

Mogens Klitgaard

**God Tempers
the Wind to the
Shorn Lamb**

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes
by Marc Linder

With the Assistance of
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The cover image is one of the friezes adorning the lobby of the Danish Parliament, which were painted by Rasmus Larsen between 1918 and 1921. Courtesy of Folketinget.

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First Chapter

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Sometimes I think about the fact that it's not the chance occurrences that determine our lives, but the way we react to the chance occurrences. No doubt many a time life's offered me a chance—I just wasn't capable of taking it. Conversely, many a time life's given me an opportunity to do something wrong and I've never neglected to avail myself of it. When I was a boy, I stole from my mother's household money when her purse was inadvertently left lying on the plate rack, and I used every opportunity to tell a lie and spin stories that were pure fabrication.

My father was a parish deacon* and my whole family consisted of nice people who never did anything wrong; every Sunday morning I went with my sister to Sunday school. I usually sat between my sister and a little girl named Lise, and she used to — —.

But why, by the way, should I be sitting and telling all this. Of what interest can it be to other people to hear about how it happened that a person of my age is sitting here in this place. In a moment the manager's going to come and say that I have to go, and that I can't sit here for hours on end without buying anything. Sit and take space away from other people. He's already been keeping an eye on me, and next time a patron comes balancing his cup of coffee without being able to find a seat, he'll come waddling in his white smock and prick my shoulder with his fat, red index finger. I'm accustomed to being able to sit for a couple of hours over a cup of coffee; if you haven't emptied your cup, of course they can't chase you out that easily, but this evening I needed the hot coffee so much that I drank the whole thing, and besides, there are so many people here because the weather's bad.

For two weeks I lived in a rusted-out crate of an automobile out at the dump in Frederiksholm.* That doesn't sound that good, but in reality it was an excellent spot, in any case when the wind was blowing in the right direction. But then one evening when I came home, there was someone in the crate. I could tell by their voices that it was a man and a girl. Since at first I thought that they'd gone in there to be alone and that maybe it wouldn't take that long, I sat down to wait, because why shouldn't people be allowed to love each other even if they don't have a villa on the Coastal Road.* But when it'd gotten toward two o'clock and it'd gotten completely quiet in the crate, I went into it. It was very cold to be sitting outside for a long time and my feet were sore and swollen from tramping around all day. When I struck a match, I could see that they were lying over in the corner on my horse blanket. In spite of the cold, the girl was totally naked. I've had a good upbringing and left the crate and began to clear my throat. Completely without any effect. If I was going to rescue my little home, I was going to have to forget my good upbringing and get tough. Once again I made my entry into the crate, this time very noisily. Then both of them woke up and sat up and glared at me. In the flickering light of the match the girl was so beautiful a sight that my heart began pounding and my body remembered how long it'd been since I'd slept with a girl.

There was only one thing for me to do—make an awful fuss about finding uninvited guests in my crate. And I did that. I groused terribly and asked what the hell they thought they were doing and so on. That was the only tactic to be used in that situation and it failed. The man flew at my head, smashed my glasses, and threw me out of my own crate.

Toward morning I reached the horse stable on Larsbjørn Lane,* but it was so stuffed with homeless people that I couldn't find room and had to walk the streets until the people's kitchen* opened.

I'm a man in my early thirties. I came into the world in a nice home and got a nice upbringing. I'm neither an invalid nor mentally retarded; apart from my near-sightedness I'm really nicely endowed by nature. Like the ordinary run of people no doubt. And nevertheless I'm sitting here telling you my life story for a cup of coffee and money for a night's lodging. If you're expecting to hear something sensational, something adventurous, you're going to be disappointed—immorality and breaches of the law are some of the most unromantic things on this earth.

Now the manager's standing over by the cash register fuming that he can't throw me out for the time being. It's a shame he has to miss out on that pleasure. Life's so lacking in pleasures.

I don't know whether I said that my father was a parish deacon. He was. I grew up in a nice decent home. When I was fifteen years old, I ran away from home. I stole a bike and rode to Humlebæk,* where I stole a boat and sailed to Sweden. It wasn't especially romantic, unless it's romantic to freeze, starve, and be afraid. In Sweden I begged my way along the highways. One evening I came to a manor in Halland.* I'd walked a very long way without seeing a farm or a house that seemed to say *Welcome, come in and have a sandwich, drink a cup of coffee in my cozy kitchen, stay here tonight if you're too tired to keep walking*—or whatever a friendly facade of a house like that says to a fifteen-year-old vagabond trudging past out on the road. I suppose there'd been a couple of farms, but they were located so far from the main road that it wasn't worth the trouble, and the couple of humble houses I went past looked unsympathetic and had dogs that made a racket long before you got close to them.

Dogs are great judges of human beings. A constable riding by on a bicycle can stare at you speculatively and be in doubt as to your right to be walking on the road, and you can trick him by looking frank—a dog smells from a great distance that you're a vagabond. You can't trick him with a frank look, and the only

way to avoid his teeth is to look rigidly ahead and walk by as if you hadn't at all noticed that a house was standing there. Besides, what would you want in a house whose inhabitants look at things in such a way that they'd get themselves a fierce cur.

My clothes were no longer in decent shape. In Ängelholm* I'd exchanged my shoes for a pair of canvas shoes. For the crown* I got in exchange I spent the night in lodgings for travellers.* My pants hung in shreds at the bottom and I hadn't changed underwear in a month. Just as the sun was going down, I came to a turn in the road where I had to go across a little bridge. I suppose the place was idyllic: a little church sat there on a hill, and tall poplars stood around a peaceful village pond. I was very tired and hungry.

A collection of barracks was located a little past the church. It was a quiet evening. I came to a crowd of day laborers; most of them were Poles.* A black-haired girl, who was sitting on the grass by the roadside, looked at me with a beautiful, calm look. She had a gaily colored scarf around her head and small, delicate gold rings in her ears.

The men said that if I felt like working in the beet fields, I could go up to the farmhouse and talk to the manager. They sized me up as being able to earn a few crowns a day on a piece rate, and for the time it lasted, I'd get shelter and a daily jug of milk. In addition, I could get as many potatoes as I wanted, but that really didn't mean that much—they'd sprouted and practically couldn't be eaten.

I went up to the farmhouse to talk to the manager. At the end of a tree-lined walk I came to a wrought-iron gate. Just inside in the garden there was a lawn where some children and a young girl were playing croquet. When I stopped to watch them, the young girl asked me angrily what I wanted. Was there any work in the beet fields on the farm? Work in the beet fields, she repeated, as if she'd never ever heard before that there was something called work in the beet fields. One of the children all of a sudden enthusiastically caught sight of me and said that I was certainly a *luffare*,* a beggar. Come Ysra, look, he's a real *luffare*.

In the middle of all that a man in tall riding boots came and asked in a brusque tone what I was doing in the garden. When I said I was looking for work in the beet fields, he looked at me disapprovingly and said that kind of thing took place on the farmstead.*

On the farmstead I found the manager, who was a friendly man. You could tell by looking at him that he himself took part in the work. While I was talking to him, the young girl who'd been playing croquet with the children came. During their conversation they moved a little bit away from me, but I still couldn't help hearing that it was me they were talking about. I heard her use expressions such as *people like that who come by road* and so on, and understood that for one reason or another she didn't like me getting the job.

But I got it anyway. The manager sent a boy with me down to the barracks to give instructions to assign lodging to me. As I left, I gave the young girl a triumphant look, but she didn't seem to notice. Had I known what awaited me, I wouldn't have taken the job that evening, but instead would've gone on and spent the night in some haystack or other in a field.

Do you know what a Copenhagen basement wash house* looks like? It's an elegant and cozy place in comparison to the room I was assigned in the barracks. The floor was cement, but too much sand had been put into the cement so that it crumbled when you just touched it. There were big holes in the floors with puddles of water; there was a rusty iron bed without bedding or mattress; a little rusty tiled stove without a door; and a hoeing apparatus that'd been put in here to be out of the way. The panes that were missing in the window had been replaced with margarine vat lids and tin advertisements for van Houten's cocoa.

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When you're sitting like this at a people's kitchen gloriously aware that the manager can't come and chuck you out into the cold snow, that you've got money for a night's lodging, so you

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don't need to walk the streets at night, and still so much left over that morning coffee and cigarettes are taken care of, life seems quite pleasant to you after all. Then of course you've got all day long tomorrow to get the little bit of food you have to have and the couple of cents needed to get into bed. You totally forget how many times you failed to do it, how many nights you trudged up the street and down the street with an empty stomach, forget how you hated the well-fed idiots who were half-drunk on the way home from a binge and answered a polite request with a bad joke or flippant grin, forget that zealous police chased you away from the trolley waiting benches at City Hall Square, where there was after all a little shelter from the cold and you could rest your tired feet.

Humans have a wonderful ability to adapt. Up in a big office near City Hall Square there's a well-known man sitting with titles and status. There are nice things about him in Who's Who, and if he succeeds in kicking the bucket before the crash, he'll get a nice obituary. With the embezzlement he's committed there'd have to be a miracle to avoid the crash. Maybe he can manage for another year, maybe two. He's wishing that the world'll come to an end before that time, that war'll break out or something else catastrophic. He's not having a good time. And still he's assured in any event of one year. Nice villa, presentable car, sweet wife, amusements, and good food. Things are damn awful for him and twice a week he ponders suicide. I'm only assured of lodging for tonight plus coffee in the morning and cigarettes, but still I'm sitting here feeling a kind of pleasure in life. That evening on the Swedish manor I didn't feel especially happy about life. For some stupid reason or other I let myself be deprived of my freedom, agreed to root about in a beet field from sunup to sunset instead of wandering free as a bird down the highway, agreed to exchange my bed for the night in some haystack or other for a rusty iron bed in a foul-smelling barracks. My clothes didn't look so pretty to begin with, but what would they look like after I'd weeded beets for a week or so. I agreed to let myself be ordered about, to let myself be treated like a dog, and I did it completely voluntarily. It must be

my good upbringing that was responsible for my not being able to say no when I was offered work.

I dragged the hoe out and tried to sweep the water up out of the puddles on the cement floor with an old sack that was lying in one corner. The only thing I accomplished was to get it spread across the floor. When I was finished with it, I was standing still in the middle of the room and was at my wits' end, standing and looking at the iron bed and pondering whether they'd expected me to sleep there without mattress or bedding. Or whether maybe they'd expected that I'd brought it along under my arm. I went outside to find someone who could help me solve this problem. The sun had set and the day laborers were settling down for the night; a bus drove by on the road. The sky was bright. It was very quiet and a white veil of bog mist lay down across the rush-grown stretch behind the village pond and the poplars. The air was spicy, far off there was someone laughing; the leaves of the poplars trembled. I cursed myself for having renounced my freedom.

Somebody was calling me from a window. It was the black-haired girl with the gold earrings. Did you eat, she asked. If I hadn't, I could eat with her and her sister. She was the one who'd looked at me with that beautiful gaze. After we'd eaten, the sister left and the girl with the earrings said there was no sense in thinking about managing to put together a bed on the iron monstrosity in my room, but instead I could sleep in her sister's bed since she was spending the night at her boyfriend's in the barracks next door. After I'd gone to bed, she took my socks and my shirt and went outside and washed them. I could hear the water bubbling in the bucket and that she was humming. I was very sleepy and was already dozing. When she came back in, she said that her name was Siska and that my clothes would be dry by the time I had to get up. Her name was actually Francisca, but they all said Siska because it was easier. I shouldn't misunderstand her doing something for me, she said—it was a pleasure for her. Then she turned out the light and went to bed.

Right after Siska'd turned off the light, I couldn't see anything at all, but could both hear and sense that she was pulling her dress over her head. Before she'd put it down, my eyes had become accustomed to the dark and I quite clearly saw her take off her slip. When she said good night, my heart was beating so fast I couldn't answer. She probably thought I was sleeping and finished undressing. In the summer night twilight her skin shone white—she was standing only a few steps from me. The gold earrings glinted whenever she moved, which accentuated her nakedness.

Even after she'd gone to bed, my heart wouldn't start functioning normally, and in spite of my being tired, it wasn't possible to fall asleep. My natural impulse of course was to get up and go over to her bed and, without further ado, lie down with her. But just the thought of making a movement was absurd; it was as if my limbs were stiff—I'd never have been able to pull it off; it would never've been possible to walk the few yards across the floor; I'd never ever get over there, even if I'd succeeded in getting up from the bed. Theoretically it would've been exceedingly easy. You just put one foot in front of the other, after that the other in front of the first, and in that way sooner or later reach her bed, where you just lift the blanket and very quietly lie down beside her. Theoretically it was exceedingly easy, but in practice it wasn't possible to move so much as a pinky.

Besides, she'd undoubtedly get angry about someone's having rewarded her kindness that way. Hadn't she in fact said that I shouldn't misunderstand her hospitality. If I hadn't had a good upbringing, it's possible that I'd have overcome my scruples. My father the parish deacon must've exulted in his heaven when he saw that I not only rejected sin, but that I was quite simply incapable of committing it.

Naturally it turned out that I couldn't keep up in the beets. The Poles would take two rows while I took one despite Siska's helping me. When she caught up with me, she'd cross over into my row and take a part of it before continuing in her own. When she reached the end of her row, she'd continue with mine till we met. She walked bent over with a small, short iron hoe. When I completely caught up with her, I could see down into her neckline: she had buxom, round breasts, which shone white down in the dark. I longed for this moment.

It was hard work. And it was especially hard when you weren't used to it. When evening came, my back ached so I could only think about getting to lie down. Just as soon as I'd eaten, I went to bed, and despite my having dreamt all day long about the moment Siska went to bed, I was sleeping like a rock before the sun set.

The next day was Sunday. I awoke early, but Siska was already up. She was in a flowery kimono and had high-heel house slippers on her bare feet. Who'd have believed it. She was in fact a different woman. I was used to seeing her barefoot or with wooden shoes and wearing a coarse cotton dress, which was tucked up to her knees when she was in the field. Especially the high-heel slippers changed her, made her instep slimmer and her calf rounder.* Besides, they gave her a different posture, a more seductive one. But maybe it was the kimono. She'd done her hair carefully; women, I suppose, love to go around like that Sunday mornings pottering, dolling themselves up, and making themselves beautiful; her black hair lay like a frame around her delicate face with its black eyes.

When she saw I'd woken up, she said I should stay in bed—then I'd get coffee in bed. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She made the coffee on the portable kerosene stove, set the table, and dragged it over to my bed. After we'd drunk it, she fetched cigarettes and sat down on the edge of my bed and said I was a silly boy.

We smoked for a bit in silence. I felt terribly foolish and

awkward. Naturally she expected me to say something. And if I didn't say anything, maybe she'd realize how things stood with me and get offended by the fact that she couldn't sit on the edge of my bed without my having impure thoughts. Maybe she'd get so angry that I wouldn't be allowed to sleep there anymore, but would have to go back to the dismal barracks room with the tin ads and rusty iron bed. When she said I was missing a button on my neckband, I blushed. She let her hand stay on my neck and bent down over me and kissed me. When she made that movement, her belt flew open—she was naked underneath her kimono. The eternal laws of nature began to function: my hand was darting wildly, she lifted the blanket and her whole scent, warmth, and softness gushed forth over me. What would my father the parish deacon have said?

After breakfast we went on an outing. She put coffee in a beer bottle and packed it in a newspaper, buttered a couple of pieces of bread, and put the whole thing in a box made of vulcanized fiber, just like the ones the farm laborers have their breakfast in. It came with a strap so you could carry it. When we passed a crowd of day laborers at the end of the barracks, one of them made a comment. She just laughed and said I shouldn't pay attention to it.

We had a wonderful afternoon, which would've been perfect if we'd avoided a little experience that cast a tinge of bad feeling over the rest of the day. We'd lain down on a grassy slope out toward a forest road to drink coffee. Siska was frolicsome and fooled and larked about while laying the table on the grass. We played husband and wife, or rather, she did. She said that there was a red scarf at the merchant's that she'd so terribly much like to have—please let me buy it. I went along with the game and said it was out of the question as long as we hadn't paid the gas bill and that she was ruining me with her vanity. She said I was a brute of a man, who drank till I was juiced and went to bed with every girl in the world, but would begrudge his little wife a measly scarf, and asked if perhaps I meant to hit her if she bought it anyway. I confirmed it and tried to look very masculine and brutish. With a whip, she asked. Yeah, with a whip, I

replied with my lower jaw jutting out, took her hard by the wrist, and twisted it around so she wound up lying down. So maybe you'll behave decently, I said. Yes, she whimpered and looked at me with her eyes enraptured. She was lying and fondling my hand, and said that I was so crude, but that she'd definitely be decent and never be disobedient. It was really funny, but very exasperating, and if just then I hadn't heard the tramp of horses, presumably I would've played the role to the end in keeping with her wish and in the midst of her mild protests and whimpering accusations of brutality.

But I did hear the tramp of horses. Siska straightened out her clothes, which had gotten mussed up, and we sat up since people are always ready to believe the worst. Before Siska'd managed to hook her dress at the neck, the rider had become visible in the bend in the road. It was the young girl who'd been playing croquet with the estate owner's children that evening I was looking for work. She slowly trotted past us with a bitter, spiteful look. Without greeting us. Siska said it was the governess up in the farmhouse, the one who was engaged to the manager. Her name was Miss Klara and the day laborers said she liked women. Yeah, but then how can she be engaged to the manager, I asked. Siska couldn't really understand that either, but she nevertheless didn't want to get into that subject any further.

The way Miss Klara had looked at us ruined the mood. Mine in any case. Siska tried to resume the game from before, but I couldn't forget the cold blue eyes and a short time afterward we left and set out on the way home. Two days later those blue eyes crossed my path again, this time with a more catastrophic effect.

It was right after quitting time that it began. I was standing and washing myself with a bucket outside the barracks. I'd taken off my shirt, was washing the whole upper part of my body, gargling, and was in a splendid mood, was standing and

singing to myself during the whole cleaning festival—life was lovely. Siska was lovely, the manual labor did me good—I felt like doing gymnastics from a sheer sense of vitality.

I say that I felt like it. Of course I didn't do it. By nature I'm a calm and quiet person who can't stand attracting attention or doing anything violent; I've been brought up not to make noise or make a hullabaloo in any other way. Maybe that's why I sometimes get such a violent urge to shout and scream and do somersaults. By the way, it may well be that it was that urge that made me run away from home.

So I was standing and gargling when one of the girls from up in the farmhouse came and asked if I was the little Dane who'd come during the past week. I covered my naked upper body with the towel and said yes I was. I was supposed to go up to the farmhouse just as soon as I'd eaten, she said. I was supposed to be registered.* I was just supposed to go into the office—it was in the main building just to the right of the entrance.

That evening Siska was going to the dance at the inn together with her sister, and this way I had an excuse for not going along to the dance. I hate going to dances; I blush about everything, and when I have to walk across the floor to bow and ask a girl for a dance, I'm afraid of stumbling over my own feet and am certain that all the people are looking at me and smirking at me. So that worked out splendidly and after we'd eaten, I went up to the farmhouse.

When I knocked on the door to the office, nobody answered. I opened the door, went in, and cleared my throat. I made sure to stand out in the middle of the floor so that if the manager came he wouldn't think that I'd stolen something or been snooping in his things. It's a nasty feeling to be standing in other people's preserves waiting for their surprise at finding a stranger there. Especially for a vagabond who's come straight from the highway and gotten work. It's okay to regard people whose labor is poorly paid as criminals even before knowing them. There was a door besides the one I'd come in through. I went over and discretely knocked on it; people who weed beets need to be polite and modest. Still not a sound. I knocked harder.

This time somebody said *come in*. I opened the door with the slowness that's supposed to express deference.

I looked into a kind of study. There were big buffalo leather chairs, antlers on the walls, hunting implements, and all that kind of stuff; yes, there was also a picture of a naked girl in a forest—that's a funny thing, but you see that kind of picture so often even though in fact you never meet naked girls in the forest; I'm certain that there's never been anyone who's had that experience, even if they've lived their whole lives in the forests. That must be a kind of dream that people go around having. Or maybe it's because that way they can have a picture of a naked girl to go and look at without the parish church council's* getting offended. If it's art, there's of course nobody who'll dare say anything, except maybe just the most fanatic people of all. And damn it, they themselves have got their French pictures well locked up down in a drawer.

But there was no one in the room. On the other hand, there was a door open into another room—it must've been from there that somebody had said *come in*. I walked diagonally across the floor and knocked on the door frame. The farther you penetrate into the bigwigs' inner sanctum, the more discrete you have to be. And what a big chasm there is between a beet worker and an estate owner.

Someone got up in the room and appeared in the doorway. It was Miss Klara. She was in riding breeches, tall boots, and had a kind of silk shirt on. With a tie. She was erect and blond and looked straight at me with her blue eyes. Sort of a bit mockingly. It struck me that she was Siska's diametrical opposite, but that in one way or another they had something in common.

Oh, it's you, she said. Yes, we were of course supposed to have registered you—please come in.

She began to interrogate me in a very general way. What my name was, how old I was. Where I was from. Whether I had any papers. How it came about that I was going around begging on the highways in Sweden. In general I answered in conformity with the truth; I just didn't say that my father was a parish deacon, but rather that he'd died when I was little.

Suddenly she asked me to my great surprise whether I understood why she'd opposed my getting the job. She said it very vehemently and came all the way over to me. I couldn't make heads or tails of it and didn't know what to answer. She was standing and smiling in a strange way right into my face. I thought it was an evil smile.

I'm pretty sure I thought she was insane. In any case, I was so scared I didn't dare move. I didn't dare move so much as a finger. I think she stood there for several minutes with that strange, quivering, mocking smile without saying anything. As if she wanted to hypnotize me. As if she didn't dare say anything so I wouldn't wake up and go my way. Suddenly I noticed her hand touching mine very lightly. It was trembling and moist and hot. Then she whispered in a voice quivering with agitation: *You're such a girl.*

I was unspeakably afraid. Her hand was squeezing mine in an overwrought way and she was breathing heavily. She drew me to herself and kissed me with hard and burning dry lips, pressed her knee in between mine, took me and whispered spasmodically and indistinctly that I was a girl and that she was going to whip me to death. Now there was no longer any doubt that she was insane; I tore myself loose and darted out the door between the study and the office and out into the garden.