonage, she had walked by the pastor's garden with her daughter, *Else*. As they came to about the middle of the stone fence that runs east of it, they heard someone call Else. It was Niels Bruus who stood on the other side of the hazel hedge and who then bent the branches a little to one side and asked Else if she wanted to have some nuts. So she accepted a handful and asked what he was doing there. He answered that the pastor had ordered him to dig, but that order was not one he intended to bother much with; he would rather pick nuts. At that moment they heard a door open, up at the house, and Niels said, "Watch out! Now we'll get a scolding!"

Nothing could be seen, because the embankment was too high and the hedge was too thick, but immediately afterward they had heard how the men had argued, and the one was never in debt to the other for words. At last they had heard the pastor shout, "I will knock you down, you dog; you shall lie dead at my feet!" Whereupon there were two or three blows, as when one receives slaps across the mouth. Then Niels had cursed the pastor as an executioner and a scoundrel. To that, the pastor had answered nothing, but on the other hand, the two women had heard two thuds and simultaneously seen the blade of the spade and part of the handle swing twice above the hedge; but whoever was swinging the spade they couldn't see because of the height and thickness of the

hedge. With that, everything was quiet within the garden; but the shepherd's widow and her daughter had become frightened and felt odd, and so they went out in the field to the livestock.

The daughter gave the very same explanation as the mother did. I asked them if they had not seen Niels Bruus leave the garden, something which, despite their often having looked back, they had to deny.

All that fit perfectly in with the pastor's account to me, and the fact that they had not seen the fellow leave the garden was quite reasonable since, on the southern side, he was just as close to the woods, toward which the pastor had said the man had headed.

I declared to Morten Bruus that their sworn statement proved nothing about the presumed murder, especially since the pastor had freely told me the whole thing, quite as the women had now presented it. To that he smiled bitterly and bade me merely to question the third witness, which I also did.

Jens Larsen explained that one evening very late (but as far as he recalled, it was not the same evening following Niels Bruus's running away, but the next) he was walking home from Tolstrup and had gone by the usual path to the east of the pastor's garden. In it, he had heard the sounds of someone digging. For the first moment he had been somewhat frightened, but since there was bright moonlight, he decided to see who could have something to do in the garden at that hour. He had then taken off his clogs, climbed up on the embankment, and made a little peephole through the hedge with his hands. He then saw the pastor in his everyday dressing gown and with his white cotton nightcap on his head standing there smoothing the soil with a spade, but he saw nothing more. Since the pastor quickly turned around, as if he had sensed someone, the witness had grown frightened, had hastily slid down the embankment, and just as hastily had run home.

Although whatever the pastor could be doing in his garden so late seemed quite peculiar to me, I still found nothing in particular that would arouse suspicion about an alleged murder, which I also told the complainant, with the serious admonishment not only to retract the accusation but also publicly to declare the circulating rumor to be unfounded and in addition to disclaim any part in it. To that he answered, "Not before I see what the pastor has buried in his garden."

"Then," answered I, "it may well be too late, for you are gambling your honor and welfare in a dangerous game."

"I owe my brother as much," he answered, "and I expect our legal authority not to deny me the help and support of justice."

Such a request I had to comply with.

Together with the complainant and the witnesses, I then went to Vejlbye, with a mind that was sorely dismayed, less so in fear of finding the escapee in question in the garden than in worry over the terror and mortification that would thereby be caused for the pastor and my betrothed. On the way I thought only of letting the libeler feel the whole weight of the law. Alas! Good heavens above! There awaited me a most gruesome discovery.

I wanted first to take the pastor to one side in order to prepare him and thereby give him time to collect himself and have his wits about him, but Morten Bruus appeared ahead of me, for, as I drove into the farmyard, he spurred his horse on past me and right up to the door, and, as the pastor opened it, he shouted, "People say that you have slain my brother and buried him in your garden; I am here with the sheriff to search for him!"

The pastor was so amazed by that address that he could not say a word before I leapt from my carriage and said to him, "You hear now the charge, and hear it unadorned; for the sake of my office I am forced to do this man's bidding in full, and at the present your own honor demands that the truth come to light and mouths be stopped from their slandering."

"It is a very difficult thing," he said then, "that a man of my station should be forced to shake off such a terrible accusation, but just come! My garden and my whole house are open to you!"

We then went in through the living quarters and out into the garden. There we were met by my betrothed, who became terrified at seeing Bruus. I hastily whispered to her, "Just be calm, dear heart! Take yourself inside and fear not! Your enemy is rushing to meet his own destruction!"

Morten Bruus walked ahead in the garden, over toward the east, to the hawthorn hedge; we others followed, as did the pastor's people, whom he himself had ordered to bring spades and pitchforks. The accuser stood for a bit and looked around until we had reached him. Then he pointed to a place and said, "It looks as if there had been digging here not long ago; we must search here!"

"Dig!" shouted the pastor angrily.

The people dug, and Bruus, who didn't think it was going fast enough, jerked the spade from one of the people and worked eagerly. When they had come a few spadesful down, the ground was so hard that one could clearly see no digging had been done there recently—perhaps not for many years. We all rejoiced—all but one—and the pastor most of all; he had already begun to triumph over his accuser and said scornfully to him, "Did you find anything, you slanderer?"

The fellow didn't answer him, but after having thought for a moment, called, "Jens Larsen! Where was it you saw the pastor digging?"

Until then, while the digging was going on, Jens Larsen had stood with clasped hands and watched the work. At Bruus's address, he woke up as if from a dream, looked around a bit, and thereupon pointed over to a corner in an area three or four fathoms from the place we were standing.

"There is where I think it was!" said he.

"What are you saying, Jens?" the pastor shouted angrily; "when was I digging?"

Without paying attention to that exchange, Morten Bruus called the people over to the designated corner. There lay some withered cabbage stocks, branches, and other garden waste, which he first pushed aside. The digging began again.

I stood quite calmly and well satisfied and talked with the pastor about the case and the punishment to which the accuser had made himself subject, when one of the hands shrieked, "Jesus Christ!"

We looked over there...; the crown of a hat had appeared.

"We'll find whom we're looking for here all right!" screeched Bruus; "It's Niels's hat; I recognize it."

It felt as if all my blood had turned to ice; all my hope was at once dashed to the ground.

"Dig! dig!" shouted the terrible blood-avenger, as he exerted himself with all his might.

I looked over at the pastor; he was as pale as death; but his eyes were opened wide and fixed continually on that horrific spot. Again a shriek; a hand seemed to stretch up from the earth toward the diggers.

"See!" shouted Bruus, "he is reaching for me; yes, wait a little, brother Niels! You shall have your revenge!"

Soon the whole corpse was uncovered...; it was actually the missing man. His face was not quite recognizable, since it had begun to rot and, in addition, the nose was crushed and flattened; but all his clothing, right to his shirt with his sewn-on name, was immediately recognized by all his fellow servants; even a lead ring in the left ear was recognized by all those standing around there as Niels Bruus's; it was one he had constantly worn for several years.

"Well, Pastor!" shouted Morten Bruus, "Come now and lay your hands on the dead, if you dare!"

"Almighty God!" sighed the pastor and raised up his eyes to heaven, "Thou art my witness that I am innocent; struck him, I have, but not more than that he could run off; struck him, I have; that I must now bitterly regret; but who can have buried him, that only the Omniscient knows."

"Jens Larsen also knows!" shouted Bruus, "and perhaps there are to be found even more who do. Sheriff, you will also have to question

his servants, but first I expect you to take this wolf in sheep's clothing into safe custody."

Alas! You Prince of Peace, I certainly dared no longer doubt; the situation was all too clear, but I was about to sink into the earth from terror and disgust. I was just going to say to the pastor that he should prepare himself to go to prison, when he spoke to me; he was pale and quaking like an aspen leaf.

"Appearances are against me," he said, "for this is the work of the devil and his angels. But there lives yet One Who shall bring my innocence into the light of day.... Come, Sheriff, in bonds and chains I shall wait for what He has decided for me, poor sinner that I am. Comfort my daughter! And remember that she is your promised bride!"

Scarcely had he said that before I heard a shriek and something fall behind me...; it was my betrothed; she lay there in a faint on the ground.... If only God had granted that we had both lain there and never wakened more! I lifted her up and carried her in my arms...; I thought she *was* dead, but her father tore her from me and carried her in, and just at that moment I was again called over to the murdered man to inspect a wound in his head, which was not really deep but had cracked his skull and obviously appeared to have been occasioned by a spade or a similarly dull tool.

We thereupon all went into the house. My betrothed had come to herself again. She flew to embrace me and adjured me in God's name and everything that was holy still to deliver her father from his great affliction and bade me next, for our love's sake, to allow her to accompany him into prison, which I also permitted her. I myself accompanied them to *Grennaae*, but only the Lord knows how I felt. None of us had spoken a word during the whole sorrowful journey. I parted from them with a broken heart.

The corpse has been put in a casket that Jens Larsen had ready for himself, and tomorrow it will be properly buried in Vejlbye cemetery.

Tomorrow the testimony of the first witness will be heard. Miserable person that I am, may God give me strength!

• • •

Would God had granted that I had never obtained that deplorable position, which I, fool, so eagerly sought! It is a burdensome occupation to be a judge...; if only I could change places with one of the talesmen!

When that servant of the Word, chained from hand to foot, was brought before me in the court, I then thought of our Lord, as he was brought before Pilate's seat of judgement. And it couldn't help seeming to me for all the world as if my betrothed—God help Her, she is lying

ill in Grennaae!—were whispering to me, "Have nothing to do with this righteous man!" Well, God grant he were so! I still cannot discern the vaguest possibility that he is innocent.

The first three witnesses affirmed, with raised hands, their entire testimony at the interrogation and did so word for word; nothing was left out and nothing added to it. And a further three witnesses appeared, the pastor's two hands and the hired girl. On that past day when the murder occurred, the first two had sat in the servants' hall, and since the window was open, they had clearly heard the pastor and the murder victim hotly arguing, and, just as the shepherd's widow and her daughter had testified, the former had said, "I shall knock you down, you dog! You shall lie dead at my feet." In addition they had twice heard the pastor threaten and denounce Niels Bruus. The men testified even further that the pastor, when he grew angry, did not hesitate to strike out with whatever came to hand and that in doing so he had once struck his former hired boy with a tethering mallet.

The hired girl explained that, the same night that Jens Larsen saw the pastor in the garden, she had lain in bed, unable to sleep, and had heard the door from the hallway out to the garden creaking, and when she rose up and peeked out, she saw the pastor in dressing gown and nightcap go out into the garden. What he was doing there she didn't see, but about an hour later she again heard the sound of the door to the garden.

When the witnesses were questioned and I asked that unfortunate man whether he would confess the deed, or, if not, what he had to say in his defense, he folded his hands over his heart and said, "So help me God and His Holy Word! I will speak the truth, and I know within myself nothing more than what I have previously confessed. I struck the deceased with a spade, but not so hard that he could not afterward escape from me and from the garden; what has since happened to him or how he has come to lie in my garden..., I don't know. As to what Jens Larsen and the girl are testifying, about having seen me in the garden in the night..., either they are lying, or it is a hellish illusion. Wretch that I am, I have no one to come to my defense here on earth; of that I am clearly aware. If He in heaven is silent, I must bow to his inscrutable will." Thereupon the pastor let his hands fall, bowed his head, and gave a deep sigh.

Many of those present couldn't keep from crying. A quiet whispering started that he really could perhaps be innocent; but that of course was just the result of their emotions and pity being stirred.

My heart, too, well wanted to find him innocent, but feelings certainly in no way dare rule over a judge's common sense; neither compassion nor hate, neither favor nor envy must weigh the least bit on the scales of justice. In accordance with my conviction, I cannot determine other-

wise than this: the accused has slain Niels Bruus, though scarcely with intent and premeditation; I well know that he has been in the habit of threatening those he has become angry with, "that he would remind them of what they had done someday when they least expected it!"; but it is not obvious to me that he has ever carried out his threats against anyone. Of course, every man wants to save his life if possible and preserve his honor, and therefore he remains in a state of denial as long as he is able.

Morten Bruus—he's a stiff-necked fellow, mean earlier and worse now, in anger over his brother's slaying—had begun to speak of means that could force an obstinate sinner to confess, but God forbid that I should use the rack to aid me against such a man. And what is it really, other than a touchstone for determining bodily and spiritual strength and weakness. The one who manages to endure the torture and the one who is broken by it could both be lying. A forced confession can never be a dependable truth.... No, before that, I would abandon the judge's bench and resign my bitter office.

Alas, my good, god-fearing sweetheart! She is lost to me of course, as far as this world is concerned; I really loved her quite tenderly.

• • •

I have had to suffer a hard blow. As I sat pondering the ghastly case that I am responsible for judging, the door flew open, and the pastor's daughter—I surely dare no longer call someone my betrothed who will perhaps never become my wife?—rushed in with her hair undone, threw herself at my feet, and embraced my knees. I raised her up into my arms, and we both wept for some time before either of us could utter a word. I was the first to master my great sorrow and said, "I know what you want, my dear heart! That I should save your father? Well, God help us wretched beings, you know I cannot! Tell me yourself, child of my heart, do you believe that your father is innocent?"

She placed her hand on her heart and said, "I don't know!" And she thereupon began to cry again quite bitterly. "Buried the man," she then said again, "he can hardly have done, but that the fellow died over in the woods from the blows he had received must well be so, Lord help us!"

"Dear friend!" said I, "you know that Jens Larsen and the hired girl saw him at work that night."

She slowly shook her head and answered, "The Evil One can have clouded their vision."

"May Our Lord Jesus forbid," said I, "that he should have such power over Christian folk!"

Then she again wept. "Tell me truly," she began after a pause; "Tell me frankly, my betrothed, if God sheds no other light on this case,

what sentence would you give?" She looked at me with anxiety, and her lips quivered.

"If I did not believe," answered I, "that every other judge would be harsher than I, I would abandon the bench, indeed, resign my appointment with joy. But I dare not now conceal it, since you question me about it; the mildest judgement that both God and the king have pronounced is still *a life for a life*."

Then she sank to her knees but arose again immediately, shrank a few steps back from me, and shouted as if distracted, "Would you then murder my father! Would you then murder your betrothed? Do you see this?" She stepped forward again and held up to my eyes the hand upon which she wore the ring. "Do you see this betrothal ring? What was it my unfortunate father said when you placed it upon my finger? '*I give my maid into thy bosom*!' But you, you pierce my bosom!"

Good God! every word she said pierced *mine*. "Sweetest child," I sighed, "Don't say such a thing! You wrench my heart with glowing tongs. What is it you want me to do? Call innocent one whom God and human law condemn?" She grew silent and raised her eyes to heaven. "One thing I will do," I continued; "if it is wrong, may the Lord then not hold that sin against me! Listen now, my dearest child, if the case runs its course, his life will then be lost. I see no other salvation than through flight. If you can hit upon some other recourse, I shall shut my eyes and be silent. Do you see what I mean? As soon as your father was imprisoned, I immediately wrote to your brother in Copenhagen, and we can expect him any day now. Talk to him then, and try to make friends with the turnkey. If you don't have enough money, you may use all that I possess!"

When I had said that, her whole face became flushed with happiness, and she threw her arms around my neck and cried out, "May God reward you for this advice! If only my brother were here, there would surely be a way out for us." "But where should we go?" she said later and let go of me; "and if we find a haven in some foreign country, I would then never see you more." She said that so piteously that my heart was about to break.

"My very dearest friend," I cried, "I shall find you no matter how far you go away, and if our resources do not stretch to cover our expenses, these hands of mine would work for us all. I learned in my youth to use axe and plane."

Then she again became blissful and kissed me innumerable times. We both prayed with full hearts to God that He would let our venture succeed, and then, cheerfully hopeful, she left me.

I also began to hope the best. But she was no sooner gone than a thousand doubts filled my mind, and all the obstacles that to me seemed

conquerable before appeared then like enormous mountains that my weak hands would never be powerful enough to move. No, no! From the gloom and darkness of this misery, He alone knows the way, He for Whom the black night is light as day.

• • •

Two more new witnesses! They are scarcely on a good mission, for Bruus presented them with an expression that didn't please me—he has a heart as hard as stone and full of poison and gall besides. Tomorrow they shall be in court; I feel as if it were against me myself they were going to testify. May God though give me strength!

• • •

It is over...; he has confessed everything.

The court was in session, and the prisoner brought forth to hear the newly arrived witnesses' testimony. They gave the following in evidence: "that, on that often discussed night, they had walked down that road which runs on a straight line between the woods and the pastor's garden; a person had then come from the woods with a sack on his shoulders and wandered a bit past them toward the garden; they couldn't recognize his face since it was concealed by the sack, but when the moonlight shone on his back, they had clearly seen that he was clad in a long green gown (namely, his dressing gown) and a white nightcap and that the person so clad disappeared at the garden gate."

No sooner had the first witness delivered that testimony than the pastor's face became as pale as ashes, and his voice was so weak that he could scarcely utter the words, "I am becoming ill." He was given a chair.

Then Bruus said to those standing about, "That helped the pastor's memory along."

The latter didn't hear it but beckoned to me and said, "Let me be taken back to my prison cell! I will talk to you there." What he requested was done.

We took off to Grennaae; the pastor drove with the turnkey and the jailer, and I rode. When the prison door was opened, my betrothed was making her father's bed; on a chair by the headboard hung the misfortunate green dressing gown. My betrothed gave a shout of joy when she saw me come; she believed her father had been acquitted and that I myself would now escort him from prison. She threw down what she had in her hands and clung with her arms about his neck. The old man cried, until one tear didn't have time to wait for the next.

He didn't have the heart to tell her what had now happened at the court but gave her some errands to run buying all sorts of things in

town. Before leaving, she ran over to me, pressed my hand to her breast, and whispered, "Good news?"

In order to hide my pain and confusion, I kissed her on the forehead and said, "My dear, later you shall hear what has happened—don't know yet if it will do much to help or to hinder—but fetch us now what your father asks." She went.

Alas, alack! What a lamentable transformation from earlier, when that innocent child lived happily and without a care in that merry parsonage, to the here and now with her living in this gloomy prison in sorrow and pain, indeed, in perpetual fear and trembling....

"Sit down, dear friend!" said he and sat down on the bedstead himself. He folded his hands in his lap and stared at the floor for a long time in deep thought. Finally he straightened up and pinned his eyes on me. I waited in anguished silence, as if I were to hear my own sentence...; oh, yes, and in a way I was also about to....

"I am a great sinner," he began to speak, "how great... God knows; I don't know myself. He will punish me here so that I may receive grace and bliss in the beyond; therefore, may praise and honor be His!" At that, he seemed to win a greater composure and strength and continued as follows:

"From my childhood on, for as long as I can remember, I have always been bad tempered, quarrelsome, proud, intolerant of any contradiction, and always prepared to strike with the sword. Nonetheless, I have seldom let the sun set before my wrath had been resolved nor borne hatred to any human being.

"Even in my youth I committed a deed in hot temper that I have often deeply regretted and have been pained by every time I have thought of it: our farm dog, a gentle animal that never did any creature harm, had taken my snack that I had left on a chair; in my irritation I kicked at the dog with my clog in such a way that it died with pitiable howls and pains. It was only a dumb animal, but still a sign that I would lay violent hands on human beings.

"When, as a university student, I traveled abroad, I got into an unnecessary argument with a student in Leipzig, challenged him, and stabbed him so seriously in the breast that only with the greatest difficulty could he be saved.

"Even for that I would have earned what I now so lately must suffer; but the punishment is meted out now and with tenfold the weight upon my sinful head...an old man, pastor, messenger of peace—and father! O God! O God! That is the very deepest wound...."

He sprang up and wrung his hands so that all the joints cracked. I wanted to say something to comfort him but knew of nothing.

When he had calmed himself a bit, he again sat down and continued: "To you, formerly my friend and now my judge, I will now confess a crime that beyond all doubt I have committed, but of which I am really not completely cognizant...."

(I was taken aback and didn't know where he was going with all that or whether he had collected his wits enough to know what he was saying, for I had then prepared myself for a clear and unqualified confession).

"Don't misunderstand me and note my words! That I have struck that unfortunate fellow with a spade, I know and have freely admitted—in my great fury I couldn't tell whether it was with the flat side or the blade. That he then fell and ran away...see, that is all that I know with the assurance of my senses. The rest—God help us!—four witnesses of course have seen, namely, that I brought back the corpse and buried it; and I am forced to believe that those truly were my actions; you shall hear my reasons!

"Three or four times earlier in my life it has happened to me that I have been a sleepwalker. The last time—it may now be nine or ten years ago—I was to give a sermon the following day at a funeral for a man who had passed away in a sudden and wretched manner. I lacked a text, when the words of a wise man among the ancient Greeks occurred to me: "Consider no man fortunate before he dies!" To take a heathen's proverb as the text for a Christian sermon would not be seemly, but it also appeared to me that the same thought in nearly the same wording must be found in the Holy Writ. I searched and searched and could not find the place. It was late; I was very tired from other work, therefore disrobed, and went to bed and slept late. When I awoke in the morning and seated myself at my desk to choose another passage and write up a draft for a sermon, I saw, to my great amazement, the following words written in large letters on a piece of paper lying on the table before me: "'*Call no man happy until his days are told.*" Sirach, the 11th chapter, 34th verse'; and not only that but also a funeral sermon, brief, yet as well developed as any—and all that written in my own hand. No one had been in the bedroom, for I had thrown the bolt on the inside of the door, since the lock was worn and could spring open on its own when the wind was blowing; it was equally impossible for anyone to have come through the window, for it was in winter and the frame was frozen to the sill. Then I knew who had written the sermon—no one but myself.

"It had only been a half year earlier that, in a similarly peculiar state, I had gone into the church at night and had gotten a handkerchief that I distinctly remembered having left lying on my chair behind the altar in the evening.

"You see, dear friend, when the two witnesses made their statements today before the court, my sleepwalking, which had slipped my mind until that moment, suddenly occurred to me, and I simultaneously remembered that, the morning after the corpse was buried, I had wondered over finding my dressing gown lying on the floor just inside the door, since each evening I always hung it on a chair by my bed. That unfortunate victim of my uncontrollable wrath must have dropped dead in the woods, and in my dreaming state I must have seen that and sought for him there. Yes, God forgive me, it is, it must be so!"

There he grew silent, covered his eyes with his hands, and cried bitterly. But I was completely amazed and full of doubt about what to do. I had always believed that the murdered man had died on the spot and been buried there where he had fallen, though it seemed strange to me that the pastor should have finished up that job during the day without anyone having noticed it, and that he had had enough presence of mind to do it. Still—I then thought again—necessity had forced him to; he had covered the corpse only in haste and buried it deeper down later at night. Then the two last witnesses said that they had seen him carry a sack from the woods; that immediately seemed highly remarkable to me, and the passing thought occurred to me that their testimony might contradict the previous, and the man's innocence thereby begin to emerge.

But, alas, no! Then everything was adding up too well, and his crime was beyond the least doubt. Even the peculiar turn he gave the case amazed me: that he had committed the whole deed was certain, but whether the latter and unimportant part was done in a waking or dreaming state, that was the only unknown. The pastor's testimony from first to last, his entire conduct carried the stamp of truth; yes, for its sake he would willingly give up his life; yet perhaps he was just then struggling to salvage some little part of his honor, or... perhaps he was faithful to the truth in that, too? Such sleepwalking has its precedent, just as does the feat of a person's being able to run so far with a fatal wound.

The pastor again walked hastily up and down the floor; then he stood still before me and said, "You have received my confession here within the prison walls; I know that your mouth must condemn me, but what does your heart say?"

"My heart," I answered—so disheartened it was scarcely possible for me to speak—"my heart suffers unutterably and would rather break at this moment if it could thereby save you from a terrible and dishonorable death...." (I dared not mention the last means of salvation, flight.)

"You cannot," he quickly interjected; "My life is forfeited; my death is just and a warning to all who survive me. But promise me that you will not wash your hands of my poor daughter—I had once thought

to give her into thy bosom" (at that, he dried the tears that again burst forth)...; "that bright hope, I myself have dashed; you cannot marry a malefactor's child, but promise me that you will look after her as would another father!"

With great sorrow and through many tears, I gave him my hand on it.

"You of course have not heard anything from my son recently?" he again began speaking: "I hope that he can remain ignorant of this wretchedness until everything is over; I cannot bear to see him."

At that, he hid his face in his hands, turned round, and rested his forehead against the wall—he sobbed like a child.

Some time passed before he was able to speak: "Now, dear friend," he then said, "leave me now! And let us not see each other more before we do so in the house of stern justice! And—show me this last sign of friendship!—let it happen soon, as soon as tomorrow! I long for death, for I hope, for Jesus' sake it shall be for me an entrance into a better life than this, which has nothing more to offer me than torment and horror...; go, my dear, compassionate judge! Let me be brought to the court tomorrow, and send already today for Master *Jens* in Aalsøe! He shall prepare me for death...; God be with you!" With his countenance turned away, he gave me his hand; I tumbled out of the prison...; I was stunned, yes, almost in a swoon.

I would perhaps have ridden directly home without speaking to his daughter if she had not come to meet me just outside the prison. She must have been able to read the death sentence on my face, for she paled and grabbed hold of both my arms. She looked at me as if she were going to beg for her life; she couldn't ask, or she didn't dare to.

"Flee! Flee and save your father!" was the only thing I had the strength to utter.

I threw myself on my horse and was at home long before I realized it. So...*tomorrow!*

• • •

The sentence was pronounced. He heard it with greater composure than he who read it possessed. Everyone present, except for his stiff-necked enemy, also showed great sympathy; some even whispered that it was severe...; yes, assuredly it was severe! It takes one person's life and takes from three others happiness and peace of mind. May the merciful God be to me a more forgiving judge than I, a sinner, dare be toward my fellows!

• • •

She has been here..., she found me sick in bed...; there is no longer any rescue possible..., he will not flee.

• • •

The turnkey was won over. The fisherman, a cousin of her sainted mother, had promised to take them to Sweden and had his sailboat lay by, but that penitent sinner was not to be persuaded. He will not evade the sword of justice, hoping that by his own death and that of Jesus he will win for himself justice in the beyond. She parted from me just as inconsolably as she had come, but without a single harsh word. God bless her, poor thing! How shall she get over that terrible day? And here I lie, sick in both body and soul..., can neither comfort nor help...; the son remains away.

• • •

Farewell! Farewell, my heart's promised bride! Farewell in this miserable world and until we meet again in a better one!

• • •

Soon perhaps, for I feel that death has me in its grip...; perhaps I will go yonder before him whom my cruel position has forced me to send thither.

"Farewell, my beloved!" she said; "I leave you without rancor, for you were only doing your stern duty; but now, farewell, for we will never see each other more!" She made the sign of peace over me.... May God but grant me soon that peace eternal!

God, where is she going? What does she have in mind? Her brother has not come...; and tomorrow...Ravnhøj.[1]

• • •

(At this point Sheriff Erik Sørensen's diary seems to have been suddenly interrupted; but to that equally truthful as terrible event's closer disclosure and full completion, the then-neighboring pastor in Aalsøe has added his written account. Should any reader want to draw the authenticity of these writings into doubt, he surely dares not, in addition to its trappings, throw out the essence of the story, which—unfortunately!—is all too true. The legend, which even yet is alive and well in the region, adds further to it: precisely that tragic event caused future capital cases to be taken before all the courts; legal experts must then surely be able to establish the time period for that self-same event.

[1] The bank on Aalsøe field, near Grennaae, where Pastor Søren Qvist was beheaded, is still called "Raven's Hill."

B.
THE AALSØE PASTOR'S REPORT

In the seventeenth year of my tenure there occurred here in the district an event that moved all to terror and horror and involved our clerical class in great disgrace and shame, because the pastor in Vejlbye, the learned Master Søren Qvist, in wrath struck down his servant and buried him afterward in the garden at night. After prior legal investigation, the pastor was convinced, as much by the testimony of many others as by his own confession, that he had committed that gruesome deed, and was therefore sentenced to have his head parted from his neck. That sentence was carried out here in Aalsøe field in the presence of many thousand people.

The executed, whose spiritual guardian I formerly had been, requested that I visit him in prison. And I may truly say that I had never given the Holy Sacrament to any better prepared, more remorseful, and fully devout Christian. He admitted most ruefully that he had wandered in the arrogance of the flesh and been a child of wrath, wherefore God had abandoned him to sin and harshness of temper, deeply humbled him and made him so very wretched that he could again be resurrected by belief in Christ. He maintained his frankness right to the end, and on the site of execution he gave the people present a speech full of power and unction, which he had labored on during his last days in prison and had learned by heart. It dealt with wrath and its terrible consequences, by making moving use of himself and that cruel crime to which wrath had induced him and swept him away. The words of the text were taken from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, chapter 2, verse 6: "*The Lord...hath despised in the indignation of His anger the king and the priest.*" He thereupon disrobed, put on the blindfold himself, and knelt with folded hands; and, as I was pronouncing the words, "Be of good cheer, dear brother! Today shalt thou be with the Savior in Paradise," his head fell to the executioner's sword.

What made death bitter to him was the thought of his two children, the elder of whom, the son, was absent—he was believed to be in Copenhagen; but, as we later learned, he was in Lund, and therefore he did not arrive here until the evening of the same day on which his father had been paid the wages of sin in the morning. The daughter, who—to further heartache for herself and her sweetheart—formerly had briefly been betrothed to the sheriff, I took of pity into my house, where, early that morning, she had been brought, more dead than alive, after she had taken leave of her father, whom she had cared for with daughterly tenderness in the prison.

When I came back from the most dismal walk of my life, I found her fairly calm and busy preparing the executed's shroud (for it was

allowed for him to be buried in hallowed ground, albeit quietly). She no longer cried, but she didn't speak either. I also remained silent, for what could I say to her? And was I myself not oppressed by dark thoughts?

An hour later my carriage arrived with the corpse, and shortly thereupon a young horseman stormed into the yard—it was the son. He threw himself upon his father's soulless body and thereafter into his sister's arms; both children embraced each other for a long time, but neither of them could bring forth a word.

In the afternoon I had a grave dug right outside the porch door of Aalsøe Church; there at the silent midnight hour the earthly remains of the pastor in Vejlbye were interred. A sandstone, upon which there was engraved a cross and which I earlier had had prepared for myself, covers the grave and reminds every churchgoer of that unfortunate man's deep fall from grace and human nature's corruption, as well as sin's only salvation through the cross of Christ.[2]

The next morning both fatherless children had suddenly disappeared, and no one since has ever heard the least thing from or about them. God knows in what cranny they have hidden themselves from the world.

The sheriff is still ailing and is not expected to live. I myself am possessed by sorrow and anguish, and death seems to me to be the greatest good for us one and all.

God's will be done according to His wisdom and mercy!

• • •

Lord, how inscrutable are Your ways!

In the thirty-eighth year in my office and twenty-one after my neighboring pastor, Master Søren Qvist in Vejlbye, had been accused, judged, and executed for the murder of one of his servants, it so happened that a vagrant came here to the parsonage. He was an oldish man with grayish hair and walked with a crutch. None of the servants was present just then; I therefore went out to the kitchen myself to give him a slice of bread, and so I asked him where he was from. He sighed and answered, "From nowhere."

I then asked his name; again he sighed, looked around fearfully, and said, "They used to call me Niels Bruus."

It gave me a start, and I said, "That is a grim name; that was also the name of someone who was slain hereabouts for a score of years past."

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[2] The stone lies in the same place to this very day.

He sighed even more deeply and answered, "It wasn't right for me to have died that time; it has seemed wrong that I fled the country."

My hair stood on end, and I began to shake with horror, for now it appeared to me as if, for all the world, I should recognize him; it was also as if I saw Morten Bruus standing before me as large as life, he upon whom I had thrown earth three years before. I jerked back and crossed myself; I thought he was a ghost.

But he sat down on the chimney edge of the open hearth and said, "Good Lord, pastor, I hear my brother Morten is dead. I stopped by Ingvorstrup, but the new man shooed me away...; is my old master, the pastor in Vejlbye, still living?"

Now it was as if scales fell from my eyes, and I immediately sensed how the whole gruesome story was tied together, but I was so numb that speech was denied me for some minutes.

"Of course," he said then and bit greedily into the bread, "it was all Morten's fault...; but did the pastor otherwise come to any harm?"

"Niels! Niels!" I shouted in my heart's terror and loathing, "You have a sin of blood on your conscience; for your sake that innocent man had to lay down his life at the executioner's hand."

The vagrant's bread and jaw fell, and he himself nearly collapsed in the fire. "God forgive you, Morten!" he groaned; "I didn't mean it...; God forgive my great sin! But surely you are only trying to scare me? I have wandered in here just now from far on the other side of Hamburg and have not heard a word about any of this. Neither has anyone recognized me but you, pastor, and I haven't revealed myself to anyone else; but when I came through Vejlbye and asked if the pastor there was alive, they answered that he was."

"That's the new one," said I, "but not he whom you and your ungodly brother took the life of."

Then the fellow started to beat his hands together and howl and moan, so I indeed realized that he had only been an unwitting tool in the devil's hand; in fact, I furthermore even began to pity him fervently. And I therefore took him with me into my study, spoke a few consoling words to him, and then calmed his mind enough that he could explain and describe to me everything about that bit of hellish knavery.

The brother, Morten—a son of Belial—had developed a deadly hatred for Master Søren in Vejlbye from the time the latter had denied his daughter to him as wife. Therefore, as soon as the pastor had lost his previous coachman, Morten got his brother to let himself be hired in the man's place. "And watch out carefully now," he had said to Niels; "When the occasion arises, we'll play a trick on that black-clad man, and it won't be to your loss." Niels, who was rigid and brusque by

nature and in addition inflamed by Morten, soon got into an argument with the master of the house, and as soon as Niels had received his first punishment, he did not forget to report it at Ingvorstrup.

"Let him now strike you one more time," Morten had said; "he'll get his come-uppance; come immediately to me and let me know!"

It was then that Niels picked a quarrel with the pastor in the garden and afterward ran without stopping to Ingvorstrup. The brothers met outside the farm. Niels told what happened. "Has anyone seen you on the way here?" asked Morten; Niels thought not. "Then," said Morten, "we will give the pastor a fright that he won't get over for the next fortnight."

So Niels was secretly taken to the farm, where he was kept hidden until evening. As soon as everyone had gone to rest, the brothers went together over to the stakes of three connected fields, where two days before the corpse had been buried of a fellow of Niels's age, size, and appearance. (He had served at Ingvorstrup and had hanged himself there, so it was whispered by some, in desperation over Bruus's tyrannical treatment and threats, whereas it was said by others, in grief over an unhappy love affair.) That corpse, they dug up—however unwilling Niels was to do so, his brother forced him—and dragged it home to the farm, for it was close by. Then Niels had to take off all his clothes; the corpse was clad in them, piece by piece, and even an earring was included. Afterward Morten gave the dead man a slash across the face and one in the temple with a spade and kept him in a sack until the next evening. Then they carried the sack to the woods, which lie close by Vejlbye.

Of course, Niels had questioned his brother several times as to what he had in mind and what all these maneuvers were for, but the latter had always answered, "That, you don't need to bother yourself about...; that is my business." In the woods Morten said to him, "Now you shall bring me one of the pastor's everyday robes, preferably the long green one I have seen him wearing in the mornings!"

"I don't dare," answered Niels; "they are hanging in his bedroom."

"Then I will dare it myself," said his brother, "and now be on your way, and never come here anymore! Here is a purse with a hundred dollars for you. That will certainly last until you can get a job in the south, but far away—do you hear?—where no one knows you! Take another name, and never again set your foot on Danish soil. Walk at night, and keep to the woods by day, and here is a food packet that I took along from the farm; it can feed you 'til you get beyond our king's mileposts. Hurry up now, and don't come here again if you value your life."

Niels obeyed, and with that the brothers parted, neither did they see each other from that day on. The runaway had suffered much hardship in foreign countries, had been inducted as a soldier, had served for many years, and had been in war, where he had become disabled. Poor, weak, and wretched, he had a mind to seek out his birthplace and with great suffering and difficulty had struggled his way back.

Such, in short, sounded that ill-starred person's account, and as to its truthfulness I unfortunately could not have any doubt. And it consequently became clear to me how my unfortunate colleague had fallen as a sacrifice to the basest evil, to the delusion of his judge and the witnesses, and to his own gullible power of imagination. Alas! what indeed is a human being that it dare set itself up as a judge over the life and death of its fellows? Who dares really say to his brother, thou art deserving of death? Vengeance is Mine sayeth the Lord; only He Who gives life dares to take it. For the bitter martyr's death you had to suffer here, may He now reward you in the beyond with eternal life's unending joy.

I did not feel myself justified in reporting that shattered and remorseful sinner to the authorities, so much the less so since the sheriff was still living, against whom it would be a cruel act to apprise him of his terrible mistake, before he wanders to the beyond, where everything shall be exposed that is still hidden from our eyes. I therefore strove rather to give the returned prodigal religious consolation and afterward most seriously admonished him to conceal his name and the whole event from everyone. I promised him, on that basis, shelter and care at my brother's, which is in a far distant region.

The next day was a Sunday. When toward evening I came home late from my parish-of-ease, the vagrant was gone; but, before evening of the following day, the incident was known throughout the neighborhood. Driven by his troubled conscience, he had rushed off to Rosmus and presented himself as the right Niels Bruus to the sheriff and all the farm's staff. The sheriff had a stroke and died before the end of the week, but on Tuesday morning Niels Bruus had been found lying dead outside Aalsøe Church's door, on the grave of the sainted Søren Qvist.

Translated by Faith Ingwersen

AFTERWORD

Sometimes, in retrospect, it becomes blatantly clear that a major event has occurred in literary history. T. S. Eliot put it like this in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) among them."[1] That introduction of the really new took place when the Danish minister Steen Steensen Blicher's "The Dairy of a Parish Clerk" was published in a regional magazine in Jutland in 1824. The novella, supposedly the journal of a servant at a manor house (who, finally, by his last entry in the journal has become a lowly servant of the Church), charts a life that is less than charmed. The contemporary literary scene was hardly excited, and why should it have been. After all, Blicher wrote far away from Copenhagen, the headquarters of *belles lettres*, and, besides, at that time prose was often thought to be inferior to poetry, the language of drama and the epic. Today it is clear, however, that Danish Romanticism—or history of Danish fictional prose—would have been a good deal less interesting if Blicher had not written those well-wrought and disturbing short stories that, through the use of Romantic elements, undermined the Romantic vision and foreshadowed twentieth-century literary developments.

Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848) grew up in the Danish provinces where his father was a minister; he followed in his father's footsteps and studied theology at the University of Copenhagen. Having received his degree, he returned to his home region, served as his father curate, and eventually became a parson not far from his place of birth. While a student, he had made attempt to write not only poetry—and he became a fine poet—but also drama, but it was his financial straits that made him venture into the realm of the short-story. Blicher was to be recognized as an accomplished writer during his lifetime, but an appreciation of his mastery of narrative prose was to come later. Likewise, criticism took its sweet time to tackle his works analytically (the Danish critic Søren Baggesen deserves major credit for recognizing the subtlety of Blicher's narrative technique).[2]

Blicher seemed to strike readers as a bit of a Walter Scott imitator—Blicher's Jutland settings seemed as exotic to the inhabitants of Copenhagen as Scotland did to the English reader—and like Scott,

Blicher was also labelled a regional writer, a term that carries a somewhat derogatory ring, for it suggests the marginal, rather than the mainstream. Undoubtedly Blicher learned something from Scott; in "The Diary of a Parish Clerk," the reader encounters well-known historical figures, but the protagonist is—as Scott's Ivanhoe—the author's own invention. Nevertheless, there is a profound difference between Scott and Blicher, one that may suggest why the former now is a dusty classic, whereas the latter continues to be read and to fascinate. Below, the introductory passage of Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) reads:

> It was in the beginning of the month of November, 17—, when a young English gentleman, who had just left the university of Oxford, made use of the liberty afforded him, to visit some parts of the north of England, and curiosity extended his tour into the adjacent frontier of his sister country. He had visited, upon the day that opens our history, some monastic ruins in the county of Dumfries, and spent much of the day in making drawings of them from different points; so that upon mounting his horse to resume his journey, the brief and gloomy twilight of the season had already commenced.[3]

Compare that panoramic overview to the beginning of the stories in this volume; and it will immediately become clear that Scott and Blicher approach narration differently. Scott uses the typical narrative voice of his age, that of the omniscient author, who speaks with total authority and who, possessing very nearly divine insight, knows what everyone feels and thinks. The fact that Scott writes "upon the day that opens our story" and deems the twilight "gloomy" suggests the authoritative approach of omniscient narration.

In contrast, Blicher created protagonists who have limited perceptions of life. Those people tell their own stories, and the reader is forced to read between the lines and construct that full picture which those who tell about their own lives are never able to form. In short, as early as in 1824, Blicher had made masterly use of that marvelous author's device called "the unreliable narrator;" he did so by making the reader suspect the character whose voice is speaking and by feeling an urge to understand what is really taking place.

Blicher shrewdly forces his readers into a position in which they become detectives hunting for truth. Those stories deserve the acclaim they have received more than a hundred years after Blicher's death, but they should not overshadow his versatility as an author commanding many narrative approaches. He, too, could narrate in the traditional

omniscient manner, and it may superficially seem that "The Three Holliday Eves" (1841) is such a story. The narration, however, is hardly omniscient, for on the whole the characters are observed from the outside. The technique used is close to the one found in folklore, and Blicher has once again proved innovative by using oral storytelling as a narrative model. The teller of a legend remains at the surface of the story; a plot is narrated, and insights into the psyches of the characters are mainly provided through their dialogue and actions. "The Three Holliday Eves" is "recorded" as a legend should be, namely, as oral history, as something that really happened. It is, however, a literary imitation of a legend—something that the clever Blicher makes quite clear by using the introductory phrase, "dear reader"—and he adds a lot of details that are foreign to oral narration. Furthermore, he borrows touches from another type of folktale, namely, the magic tale, in which repetition of events tends to occur—particularly three times—and which usually ends with the phrase "and then they lived happily ever after." In contrast to so many Blicher texts, the outcome is a joyful one, one that permits the audience not only to suffer the suspense but to greet its passing with a final sigh of relief, for as in the magic tale, the world seems "just" after all. Obstacles are overcome; evil stands corrected, and those who rightly belong together are united.

"The Three Holiday Eves" is a beloved and rousing story, told with verve and a keen sense of drama, but it is hardly representative of Blicher's world view. In Blicher's fictional universe, justice is not at all assured—rather to the contrary; and the reader who expects happy endings will often feel tricked. It may seem peculiar that a minister like Blicher, who had to preach about the Lord's mercy, would write such bleak texts, but the anti-romantic thrust of Blicher's stories foreshadows that of modern writers, who sees a world of little order or promise for the human being.

In "Tardy Awakening" (1828) the narrator is a minister—though hardly one who seems fortified by his vocation—who recalls fortysome years of events that destroyed the happiness of his circle of friends. As he relates the story, he lashes out against an unscrupulous woman, a vampire of sorts, who ruined so much. Readers wonder, however, to what extent they can trust the views of this adamant and righteous narrator. The narrator is himself glimpsed as a young man, one who may seem a far cry from the minister now banishing ambiguity from his life in a stern condemnation of immorality. The reader who begins to suspicion the reliability of the minister and who wonders what the title of the short story really means may also realize that the minister has possibly undercut his own credibility by including three love letters from the adulteress.

In "The Hosier" (1829), the narrator may seem close to Blicher himself—a country parson who loved to walk the moors with his gun and who became intimately acquainted with the people of the heathery moors. Once again, however, readers encounter a narrator with a limited perception, and, once again, readers must go on a hunt for what Wayne Booth has called "the implied author."[4] As the narrator observes the taciturn drama between lovers and parents during his first visit, his opinions seem to waver between sympathy for the young and agreement with the materialism of the hosier; Returning to the hosier's place later, the narrator admits that his expectations of life are often proved wrong; and, true enough, the idyll he had hoped to witness has turned into a tragedy. The question is: why so? It may well be that the narrator is unable to supply an answer, which leaves the task up to the reader. The reader should also note that, during the second visit, the narrator permits the hosier's wife to narrate the gruesome, melodramatic events that eliminated the potential for happiness for the young woman. Those two narrators, the educated visitor and the hosier's wife, speak with very different voices—the man is digressive and intellectual, and the woman is to the point, in the manner of the narrator of "The Three Hollidays Eves." Their discourses have little in common; their cultures clash quietly. Through that subtle contrast, Blicher maneuvers the reader into questioning the views of the educated visitor.

Romanticism had a penchant for tragedies—it was lovely to witness young lovers willing to perish together—but Blicher's tragedies have little of the "Romeo-and-Juliet" flavor, they tend, rather, to move in the direction of *King Lear*, whose one loving daughter is executed by evil. In short, the catharsis that many readers request of tragedy—and the experience of tragedy cannot be limited to drama—is lacking.

That is made brutally evident in "Parson from Vejlby" (1829). A young man, the narrator, recently appointed sheriff and judge in a region of Jutland, arrives with high hopes for the future. He believes in both divine and secular justice, and he sets out to be a fair judge and a model husband; he knows he can handle both the public and private world. Cruel and unfair events then prove him to be utterly wrong, and he, the believer in a just world, can barely stand the revelations to which he is exposed. In "The Parson of Vejlby," a man of the cloth who believes he is guilty of crime is wrongly executed, and the man who is to blame for that miscarriage of justice lives out his life in wealth and is eventually buried with the usual honors given an upright citizen.

The truth does not come to light for many years, and it is another parson who, in a few terse diary entries, reveals the nature of the evil conspiracy and the effects of the discovery of the crime. Catharsis is

denied the characters of the text, as well as its readers. Parson Blicher did not resort to Christianity to alleviate the mood of his audience.

The reader may ask why these tragedies had to occur. Blicher was not an author who permitted himself to lecture. Those who lecture are the unreliable narrators in the texts, they with their limited perceptions. The reader who chases that "implied author" will not end up, however, with clear-cut answers, for Blicher is not a reductionist. At times, all may turn out well, as in "The Three Holliday Eves," but the alert reader will notice that we are only a hair's breadth away from a different outcome. It is quite easy to prove that social values or ideology are to blame for the destruction of happiness, and Blicher suggests those causes, but he also permits chance—the accidental twist of events that no one can control or predict—to play a substantial role in matters of human existence.

Blicher hardly subscribed to easy explanations of human destinies; many explanations can be proffered, but they are hardly exhaustive. He knew that money was a crucial factor for the tragedy in "The Hosier," and he made the reader aware of the naivete of the young judge—filled with the ideology of the Absolute Monarchy—in "The Parson of Vejlby." Through the myopic views of the parson of "Tardy Awakening," he suggested that judgments passed by bourgeois society are most fallible; and in "The Three Holliday Eves," providence, luck, or fate wills that all should turn out well. Blicher admits that life is determined by many forces and that human beings can exert some control over those forces, but often without much avail. Perhaps that honesty on Blicher's part—his uncompromising admission that life is not necessarily predictable or fair—is another reason why his stories have survived while most of those by his contemporaries have faded into obscurity.

When Blicher's friend and colleague Bernhard Severin Ingemann, the author of some immensely popular historical novels—modelled on Walter Scott's successes—complained that Blicher's stories were depressing, Blicher answered, "it is true that they [the stories] are depressing, but how could they be different? And why should the tragic always be uplifting?" Some of Blicher's characters suffer ghastly fates—imagine the thoughts and emotions that welled up in the judge in "The Parson from Vejlby" when Niels Bruus finally stood before him and revealed the truth.

Often masterpieces tell grim stories—be they literary works or paintings or sculptures—but if the text is compelling, as it is in the case of *King Lear*, we implicitly agree to subject ourselves to a gruelling experience. That agreement is a part of the contract that tragedy offers

us: the terror is mixed with pleasure, for the artistry is exquisite. Søren Kierkegaard's initial entry in "Diapsalmata" in *Either/Or* (1843) exposes that trade off or contract: "[the artist's] fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror in his heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music." But Kierkegaard's aesthetic voice stands corrected; Blicher's stories are so well composed that one may initially mistake them for sweet music, but, as the reading proceeds, only the most superficial of readers will miss the terror in them. Terror and beauty, beauty and terror are intricately interwoven. Inescapably, we experience both.

NOTES

[1] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 5.
[2] Søren Baggesen, *Den blicherske Novelle* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1965).
[3] Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (Philadelphia: J. Maxwell, 1820), p. 3.
[4] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: Chicago UP, 1967).

COMMENTARY ON THE STORIES

Blicher's stories, even though they are set in remote Danish provinces, hardly need commentary, for their themes will be understood by readers who do not have the faintest notion about the past Danish culture. Nevertheless, a few comments will accompany each text to satisfy the curiosity of the reader who wonders about certain specific cultural references in each story.

"TARDY AWAKENING" (1828)

"This particular story is one of those set in Blicher's contemporary Denmark. It reveals the importance of the crown's civil servants—officers, ministers, judges, and others—in small provincial towns in which such social groups were considered high society.

When "Tardy Awakening" was published, another civil servant, Professor Madvig, who otherwise was a perceptive critic of Blicher, vehemently denounced the story for "filthy details" in an "unaesthetic description of double adultery and whoring."

The lines of German lines with which Doctor L. assures the narrator of the bliss in his marriage are taken from G. A. Bürger's "Die beiden Liebenden" (1773); the doctor omits but intimates the line preceding the one quoted: "**Die Wollust ist sie in der Nacht/*Die holde Sitsamkeit bei Tage***" ("During night she is sheer sensuality/by day she is utter virtue").

As the minister contemplates consoling Dr. L. he recalls Vergil's *Aeneid* "***tu contra audentius ito***" ("you shall fight with more fervor against [misfortune]").

Elise concludes her third letter to Captain H. with a quotation from J. W. Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773), "***Frantz! Frantz! Steh auf! der Morgen graut***" ("Frantz! Frantz! Get up, the morning is dawning").

"THE HOSIER" (1829)

The Story is set in Jutland—the peninsula north of Germany that divides the North Sea and the Kattegat. A border was formed during the ice-age between eastern and western Jutland: to the the east lies a moraine landscape with gentle hills and bountiful farmlands, while to the west the land is flat and sandy and covered with heather; the boundary between these two regions consists of spectacular hills and lakes. Along that border, slightly west of the hills and originating in northern Germany and heading for the age-old town of Viborg, runs the so-called army-road, a prehistoric track that for centuries has been used by peddlers, itinerants, shady characters, and other travellers. Pastor Blicher, who enjoyed outdoor life and marvelled at the nature of central Jutland, tended to strike up conversations with the people he encountered on the army road and, in fact, moonlighted a bit as a folklorist and published a book called *Ancient Legends of the Moors* (1824). It was that book which inspired a magazine editor to commission Blicher to write short stories.

Many of Blicher's stories are set in that borderland, one that has now drastically changed, since the moors are mostly gone—transformed in farmland. The narrator was, however, wandering about the moors well before workers with ploughs, in the name of progress, very nearly eliminated those vast heathery expanses from Jutland. A glimpse of what was to come is, however, intimated in the educated narrator's rambling introductory remarks, for he suggests that a certain settlement ought to be razed. He is referring to a settlement made up of Germans who were part of an experiment to cultivate the moors.

In the same context, the wanderer compares himself to **Tamerlane**, a mongol warrior, a nomadic conqueror whose home was—romantically speaking—everywhere.

The wanderer finds hospitality in the home of a **hosier**, who is a businessman—an example of an early Capitalist—who delivers wool to farmers and peasants; they then knit stockings, which the hosier buys back and then sells to shops and peddlers. One such peddler is Esben.

The fact that the narrator plays with the thought that the hosier is every bit as remarkable as the Scottish lairds, is a not very subtle reference to the immense popularity of Walter Scott's novels in Denmark at that time. In a sense, Blicher is imitating Scott, by introducing a region that the educated reading public might find exotic.

"THE THREE HOLLIDAY EVES" (1841)

The tale takes place in the hill country that divides east and west Jutland. At the center of the region concerned is the manor house, with its powerful lord and lady; the farmers are beholden to them; they do not own their own land but have copyhold farms, which means that they have to work on the manor fields before they tend to their own harvest. Young Seier is an ambitious man; he hopes to be allowed to rent a farm from the manor, for that would enable him to marry his beloved Ma-Ibs. The letter he wants from the master of the manor will be a contract between master and villein.

Into this settled world enters an outlaw, a man who makes eyes at Ma-Ibs and who pretends to be a part of her society. He is a **Skovlouring**, which means that he comes from a certain region in which charcoal is produced, and he is, supposedly, on his way to sell it.

Ma-Ib's father remarks that the master of the manor might put Seier on the **wooden horse**. That horse resembled a modern day sawhorse, but its back was sharp-edged in order to cause pain to the wretched person who was forced to ride it. It was used to punish obstinate underlings: their hands were tied; they were put on the horse; and sandbags or stone were tied to their legs, so that the sharp-edged back of the horse would have its impact. That the wooden horse, a torture instrument is mentioned suggests the mindset of the villeins and the power of the master of the manor house over the people of his region.

In the later part of the story, when another outlaw pretends to be a decent fellow, the good people at Ibs take him in—for it is, after all, Christmas Eve—and let him stay at the farm. They allow him to sleep **in the stove**, and that brings us a glimpse from the old farming culture in which the kitchen was in itself nearly a stove, and its ceiling coned into a chimney.

"THE PASTOR OF VEJLBY" (1829)

This story is based upon events that took place in 1626, when pastor Søren Jensen Quist was executed for murder. Just as Quist somewhat misquotes the Bible, so, too, does Blicher take poetic license with the historical records, and it is still debated whether or not the pastor of Vejlby was guilty of homicide.

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