

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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Fourth Chapter

1

You have to admit that I'd gotten into a difficult situation. How was I to go about making good my escape? How was I going to sneak away like a thief in the night from people who'd treated me that well? I had to do something that could get the Guses, including Gunhild, to despise me profoundly and sincerely. Then I'd be able to leave them with a light heart and live the free life I yearned for so boundlessly.

The following days I was intentionally surly and obstinate, did my work badly, didn't answer when I was spoken to, gave the wrong soil to the plants, insulted one of Guse's best customers, and killed Gunhild's favorite kitten. I noticed their amazement about my changed behavior and began to gloat a little to myself and imagine how Guse would ask me to come into the office, give me an envelope with my wages, speak his mind, and ask me to hurry up and vanish from his house. I'd pretend that I'd gotten fed up with it, and if he then regretted it and said that I was welcome to stay after all, I'd be defiant and say that I'd certainly noticed lately that they didn't care about me and that no power on earth would get me to stay a minute longer.

And before an hour had gone by, I'd be on the highway, free and independent. And in the first bit of woods I came to, I'd go in and fling myself full length underneath a tree, where the Queen Anne's lace grew as tall as a man and where you heard nothing but the insects and the wind. Or maybe on the shore of a lake with yellow and white water lilies, where you could lie and watch the grebes* and see the fish skip along the surface.

One afternoon while I was walking past the potting shed I heard Guse chatting with his wife in there and wound up, actually against my will, hearing what they were talking about.

Guse: Damn it, the lad hasn't been having such an easy time—there's something or other that's tormenting him. If he weren't so withdrawn, we could talk to him and maybe get him on an even keel.

Guse's wife: I mean, he's nothing but a child and naturally he misses the feeling of having a home. He goes around here like a stranger; maybe we should try and look after him a little more and be something for him.

Guse: I like the fellow and feel like trying to talk to him, but it's probably best to leave him alone so he can go work it out for himself. Damn it, at that age people are inclined to go get a bee in their bonnet. It's a pity if he's feeling rotten, but it'll surely pass.

So that was all that I'd gotten out of my fine new tactic. It was enough to drive you to despair. I'd surely never succeed in getting away from there. They'd keep me year after year, and when Guse died some day, I'd inherit the nursery and get married to Gunhild. Good night highway, good night dreams of freedom and all little lakes with white water lilies. Good night adventures and great wide world. Good night extraordinary experiences in small, remote mountain villages.

2

So I decided to talk to Guse. Tell him the lay of the land straight out. One afternoon while we were standing tying up tomatoes in one of the cold greenhouses, he said that I shouldn't tie the bast too tightly around the plants—the staking was just supposed to help hold up the weight of the tomatoes—I shouldn't tie them so the bast cut into the stems. Mr. Guse, I said to him, I feel that I'm not cut out to be a gardener; I'd rather tell you the way it is—I'm no good at it, I'm inadequate, and I'll never get it. I've thought a lot about it and decided to tell you that it's better if I left. If you hadn't been so good to me, I'd have left a long time ago.

Yeah, that was certainly quite a rigmarole, he said and smirked. Nope, my friend, stop taking it so seriously—you're splendidly suited to be a gardener and I'm very satisfied with you. Cheer up and stop taking things so hard.

Yes, but Mr. Guse — — —

No buts about it, he said. Damn it, I think you've got an inferiority complex. Just do your best—I won't demand any more. Nobody can do more than his best, not even Our Lord.

He gave me a push on the shoulder with his fist and looked at me right in the face with his good, keen eyes. Is that all right, he said.

I couldn't deal with it—I tried to avoid his gaze and forgot the attitude I'd finally managed to adopt. He had authority and I'd been brought up to yield to authority. I mumbled something or other and he gave me a pat on the cheek and said:

That's settled.

— My plans with Gunhild also failed. I felt so certain that if the girl loved me, she'd also put that crazy plan about going away with me out of her mind when I explained that I'd feel happier about it. Isn't there perhaps something beautiful about making a sacrifice for the one you love. On the contrary, she became more bent on going along after I'd asked her to stop it.

Altogether I was in a pickle. Now there was only way left—that was to scam from the whole thing one night, leave a note on the table, and ask them to understand why there was nothing else I could do. And thank them for all the good they'd done for me.

3

And then it wound up, after all, going totally differently than I'd imagined. I'd decided to leave the next Saturday. In the evening. I would put a letter on the table up in my room; it wouldn't be found until toward noon the next day. I felt horribly rotten about it, but it had to be done.

On Saturday I was in a strange mood and convinced that all of them could see by looking at me what I had in mind. After knocking off for work I went up to my room and wrote the letter on a piece of Guse's company stationery which I'd taken down in the office.

I still hadn't managed to put the letter in an envelope when

I heard Mrs. Guse calling me. I shoved the letter under the pillow and went down. Would I take a package to the railroad station that absolutely had to go off that very evening. I took the package and hurried off. While I was on the way home, I suddenly saw Gunhild diagonally across the street from me. She looked very agitated. At first I thought she'd found the letter and I wished that I'd never been born. When she caught up with me, she was so short of breath I could barely understand what she was saying. When it finally dawned on me, it chilled my spine: Right after I'd taken the package to the station, Rössler, the policeman, had come and asked for me. When he heard that I wasn't home, he said he'd wait for me. Then he'd gone into the office with Guse and Gunhild had run in my direction to warn me.

Naturally I realized that it wasn't the geraniums—that it was something more serious. Maybe it was just something to do with registering with the police, but of course it might also well be that the police had discovered that I was a foreigner and that I was now going to be arrested and deported. Being greeted by a family deputation at the main train station* with the parish deacon at the head, receiving their forgiveness like a prodigal son, and once again being compulsorily detained in *the fancy sitting rooms*. Go home and see father sitting and writing out birth certificates for sixty øre a piece. And every Sunday morning sit in church and devoutly play hypocrite.

Not on your life. Then it'd be better to be beaten to a pulp as a cabin boy on some ship or other. If there was anyone who'd have me. In any case, I had to get out of Germany. Back then I had very naive notions about the police's methods and thought that the whole machinery would be put on highest alert if I made myself scarce.

Five minutes later I was sitting on the bus to Hamburg and Gunhild was standing back on the road waving and crying. I got a lump in my throat and all of a sudden felt that I was losing so much. Something that maybe was worth more than freedom and adventure. The day before it'd seemed to me that it was crystal clear that my fortune was made if I could just slip away, and now

suddenly I could no longer understand why it was actually crystal clear. And there was Gunhild standing on the road looking back at the bus that was driving off and all of a sudden I realized that I loved her, that I couldn't do without her, that she'd been the only thing in my life there was anything good about.

And why then did I absolutely have to leave the people who'd treated me better than any other people. I mean, it wasn't because Rössler had come and asked for me—after all, I would've fled that same evening anyway.

But it was just for a moment. When Gunhild and the nursery's chimney had disappeared from sight, I was on the verge of starting to sing—now I was free, now I was my own master again. No obligations, no bonds—life and freedom would be coming now.

4

There was a full house on Little Parrot Street—I got the last bed that was empty. A Copenhagen beggar-prince who called himself Valby-Povl* was lying in the next bed. The rest of them called him Liar-Povl. He was lying there scratching himself incessantly and talking about scams, while I was lying there thinking about Gunhild and about how I was going to get out of Germany before the police nabbed me. I didn't dare stay more than one night on Parrot Street.

I asked Valby-Povl whether he thought I could slip across the border near Kruså.*

Now listen here, he said, you're a little baby: you don't have an honest piece of paper in your pocket and then you think you can walk across the border. From the German side. I mean, you must have bats in the belfry. You see, a German can run the risk and walk across if he isn't wanted by the police; if the gendarmes take him, he just plays dumb, has no idea that he's right near the border, and so on. A Dane can do that from the Danish side. But a Dane from the German side without papers and wanted by the police, that's the most insane thing I've heard in

a long time. Why not get sent home,* approach the consul, and say you've lost your papers. He's a nice man, that consul, he talks to you in a friendly and sympathetic way for half an hour and then says that he's awfully sorry that he can't help you. Just approach him—maybe you can get a ticket to the Salvation Army hostel, where they have almost no lice and where you can get permission to chop wood and sing hymns if you're really well-behaved. Across the border, you say, nooo, damn it, that won't work, pal, but try and talk to the stokers on one of the Danish boats, damn it, they'll help you get home, all right, without asking about your citizenship rights or your religion—just say hello from Valby-Povl, then it'll definitely be okay.

The next day Valby-Povl accompanied me down to the harbor to find a ship for me. After he got me to come clean with my whole story, he felt that I should probably prefer the prescribed way of going home, after all. It could certainly be arranged and it was, well you know, more pleasant.

I tried to let him in on the fact that it was that business with my family. That this way I'd fall right back down into my family's bosom, but under even more difficult circumstances than when I ran away from home. And that it was my plan at some point eventually, maybe not for many years, to return home with a lot of money in my pocket, put up at the Angleterre* and invite the whole family to dine, come on like a big shot, really impress them, and then go off on my way again, out to the great wide world, to new adventures and experiences.

Valby-Povl looked at me disapprovingly. Yeah, you know, I sure thought you were a childish ass. I once knew a guy who took off from home in order to be able to return and show them a guy could turn into somebody without their advice and admonitions. He also wanted to return home on a 2nd class ticket, send a telegram about his arrival, and so on—such a really stupid little pig from a nice home, you understand. He sailed off and saved every penny, didn't smoke, didn't drink, just to be able to go home and annoy his family. Naturally he soon discovered that that isn't the way it's got to be done. So he went ashore and became a dishwasher at a bar in Marseille. That didn't work out

either. Then he went to the States, took the hardest drudgery you could get, and discovered once again that it's the hardest work that pays the least. That's a hard and fast rule, old boy, don't ever forget it. The ones who earn the most are the ones who don't do anything; from there the earnings gradually go down and are the lowest for the ones with the longest working hours and the hardest toil. So, after ten years he managed to scrape enough together that he was able to slip back over to Europe, got a job at a box factory in Paris, and tried to be thrifty and industrious. One year after the next went by and he had every possible kind of job, but he never managed to put aside enough to be able to go through with his trip home and invite his family for split pea soup at Brøddehytten.* So he killed a man and took his wallet with 7,000 francs, which was something like a thousand crowns back then, and outfitted himself from head to toe. God, how his family would be annoyed when they saw how dashing he'd become: there they spent their time at home, did their jobs, and were nice and well-behaved; so that's what you got out of going around and being decent and nice—they had to go around with an old overcoat, which was turned inside out, and put margarine on their bread, while a loafer like that could come rolling in from Paris like some kind of man of the world, dashing and elegant, and be patronizing to them and say that they shouldn't lose heart: after all, we can't all come out on top, but, you know, the quiet life has its place too, and so on.

Well, he had to wait about two weeks in Paris before he left, because you could see by looking at his calloused hands how he'd had to slave away, and that of course wasn't part of the plan. He went to the manicure salon every other day, but that didn't help much. In the meantime of course he'd blown some of the money and he began contemplating killing someone else so as not to run the risk of winding up running dry midway. But he couldn't really find the opportunity for it and decided then to go home and pull it off as well as he could, while he still did have some money. He bought a pair of gloves to hide his hands, telegraphed his arrival and travelled third class to Gedser.* In Gedser he bought a ticket second-class and when the train rolled

into the main station, he was hanging out of the window of the compartment with a big cigar in his mouth. With a cigar band, you understand.

Sure enough, his family was standing on the platform, but his father was missing. He'd died in the meantime; that was a hitch, because it'd been especially him who was supposed to get annoyed. You see, he was the most respectable one of them all.

Well, the family really didn't wind up being especially impressed; if anything, they were of course happy to see that he was alive and that he hadn't completely gone to the dogs. The man of the world gave his suitcase to a hotel bellboy from one of the big hotels and said that he was very glad to see all of them again, and that he was forced to retire to his room. He was tired from the trip and had a number of business matters to see to, important things, telegrams, and that kind of thing. They felt that he could just as well go home with them and live there; after all, he could presumably manage his business matters, but he said that they were no judge of that—he was forced to live in a proper place to be able to tend to social obligations, but that he'd be very happy if they'd be his guests the following day at Wivel.* For dinner.

The morning of the next day he tried to figure out what such a dinner with wine and extras might well wind up costing and discovered that it corresponded exactly to the amount that he had left. At the dinner he put on a big show, said that these endless trips on the continent with hotel stays tired him a lot, and that he'd begun to consider buying a little bungalow at Lake Fure* to have a place he could withdraw to when he needed a bit of peace and quiet. He let something leak out about his business, about his villa at Lake Garda,* and about the well-known names he was going to meet the following days and discuss business with. He mentioned these famous persons as equals; some of them he called by their first names and recounted incidents from their private lives.

He'd asked the doorman at the hotel to call Wivel at half-past twelve and to inform him whether any telegrams from abroad had arrived. At half-past twelve a servant came through

the room and asked loudly for President Andersen from Paris. He got up with an exhausted expression, apologized to his family—you certainly never got any peace and quiet—and went to the phone.

When he returned, he informed his family that a telegram had come and unfortunately he had to travel to Berlin the next morning. He hugged all of them and promised to think of each one in his will.

Next morning he had thirty-five øre left. He'd given his last five-crown coin to his sister's little boy to buy candy with. Then he took the trolley out to the last stop in Valby and walked out to the highway. It's not that easy to be on the tramp when you've got fancy clothes on, but after he'd been lying in haystacks and barns for a couple of nights, he began to look like a human being. He tramped through all of Germany and one fine day reached Paris, where he joined the Foreign Legion. After he'd been there for two years, he managed to run away, and now he's bumming in Hoboken.

5

Two days later I was standing on the wharf in Esbjerg.* The stokers on a Danish boat had stowed me away without demanding anything in return other than my keeping my mouth shut. I had a couple of German thousand mark bills on me, but they weren't worth anything—no one wanted to exchange them.* Outside the seaman's home I got to talking with a coal trimmer,* who advised me to go out and hustle up a crown and spend the night at the travelling journeyman's hostel. I looked in on some villas on the outskirts of town, which were nicely situated and looked nice, but I quickly learned that if I asked for a couple of øre for a night's lodging, they shut the doors again just like that. Without a word. I became piqued and tried it next door. Same result. I certainly wish people would answer you when you ask them something—it certainly doesn't cost anything. I was just on the verge of giving up, but I was hungry and thought that in

any case they probably wouldn't deny me a couple of sandwiches. I rang the bell at a small red-brick house with hollyhocks, the kind of house where the woman of the house herself is in the kitchen, and asked for a little bite to eat. The woman said that she was in a hurry, but asked if she mightn't give me ten øre. By now the thought of food had made me tremendously hungry, and I traipsed through the whole strip of villas asking for food. Everywhere I got money, but no food. That's the way people are—the only need they respect is the stomach's. And once you've convinced them of your need, they just try to get out of it as easily as possible. In reality people are insensitive to a fellow human being's difficulties; when they give you something, it's only a result of a kind of morality in them, not at all because they feel something while doing it. It's something that custom requires if you want to be a respected citizen and enjoy others' and your own respect.

Besides, people like being introduced to distress when they themselves are living off the fat of the land and having a good time of it. It produces such a pleasant sensation. The only thing they demand is that the distress that's being introduced isn't too boring, too common. And naturally it has to be distress that packs a wallop. The best thing is if the distress is indescribable and linked to an uncommonly dreary fate. In part it has the advantage that people can then feel moved—something they of course ordinarily have to pay through the nose for; if a play or a film can get them to cry, that's regarded as as fine as it gets, but at the same time such a fate, if it's a bit peculiar, has the advantage that you can tell about it the next time there's an evening party. It's a very refined and indirect method of informing people that you have a heart for the poor creatures who come to your door begging. You don't have to say that you gave the beggar something—that's so coarse; being familiar with the poor creature's story shows that you've been looking after him and to such a degree that you've gained his confidence to boot.

Naturally the vagabond can't tell the same story everywhere. It has to be adapted to the circumstances and the people he's telling it to. The point here is to develop a certain psychological

sense. To a clergyman you can often successfully say that you've been in prison; he's shaken by the fact that for a change he's dealing with an out-and-out sinner, and of course Our Lord's happier about the converted sinner than about those who've always been well-behaved. To a doctor you can safely say that a quack ruined your father and contributed to his dying prematurely; with an employer you can say that the labor union bureaucracy knocked you out. With a wholesale merchant* you have to be a jaunty fellow, a real man, who's tried a little of everything.

Back then, of course, I was, if anything, a complete beginner, but people themselves very quickly educate a vagabond of normal intelligence to tell a story. Otherwise he simply won't get anything. Since I was, of course, very young and raised to be modest, I never elbowed my way ahead and that way I mainly got women as my clientele. Women prefer a story that's touching. Since I was a bit near-sighted and people noticed that now and then and I'd be asked whether it had caused me difficulties, in a way it happened completely automatically that I'd explain that I'd gone out to sea when I was fourteen years old and almost served my apprenticeship when my eyes began to cause difficulties; it'd gotten worse and worse, and by now I was no longer capable of doing the work that was required. I'd had to stop sailing and was now without an occupation. In the meantime my mother had died; my father had died when I was little. I had the hope some day of eventually becoming a brush-maker. A doctor who'd examined my eyes hadn't wanted to hide from me that possibly I'd lose my vision completely. How long it would take he couldn't say. Life was hard, but of course you had to learn to accept the vicissitudes of fortune with good cheer; you had to be brave. The story had sprung up on its own; it was actually, if anything, the women themselves who made it up with their questions. For example, the little filler about the doctor, who didn't exist in the first versions of the story: A friendly woman had offered me coffee in her kitchen and pumped me in the meantime for my story. When I got to that business with the near-sightedness and underscored it by constantly fumbling for the

cup, she asked me whether my eyes in fact were still getting worse, to which I answered yes. Then all of a sudden she got a craving for a sensation and asked me in an agitated voice whether I thought that I'd eventually lose my sight totally, become blind. I looked mournful and confirmed it with a weak yes. After that she turned aggressive and asked why I actually felt that way. I searched my brain for a suitable answer and then said that a doctor had said it. That was like grist for her mill; she was deeply moved and wanted to know whether the doctor had said how long it would take before I became blind. I replied that the doctor couldn't say with certainty. That satisfied her immensely—I got an extra cup of coffee and fifty øre.

6

I went begging in Esbjerg for about a week. I hadn't the slightest urge to realize my dreams of the free and easy life on the road here in Denmark, where I lived; it was going to be in a foreign country, in other surroundings, and would have to be shelved for the time being. Maybe I'd try to get to France. In France there are mountains and rivers, vineyards along the highways, where you can stuff yourself like a pig with all the grapes you'd care to; in the monasteries they give you a night's lodging and breakfast free and wish you luck on your journey if you're going on. Besides, Frenchmen are said to be immoral—France would surely be an excellent country to be on the tramp in.

But for the time being I had to deal with the problems that were more immediate and hope that a way of getting to France would turn up. I'd gotten to know a man named Schmidt. Schmidt was no ordinary vagabond: he travelled with a suitcase and didn't leave one town till he had enough money to be able to go by train to the next. When things didn't go so splendidly and he had to live in a travelling journeyman's hostel, his suitcase would be at the left-luggage office at the train station. In the suitcase he had clean underwear and a couple of extra pairs of pants, a jacket for indoors, and a toothbrush. He intimated that

he knew a thing or two and that he preferred begging for paper money than for small change. If there absolutely had to be begging at all. He called it swindling and felt that it raised him above the rest of the residents of the travelling journeymen's hostel and emphasized that his method had to be regarded as labor-saving, more lucrative, and lying on a higher social plane. Incidentally, he claimed to be the king's illegitimate son and to have taken out a patent on a revolutionary invention that would make him a millionaire when the formalities had been taken care of and the manufacturing could be started on. He could sell the patent tomorrow for a dizzying sum, but intended to exploit his invention himself and not to let some damned sharks run off with most of the profit. He had time to wait till matters were arranged; a few days ago he'd contemptuously rejected a flattering offer from Sir Basil Zaharoff, the armaments prince.* In addition he composed little verses about butterflies and girls' breasts, but, in spite of countless requests, he didn't want to publish them since he regarded it as in bad taste to expose his spiritual life to the masses.

I was very impressed with Schmidt, and when he claimed that Esbjerg was a dung-hole and suggested that we travel together to Odense,* I felt very flattered and was only afraid that he'd regret it before we got going. He was very interested in what experiences I'd had and I laid it on a bit thick, since otherwise I didn't feel that it would interest a man of such considerable stature. For example, I told him that the Thurø-schooner had been stranded on the Scottish coast and that the rescue work had been very arduous and perilous; I'd been the last to be rescued because I absolutely insisted that the skipper go into the breeches buoy* before me, since he had a wife and children in Svendborg* and at any moment the ship could be smashed in the raging breakers. I was very modest and wouldn't accept the praise for heroism Schmidt made me the object of, and said that I was, of course, only doing my duty.

So we had to get the money for the train tickets to Odense, and Schmidt said that that'd be a piece of cake if I'd just do as he said. We went to the post office and here Schmidt wrote a letter

that was supposed to look as if it'd been written by my mother in Copenhagen. The letter was a request to me to come home immediately because she'd gotten me a job at a soap factory. Unfortunately she couldn't send me money for the trip, since she didn't have any, but she hoped that I'd be able to manage that matter myself, since the condition for my being able to get the job was that I start work right away. In a P.S. there were greetings from my little sister and the news that uncle Hans had gotten an intestinal infection and had to be operated on.

Schmidt crumpled the letter a bit and left a couple of finger-marks on it so it would look natural, after which Schmidt stuck the letter in my pocket. We walked together along the street while Schmidt explained my task to me. A dentist lived in a villa at the edge of town: I was supposed to approach him, explain to him that I'd gotten into a difficult situation, that I'd heard he was a man who secretly tried to do good, and show him the letter from my mother. Then the nice dentist would give me money for the trip to Copenhagen, and we could go to Odense that very evening.

Schmidt was waiting on the corner while I walked up toward the villa. I felt rotten and, if anything, like running away from the whole business, but I felt Schmidt's eyes on the back of my head and continued automatically in through the villa's garden gate and up to the house. When I rang the bell, my hands were clammy with cold sweat. A maid answered the door. I introduced myself and asked whether I might be permitted to speak to the dentist; I was led into a waiting room and was asked to wait for a moment. I sat down on a wicker chair and began leafing through an old weekly, but the letters danced before my eyes, and I began considering the possibility of disappearing through the window.

Just then the dentist came. I got up and my cheeks got hot. He was an elderly man with a friendly manner. I suppose I talked very inarticulately, but still I did manage to explain what had brought me to him. He didn't seem to take me seriously; he had such a facetious, ironic way about him. I wanted to make a good impression and informed him that my father had been a

parish deacon before he died five years earlier. Well, the dentist said, that doesn't mean you still couldn't be a decent person. I let him read the letter; he stood for a long time pondering it and then said that he really believed that for a change it was an honest person who'd looked him up. Then he took out his wallet, gave me twenty crowns, and asked whether I was very fond of my uncle. I nearly died of agitation and emotion and suddenly began crying. Against my will. Come, come, he comforted me, now don't take it so seriously—I mean, it's not major surgery.

That was the first time in my life I had so much money, and after I'd said goodbye to the dentist and walked out through the garden, I felt that it was senseless for me to have to share with Schmidt; it was quite ample if he got five crowns for having written the letter—it was no mean fee—I was the one who'd had the work and the trouble, and the ten crowns were sufficient for us to get to Odense. If he felt that we didn't have enough as it was, I mean he could approach another dentist—I'd be really glad to write a letter he could take along.

Since I imagined that I was being observed by Schmidt from some place or other, I had to be cautious and separate the two ten-crown bills down in my pocket and in a natural way manage to transfer one bill over into another pocket. When I got the chance, I could put it in a safer place.

Schmidt was waiting for me around the corner. I intimated to him that it was a difficult task and requested that the next time he gave me the address for a scam, he also give me one where it wasn't practically impossible to get money. Nevertheless, I'd succeeded in hitting the dentist up for ten crowns; we needn't have bothered with the letter—he hadn't wanted to look at it at all, he'd said that I was a damned swindler, and the fact that I was able to get money at all was due to my having put on a mask and saying I wouldn't leave the villa till I'd gotten some money. So as far as I was concerned, the dentist could call the police as much as he damn pleased. Then he'd mumbled something and forked over a ten'er.

Schmidt looked very doubtful about my explanation, but he accepted it all the same and even praised me because I'd been so

tough.

7

That same evening we got to Odense and the following days were spent on scams that Schmidt arranged and I carried out. I put aside everything that I could justify and hid the bills in the sweatband of my hat. Those were amusing and exciting days back then in Odense. We went for walks in Fruens Bøge* and Munkemose.* Schmidt composed nice verses and thought up new inventions, while I looked at the black swans and dreamed about the real freedom as a vagabond in southern Europe.

We were living in a little hotel down by the train station where the proprietor was very suspicious and already after four days presented us with a bill that we had no money to pay, that is, apart from the bank notes that were lying in the sweatband of my hat and that I was, of course, quite simply prevented from disclosing that I had. The proprietor looked very threatening and since we feared the police more than anything else on this earth, we had to try and figure out a way to calm him down.

Schmidt took care of that. In the afternoon we went down to a little cafe where some girls hung out who lived by street-walking. We fell in with a beautiful, black-haired girl, who was called Odense's nightingale, and she promised to help us manage the proprietor. That happened in the following way:

The nightingale called up the hotel and said: Call from Copenhagen. Go ahead, please. Then she gave the receiver to Schmidt, who put a handkerchief over the mouthpiece and waited a bit, after which, in a distant voice, he asked for deputy director Schmidt. When it turned out that the deputy director wasn't in, Schmidt asked the proprietor to tell Mr. Schmidt that there was a general delivery letter for him, that a money order would follow, and that factory owner Thrige* requested a personal conversation with the deputy director.

When we got home in the evening, the proprietor was unusually amiable, and it wasn't until a week had gone by that in

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all modesty he was so bold as to put a bill on our writing table.

The following night a sensational burglary took place in the center of Odense. The window in a big jewelry store had been smashed and objects worth thousands of crowns were removed. When we read about it in the newspaper in the morning, Schmidt's face turned green with alarm: we have to get out of town, he said, the police are going to be combing all the hotels and arresting everybody who can't explain what they're up to in Odense. And even if we can probably prove that it's not us, we'll get into a bunch of trouble anyway, we'll be sent to serve a prison sentence for nonpayment of child support for an illegitimate child,* and so on—so, let's get out of town and right away.

In fact, on second thought it turned out to be more difficult to get out of town than to stay in it. We didn't dare go to the train station—naturally the police were there. The same was true of the bus stations. So we had to leave town on foot and avoid the main road till we'd gotten a good ways outside of Odense; there we could stop the bus to Middelfart* and go on.

We did, we walked along the villa roads and byways till we'd got two miles outside of town. There we met up with the main road and hid in a little grove that bordered on the road, and we started waiting for the bus. That took almost three hours. When it came, we went and stood out on the roadway and waved. There was plenty of room in the vehicle: apart from us there was only a fat travelling salesman in a well-ironed suit with a pale yellow leather briefcase and an old woman with a basket.

A little further on the woman got off, and the driver sold us tickets and informed us that the bus wasn't going to Middelfart, but only to Enslev.* And that there wasn't a bus going to Middelfart that day.

So we had to spend the night in Enslev. I thought that was amusing, but Schmidt, who was a city person, got crabby and sat the rest of the way bellyaching about the bad luck that had pursued him since the day he was born.

We rented ourselves a room at the inn and to while away the time, till it was time to go to bed, we sauntered around the village and its environs. Schmidt was in possession of a clothes brush that could fit in an inside pocket—once in a while he took it out and brushed the cuffs of his trousers. He was very meticulous about his appearance, incessantly using a comb and nail cleaner, straightening his tie, and pulling up his jacket at the neck. I liked talking to him most of all when we were alone; as soon as there were other people nearby, everything he said and did was meant only for them.

We sat down under a willow tree, one of these pollarded* willows, you know, and watched the sunset. Schmidt had spread his handkerchief out on the grass and sat cautiously to spare his suit. He used to say that his appearance was his weapon in the struggle for his daily bread, his tool, and that every decent craftsman maintains his tool in fine condition.

The sun was a big, red ball that was descending behind a little grove; I thought it was so nice—I wonder whether there's anything in this world more peaceful than a village on Funen at sunset. There was a ladybug sitting on my hand and I let it fly up to Our Lord and ask for good weather tomorrow, because, I mean, you just do it—you learned it as a child*—and at the same moment that you see that beautiful little insect, it's as if you've gotten a cue and you just have to get going with the ceremony. As if a button were being pushed. If you see a shooting star, you hurry up and make a wish for something or other—you've learned to do that and you don't dare not do it. Sometimes I've felt like trying never to do what I'd learned I should do, but always the exact opposite. Yeah, like trying outright to do everything that's forbidden. Literally buying a copy of the penal code and trying all the crimes in alphabetical order. Not in order to do harm to anyone, but to get a little sense of freedom; it was more the desire to do something really wild, something in the way of getting up on a roof in a nightshirt and playing a harp.

It was when I'd let the ladybug fly to Our Lord that Schmidt

let me in on his extraction, his noble ancestry. He looked stiffly and asked whether I'd actually never thought about whom he resembled. I hadn't, but tried to figure it out in a hurry to cover up my stupidity. He asked me to really look at him. I looked at him penetratingly, but couldn't think of who it was. Then try and look at my profile, he said and turned to the side. Since I still just sat there staring without being able to figure it out, he became a bit irritated and asked whether I still couldn't see it. Ashamed, I had to admit that I hadn't discovered it yet.

For a long time he sat silently, looking ahead and mumbling that maybe it was really best that way. I was sorry about having hurt him and said that I'd very much like to know who it was he looked like. Since he was still sitting there looking as if he were absorbed in somber reflections, I became earnest and said that he should tell me. He appeared to be appeased and asked whether I'd never seen a Danish stamp before. I admitted I had, but didn't grasp what he meant. Silently he took an envelope out of his pocket and handed it to me. I took it and looked at the stamp. It was a ten-øre stamp. I sat for a long time looking at it—it looked very uninteresting. There was a head on it of a handsome, fairly young man with a nice part, the king. Suddenly it struck me: The King.* It was the king he resembled. God did he resemble the king—only the king was better-looking. On the stamp at least.

Schmidt looked at me triumphantly: Yeah, that's the way it is. He nodded gloomily ahead and said: And here I am sitting by the roadside, a prince by blood, who has to beg for my food from ignorant farmers, a scion of the House of Oldenburg* who has to tramp around and degrade himself to keep alive.

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The next morning we got up early and went down to the dining room to get morning coffee; we'd decided to walk to Middelfart. We'd slept well in spite of the clammy, starched sheets and the heavy down quilts. It was a lovely morning, the

sun flooded into the dining room, which was neat and clean, and the coffee was wonderful.

While we were drinking it, we couldn't avoid noticing that the innkeepers were watching us in a strangely suspicious way. Schmidt whispered to me that it was that damned jewelry robbery, and that the stupid innkeeper, damn it, had probably called the police and said they could pick up the jewel thieves here.

We hurried up and paid and left. When we'd gone a little bit down the road, we turned and saw that both innkeepers were standing in the doorway following us with their eyes.

At the first byroad we turned off, but we hadn't been walking more than ten minutes when we were overtaken by a car that stopped crosswise on the road in front of us. Four men poured out of the car and pounced on us, handcuffed us, and hauled us into the vehicle. When we were sitting there, one of them asked triumphantly where we were intending to go. When we said we were going to Middelfart, he said that they were too and we could ride with them. It was the police.