

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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Sixth Chapter

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To be honest, I don't remember how long I was a globetrotter, but it was a long time, probably for most of a year, and when I stopped, I'd been around most of France. Some places I did really well and I really felt like taking these friendly towns in one more time, but of course that's the flaw with the globetrotter existence—that you can't go to a town more than once.

I think that's the way it must have been more or less right after the period when I became a smuggler in Sweden; in any case, there can't have been a long time in between. I'd gotten to Liverpool on an Italian freighter, but hadn't been in England for many months before I was caught by the police. That was in Hull and got me a three-week stay in jail. Naturally it was the consul who was to blame for the whole thing. You wouldn't believe that Danish consuls exist to support Danish subjects. This consul here was an Englishman who could speak a little Swedish; I tried to get him to give me a ticket to Esbjerg on one of The United's ships; I could have managed to sell it as easy as pie to someone or other—there's always a bunch of Scandinavians travelling that route. I was pretty down on my luck, had been walking the streets for a couple of nights, and hadn't tasted real food for a long time.

This consul was hard and unkind. I showed him a letter from my mother in Hobro*: I had to go home right away—father had been taken to the hospital and the doctors feared the worst. But he was deaf to all pleading—couldn't approve a ticket for me. I implored him not to prevent me from getting to my father's deathbed and became so stirred up over the man's pigheadedness that for a short while I myself was on the verge of believing that I had a dying father in Hobro. I feel this consul was exceptionally malicious—I mean, the story *could* have been true, there wasn't the slightest reason why it couldn't have been true.

But that's the way the consuls are. Even though he was probably one of the worst of the kind. Besides, he was distrust-

ful. People of an unrefined character are as a rule distrustful. When I kept waving the letter from my mother, he demanded to see the envelope. That was a malicious way to treat a Danish seaman whose father was dying, and I admit that I became indignant. I asked him whether he thought I was lying. And I asked him since when it had become custom that people who sought the consulate's aid were branded as swindlers from the outset. Wasn't an insinuation like the one implied by his question about the envelope really the same as accusing me of being a swindler.

Naturally I didn't have any envelope. Where in the world should I have come by it. If you could come by it just as easily as you could go to the post office and write yourself a letter, there'd be nothing to it. The envelopes were always the weak point and you always had your work cut out for you convincing the consuls that it'd gotten lost. Besides, as a rule it's safer to get indignant. And it's never hard to lose your temper with a consul, especially when you start thinking about the fact that of course it *could* be a real letter you're showing him. Practically speaking, it's impossible to get yourself an envelope: it has to be written in the same handwriting as the letter, and, besides, the postal service stamp shows how old it is. On special solemn occasions I've gotten an acquaintance in Denmark to write such a letter and send it to me, but, for one thing, it's very complicated, and, for another, of course it quickly becomes out of date. I mean, your father can't be lying on his deathbed like that for years. And when you've had such trouble getting the letter, then, of course, you'd like to be able to use it more than once.

This consul wasn't a refined human being. When I said I was going to write to the Foreign Ministry and complain about him, he told me to scram and said that if I ever came back, he'd call the police. That's a free and easy way of looking after Danish subjects' interests.

There was a Dane living in Hull who had a tea room. He was from Roskilde* and was considered to be a clever man. He looked at the letter from my mother for a long time and said that he'd certainly take care of that matter—I should just go to the

consul, who was a good friend of his. I said that I'd gone to the consul and been turned down. That didn't matter, said the tea-room man; in fact he'd call him—they were old friends—it was safe for me to go up there.

Under these circumstances I didn't take the risk into account—I've always trusted influence blindly; if you've got connections, everything's possible. When I returned to the consul's, two detectives were standing there waiting for me—I didn't get to see the consul at all. That was high-minded, wasn't it.

I was locked up for a week before they could pull themselves together and mount an interrogation. That was against the law, but the law isn't for the poor. Except when they violate it. Then, however, in fact it's mainly for the poor. Of course, under the circumstances I didn't understand a bit of English—you can't expect the lamb to put its own head on the block. The tea-room man acted as an interpreter; if there's money to be earned on a poor seaman, they'll be there, all right. Naturally, the consul was there too. The barristers were wearing wigs and gowns and I was a bit impressed that this whole apparatus had been staged for my sake.

I was charged with vagrancy.* They wouldn't believe that I'd come to Liverpool on an Italian freighter, especially since I couldn't remember the name of the boat. If you tell the truth, you don't have any chance of being believed. They kept cross-examining me on this point and since I was afraid that the time limit for the investigation would be extended, I decided to give them a story. I said that I could just as well confess sooner than later how in reality I'd gotten to England and if I hadn't said it right away, it was to cover up for the people who'd helped me. The truth was that a French fishing boat called *Pourquoi non** that was going to Dover had taken me along because I asked nicely and paid; I didn't think it was illegal since, after all, I had my passport. I answered the question as to why my passport hadn't been stamped by saying that passports hadn't been checked on board. The judge asked whether I really didn't know that people were required to be in possession of a certain sum of money to be allowed to set foot on English soil. I admitted that

I hadn't had any idea, but, to be on the safe side, I informed them that I'd had 700 francs on me when I went ashore. Since they wanted to know where I had the money from, I readily told them that I'd signed off on an American four-master in Le Havre, that the ship had gone into dock after an extraordinarily hard voyage around Cape Horn. To make it more lively, I added that the cook had been knocked overboard by a breaker in the Straits of Magellan, that he'd been my best friend, and that I couldn't understand that I'd never see him again.

The whole courtroom was moved and when I saw the effect my humble statements had had, I myself got tears in my eyes. That way they forgot to ask why I didn't have a discharge book and the case was quickly closed on the basis that I was deported and was to be sent home at the first opportunity.

2

It took two weeks before there was passage available to Esbjerg and during that time I was held in custody. I sat in a cell together with a beachcomber, a pickpocket, and a soldier, who had deserted, in full uniform. We really had a very enjoyable time; especially the soldier was full of humor: he turned his uniform jacket inside out, put it on backwards, and wrote in chalk across the back: "Jesus died for you." After that he put on a serious face and did a routine as a Salvation Army soldier—I've never seen better. And I've seen many of that kind of routine—the underworld can't stand the Salvation Army. I mean, it's odd, all right, that it's precisely the people the Salvation Army's set up to look after who can't stand it and the rich people who support it with money and think it's an excellent institution. I've never yet met a vagabond who could stand the Salvation Army. That's why that kind of vaudeville act the soldier performed inspires cheering on the outskirts of towns,* while respectable people say that they ought to be a little ashamed of themselves, that you mustn't mock that kind of thing, and so on.

The soldier did his stuff well—we were lying flat on our backs with laughter on our plank beds till we heard the keys rattling, the door being opened, and the prison guard shouting who the hell did we think we were. The soldier was from London and in private life was the son of a tavern-keeper in the East End. Of course he still was, but it's my opinion that when people become soldiers, all that kind of stuff stops—then they're just soldiers. When you see a company of soldiers march down a street, you don't think about the fact that they're a bunch of tailors, burglars, wholesale merchants' sons, night club waiters, YMCA officials, and vagabonds—they're just soldiers, who look totally alike, and maybe there isn't that big a difference among them either when push comes to shove.

The pickpocket didn't have any special social talents—he could wiggle his ears and sing “Inky pinky parlez vous.”* He was very melancholy and sat most of the time biting his nails, the tramp could produce a tune by hitting himself on the head, and I was interesting because I was a foreigner, but otherwise I wasn't a real hit because I wore glasses. Naturally I told them some of my experiences, but they didn't really want to believe that a man with glasses could experience such things.

If we got too bored, we'd bang on the walls or scratch the paint off the plank beds. There was a toilet bowl in the cell; when we thrust the water out of it with the brush—by the way, all the prisoners did that every time it was used—you could talk to the prisoners in the other cells by sticking your head all the way down in the bowl and shouting.* However, you got tired of it—it was a strenuous position—and during our exercise in the prison yard we could chat with one another as much as we damn pleased. We had exercise in the prison yard twice a day and all the prisoners were in the yard at the same time. After the interrogations and hearings the bailiffs would collect all the cigarette butts that were lying around in the ashtrays, take them down into the yard, and hand them out to those of us who didn't have money for extra provisions; there were fine brands among them—the barristers sure know what they're smoking—many times you got a cigarette that only a puff or two had been taken from.

Then finally one day I was led into the office where they gave me the things that had been confiscated at the time of my arrest—my suspenders and what I'd had in my pockets—and a detective came for me to take me out to the ship. I was a little disappointed that the trip took place on a trolley; I'd been told that such transports usually take place by car and I'm very fond of riding in cars. Maybe the detective wanted to save the United Kingdom that expense or he pocketed the money himself.

When we got on board the ship, which was lying in the middle of the dock after having been hauled* out there, the officer wanted the captain to lock me in detention till we'd gotten out onto the water, but he refused and they outright quarreled over it; I heard the skipper say that here on board he was the highest authority and that he didn't take orders. I was touched by the skipper's attitude, but when we'd gotten out of the harbor, I realized that it wasn't for my sake he'd cut the policeman down to size. As he passed me on the way to his cabin, he snarled at me: Damn it all—that we have to have such rabble on board.

That's not the way I'd dreamt of returning to Copenhagen, and I hadn't been in town more than two days before I decided to get away again. I took the ferry to Malmö* and tramped up through Sweden.

In Norrköping* I got a job as an agent selling lace to private individuals. It actually went very well; after a while I got experience in chatting with the girls—little audacious compliments sometimes meant more than the quality of the merchandise. It was as a lace salesman that I went to Nykøping* and met old man Hellstrøm, who was one of the funniest people I've ever known. He lived by going to taverns with a big sketchbook under his arm and drawing people's portraits. His secret was that he could make people look more attractive without causing

the likeness to suffer.

The old man's nickname was *the horse frightener*. He'd gotten it because he was afraid of horses. Scared not in the usual way, but mortally afraid. He'd shake all over and couldn't say a word. Even if it was a gentle old hack that was standing securely tethered in a field and didn't even bother to turn its head to look at him. We lived in the same hotel and had little Dutch treats up in the room. He was an expert at drinking and was offended by his not having succeeded in drinking me under the table. One day he'd apparently decided that it was now or never. We'd been at the alcohol monopoly company* restaurant and had dinner with lots of schnapps and strong beer; there we fell in with a travelling salesman dealing in photographic enlargements and a metal worker who was on the tramp.* All four of us decided to go back to the hotel room and continue the party.

When we got up to the room, we began playing twenty-one and drinking schnapps. Old man Hellstrøm was keeping an eye on me and getting more and more rattled by my still not getting drunk. While I was in the bathroom, he put ashes and a nail file in my beer. I'd been up against that trick before: if you drink a glass of beer that's been prepared that way, you get so sick that you want to die; you vomit nonstop and it takes several days before you're the same again. I saw right away what'd happened to the beer and said to him that I didn't think it was nice of him to treat a poor man that way. He got furious and said damn it all I was lying through my teeth. The metal worker jumped up from his chair and said that if it was true, the old man would get a beating. And if it was a lie, he'd teach all damned Danes what it meant to lie about an honest Swede. He was one of those who love to fight and couldn't hide his delight over the fact that, regardless of who was right, there was a row in the air. I took off my glasses and thought there was going to be a brawl.

And there was. Good lord, what a brawl. The photography salesman sniffed my beer glass and said that there were ashes in it. At the same moment the metal worker rushed at the old man, yanked at his artist's wig, and gave him a black eye. He had a splendid wig, the old man; he said himself that without it he

couldn't sell one picture.

The old man fell over against the table, which went down with glasses, bottles, and everything. After that he sat down on his ass in between the beer spots and pieces of broken glass. The photography salesman was going to intervene, said that brutality was un-Nordic, and suggested that instead we give the old man a real spanking. The first thing it resulted in was the salesman's also getting a black eye, but when the idea had reached all the way into the metal worker's skull, he became pensive and came to the conclusion that it was actually an excellent idea.

We pulled the old man's pants off and used his own belt as an instrument of punishment. He howled and wailed, but the metal worker was not about to miss out on the amusement and the old man's skinny backside got one red stripe after the other.

Naturally it didn't go off totally calmly, and before we knew it, the room was filled with people trying to intervene. It turned into an enormous brawl. I was standing with the hotel porter's head under my arm punching him in the ribs when I heard the police car. I burst out of the room, ran upstairs one floor, and hid in a bathroom.

It wasn't till about an hour had gone by that I ventured out, walked down the service stairs, went out into the yard, and that way managed to escape the deportation from the kingdom of Sweden I was sentenced to a couple of years later anyway.

5

By now it was winter and since it was mainly in the area surrounding the cities I was supposed to sell my lace, the job was really hard all right. In Valdemarsvik* I rented a chair sled* to get moving faster. It's a chair on two runners; you stand behind the chair with one foot on one runner and with the other foot you push off. My sample case was strapped down on the chair. I got out to a small community safely where I did a good business, and after I'd eaten dinner, I set off on the way home. It was dark and the roadway was covered with ice. After hard slogging I'd

reached the top of a hill and now I was really about to enjoy the rest down the hill—I straightened my back and breathed. Before I knew it, I was going tremendously fast—it was lovely, it would help me a good piece of the way up the next hill. But when the speed kept increasing and there was no sign that I was at the foot of the hill yet, I began to get nervous. All of a sudden the road made a turn; I didn't see it before the border of the forest sprang up right in front of me and I was able to realize that I wasn't on the roadway any more. I turned the chair sled so that I slid off and nearly toppled over. I made it, but I'd gotten scared. The chair sled continued storming downward and the hill didn't appear to have any end. If the road had at least been straight, but it made the most dreadful curves. I'd begun to ponder letting myself fall down—in any case that would've been better than smashing my head against a tree—but the speed by now had gotten so wild that I was afraid of breaking my neck. A moment later the chair sled left the roadway on its own initiative and tore over a plowed field, did a couple of somersaults, and hurled me on my head into a juniper bush.

I was pretty battered, but was still able to hobble across to a house, where there was a light, about a half-mile away. I was certain that I'd suffered terrible internal injuries and admired myself a little for not having remained lying there listlessly, but instead having overcome the pains and dragged myself off across the fields. When I got over to the cabin, the people would have to take care of me. Presumably I'd be taken to a hospital, even though I was, of course, too weak for that to happen during the first few days. I'd lost my glasses and my cap, and the thought of the state of my crown jewels almost made me give up. I thought it was marvelous what a person's energy and will-power could achieve. Presumably I'd collapse on the doorstep of the house. I'd often read about badly wounded people whose will-power was so enormous they could force their maimed body to obey till it had been removed to safety, and I'd always been aware that I was one of those people who'd be able to pull off such a feat.

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knocked on the door with one final exertion. The farmhands came out, I heard their voices very faintly, and was aware that they carried me in and put me on a bed.

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While I was lying in bed, it seemed to me that I was feeling somewhat better, but still I felt I had to say no thanks to a cup of coffee. The farmer had been out looking for the chair sled and the rest of my worldly goods; actually, of course, it didn't matter—now I'd probably never need them any more; my glasses were undamaged—I put them on. I made a present of all the lace samples to the farmer's daughter, who was so gentle and considerate when she tucked pillows down behind my back; when I didn't lie completely still, it hurt, and when I winced, she looked totally frightened.

Late in the evening the doctor came; I heard the car brakes squeal in front of the house. While he was examining me, I said to him that I preferred to hear the truth no matter what it might be.

The truth, young man, he said, is that there isn't the slightest thing wrong with you. You've gotten a couple of skin scrapes and black and blue marks, but for that matter you can get up right away. If you hurry, you can drive with me to Valdemarsvik—otherwise you'll probably topple over again with your chair sled. My fee is 15 crowns.

7

It was pretty unpleasant to say goodbye to the nice people who'd been convinced that I was going to die on them. I heard the daughter tittering before the car door was closed. On the way I got the doctor to lower his fee to 10 crowns and was allowed to owe it till the first.

I left Valdemarsvik the next morning and used the last of my

money on a ticket to Stockholm, where, as far as I recall, I was the whole winter. I lived on something called Dannemora Street and lived by hawking door to door. All sorts of things. Needles, buttons, sewing thread, tapes, soap, silk ribbons, and all that kind of stuff. I lugged around a big tote bag from one staircase to the next; I was energetic and thrifty. I think it was the most honest period of my life. And the poorest. In spite of everything, of course, I was, after all, my own master, and actually I didn't have anything against being virtuous as long as I wasn't ordered to do it. So it really wasn't especially entertaining.

And when spring came, I cleared out. Sold the bag and the stock on hand and tramped out on the road. Northward. Gävle, Sundsvall, Umeå, Skellefteå, Haparanda.* I was zooming and took the distances in record time, hailed cars on the road, and rode as a stowaway on freight trains. I didn't actually have anything I was chasing after, but it shook the Stockholm stairway dust off me, so to speak, and gave me a sense of accomplishing something, of moving forward. Incidentally, the rushing and my ambition as a vagabond led to my nearly breaking my neck between Härnösand and Örnsköldsvik.* I'd asked the tramps in Härnösand when a freight train would be going to Örnsköldsvik, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for me to take the next train. It was really something of a game of chance to take a train, and you often had to let several trains go by before you succeeded in getting up into a brake compartment without being seen and hiding there. And naturally it annoyed them that I took it for granted that I'd take the first train and that I asked about the departure time the same way a tourist asks at a travel agency. I mean, it was in fact precisely to annoy them that I did it.

That's why they decided to take revenge and their revenge nearly cost me my life. As the time for my departure approached, they said they'd accompany me down to the rail yards to wave goodbye. Naturally I protested, said that it was touching of them, but that I couldn't accept it—they shouldn't waste their precious time on me, and so on. But I couldn't shake them off and we were quite a good-sized and sensational crew by the time we got to the rail yards five minutes before that train's departure

they'd given me the information about.

We heard a train coming from the south; it was approaching very fast and rolled into the station. There's your train, said one of them, give my regards to your aunt in Ömsköldsvik.

I don't think these congenial ruffians could tell by looking at me what I was feeling. It was a nasty practical joke they'd played on me: the train was a passenger train, an express train. Every honest prince of the road knows that it's impossible to ride as a stowaway on an express train—there aren't any freight cars and that's why there aren't any brake compartments.

My honor as a vagabond was at stake: if I was made a fool of, all of Sweden's highways would know it within a month, and I wouldn't be able to show my face anywhere without having to take that lying down. I looked at the train. There was a possibility I could jump up on the tender, where there was a little narrow iron landing I could stand on, and an iron bar I could hold on to.

When the train got going, I flung away the cigarette and hopped on. I didn't get time to look at their faces—those are powerful trains: in the course of a few seconds they're in full swing. I had enough to do holding on tight. It was insane of me to risk my life in order to impress that ragtag riff-raff. The express trains travel at more than 60 m.p.h., and tomorrow it'd say in the *Norrskensflamman** that the body of a vagabond with glasses had been found a few miles north of Härnösand. Yeah, the glasses, in a second they'd been blackened by soot from the engine so I couldn't see a bit, and I didn't dare let go with one hand and put them in my pocket. There was nothing else for me to do but hold on tight, close my eyes, grit my teeth, and just think about this one thing: holding on tight.

If the railway line had been straight, the risk would've been smaller, but it went into curves, into tremendous windings around cliffs and lakes. On these curves the roadway was built with a banking* so the train didn't need to slow down. When I was standing on the inside of the curve, I was pressed in against the tender and was able to loosen my grip, but when I was standing on the outside, it was as if a huge magnet was going to suck me out into the air, constantly more and more, until the

train once again began to straighten itself out.

On the biggest curve I was standing on the outside, and if it'd taken just a few seconds longer before the train straightened itself out, I would've been flung off; I sensed my fingers slowly loosening their grip on the iron bar, saw my hands slowly opening because of the pull my body was exerting. I wasn't thinking that I was going to die now, didn't see my life pass before my eyes and all that stuff: my sole thought was to hold on tight, hold out—sooner or later the curve would have to be over with. When the pull was at its highest, my cap flew off—that gave me such a shock that I was nearly flung off with it.

When the curve was past, the train braked. Maybe my flying cap was the reason that they'd discovered me. Long before the train had come to a stop, the stoker stuck his head out of the locomotive and bawled me out in a very irritated and impolite way. Since the speed had slowed down so much that I dared to, I jumped off, rolled down the slope, and ran away from the railway embankment in order not to be arrested. By the time I'd gotten a little ways away and turned around, I saw the locomotive engineer waving his fist at me. I sat down, dried off my glasses, and pretended that it wasn't me he was waving his fist at. A little later they moved on.

8

It was on this trip north that I had one of the strangest experiences I've ever had. I'm actually not happy about telling about it—the times I've done so, people have put their index finger on their temple and buzzed like a bee.* Tonight I won't think twice about it, and maybe you'll believe it.

While we're on the subject of trustworthiness, I'd like to repeat what I said before. I'm not trustworthy. Quite apart from the advantages I've gotten by it, I've always felt a certain pleasure in telling people something that was pure fabrication. Even as a child I was prone to it and was always severely punished for it. I distinctly remember one day I'd been in Østre Park* playing

with my buddies and came home too late. I really always did that, after a while people took it for granted that I wasn't able to be punctual, and they hardly noticed it. But that day I ran into father on the stairs and he asked me where I'd been. I told him and father was about to keep going downstairs when it occurred to me to tell him that one of the boys in the park had a horse that wasn't any bigger than the dog of the woman who had a business running people's laundry through a mangle. The dog of the woman who ran the mangle business was a fox terrier.

Father turned around down on the landing and looked at me, furious. Now, you know, you're lying again, boy, he said. I avowed that I'd told the truth, I'd seen the horse with my own eyes, played with it, and pulled it by the tail. It wasn't bigger than what would fit in father's overcoat pocket.

Now my father got totally furious, leaped up the stairs and caught hold of me, shook me, and shouted out so the house could hear it. He dragged me into the entrance hall. Naturally I howled—that was usually the means of getting him to stop—and admitted that that business with the horse was just something I'd made up. Then he wanted to know why I'd done it, and even if I'd gladly wanted to, I wouldn't have been able to explain it to him. I didn't know. He kept pressing me. Now I want to know why you tell those kinds of stories, he shouted. I was at my wits' end; he dragged me into the bedroom and ordered me to pull my pants down. Now I'll teach you once and for all to stop your cock-and-bull stories, he said.

In order to avoid a beating I tried to think up an explanation—I said that it was because I'd always wished for a little dog that looked like a horse, and that the teacher had said that in Australia they had little horses like that cavorted in the mountains and lived on berries and earthworms. I didn't say it to irritate him—I myself thought it sounded credible—but father got blue in the face, flung me down on the bed, and thrashed away at me until mother knocked on the door and shouted: Barnabas, you're gonna kill the boy.

Out in the entry hall he shouted that now he'd be late because of me, to boot—he was going to a meeting on pedagogy.

Pedagogy was his hobby horse. And he added that my brothers and sisters weren't allowed to talk to me for a week and that I wasn't allowed to have any dinner, but instead would be put to bed. Then I could lie there and think about what my untruthfulness had led to.

I remember that I cried myself to sleep. When my brothers and sisters came in to go to bed, they didn't dare talk to me, but pulled back my blanket to see the stripes that were evenly distributed across my back and my thighs. Then I wound up crying again. In general I cried a lot as a child; in school the teacher could make me cry just by looking at me.

9

I think you understand that even though my life has turned out the way it has, there's no reason to doubt any of what I'm sitting here telling you this evening. Just as it's been a pleasure for me to make up a story now and then, this evening it's been a relief for me not to need to conceal anything, not to distort anything, not to be forced to keep back anything.

I can do that all the better since presumably we won't be having anything to do with each other again, and whatever opinion you'll form of me won't matter. I realize that it won't be very pretty; I've told you the brutal truth about my life—how many people could do that and still retain the fine reputation they've succeeded in bluffing their way to. It's not a pretty and uplifting tale you're getting for the helping hand you've given me, and I wonder what pleasure you'd get from having a rigma-role like that palmed off on you; isn't the truth about a wretched human being's defeat when confronted with difficulties just as interesting, especially when the poor devil's sitting right across from you and really exists. I'm no hero, I doubt altogether that heroes exist. And if any really do exist, I wouldn't care to know them. I'm a perfectly ordinary person who's gone to seed because I had a good upbringing, because I had to rebel against the desert the adults made my life into, because the urge to rebel

never left me, was never satisfied, and despite everything I could never really turn into anything because I was raised into a slave existence and was afraid of responsibility when the chips were really down.

I don't expect you to feel sorry for me—I can assure you I don't give a good goddamn—but I do expect you to believe me. People are filled with stories, one more profound and phoney than the next; what I've told you this evening is just a story about a fellow human being whose life was made a mess of. And of course a human being has only one life. For other people his life is just a detail in the picture of the world, but for him it is the world.

If I'd at least gotten off with just getting a beating as a child, if I'd been so lucky that the morality that was beaten into me hadn't been so firmly rooted, then maybe I could've saved my life. But it was firmly rooted and it ruined the game for me the couple of times I had a chance. That morality is good enough for the person who stays in the box—in fact, it's even a support—but for a person who's cast out into conditions that deviate from the normal, morality's a hindrance. It's very pleasant for others—especially for the ones who own something it's reassuring that people are moral—but for people themselves it's a weakness in the struggle for existence.

My life as a smuggler in Sweden could've been my chance if I'd been strong enough to take it, but what can you expect of a parish deacon's son with glasses. Well, before I became a smuggler, incidentally, that, of course, was when I had that strange experience I began telling you about. It was pretty far up north, I think up around Luleå,* that it took place. I'd been marching north for many days, as if the devil were on my heels—it gave me, so to speak, an outlet for something, a feeling that I was doing something. It was a long way between the farms there, and I didn't get much to eat those days; I also didn't care—it was a relief to see the countryside become less and less civilized, and in a pinch I could really do without food for days at a time. Mainly I slept outside or in barns, which were located far away from the dwelling houses, so I didn't need to ask per-

mission and avoided having to say thanks when I went on the next morning.

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Sometimes it's happened to me, when I was going to walk across a street and the traffic was shaping up in a very definite way, that I felt I'd experienced the situation once before. You know, no two situations are totally alike—there's always a detail that diverges. And it's especially the detail you recognize. First comes a green truck with a dented front fender, then a bicycle messenger with teeth like tusks, then a taxi whose driver is buttoning his jacket while he's driving and swerves because a crazy fox terrier's fooling around on the roadway. A combination like that you won't see twice in your life, and still it's happened to me several times that I've been able to say with certainty that I've seen this picture before. As if I'd seen it in dreams. Once I came to a little Swedish town called Laholm,* and as I stepped out of the train station onto the street, that feeling came over me. I knew that town, despite the fact that I'd never been there before. It was as if I'd lived my childhood there and were now returning home. When I turned a corner, I knew exactly what it looked like. If you'd asked me what it was going to look like around the next corner, presumably I wouldn't have been able to answer; I can only say that what I saw was so self-explanatory. When I say that it was like recognizing the town of your childhood, that's not quite right either, because the details, which were a part of the picture I recognized, were something especially for that moment I got to the town. A girl with yellow braids who was coming out a door, a butcher who was standing and talking to two ladies dressed in black, a piece of paper that the wind had swept along the street.

I don't know how to explain that kind of experience; maybe it's just an expression of the state of mind you're in. I've heard that after strenuous marches soldiers can experience something similar, and if I'm telling you about what happened to me back

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then up in northern Sweden, it's because that way you'll get a clearer picture of the person who, by ordinary notions, I suppose, behaved in a pretty deranged way.

If I've decided to speak my mind about my life, it's not because I want you to think that I'm a bad person. I myself have never been able to view myself that way. What is a bad person altogether? People act based on their feelings, their morals, and their intellect, and they're not responsible for any of them. When I think back, there are certainly many cases where today I'd have acted differently, but only because today I have more experience and a different morality. I've always done what I regarded as right. Presumably everyone does. When you really have time to think it over, when your feelings don't dictate quick action. Back then in northern Sweden, I must have been like a soldier after a strenuous march of many days, physically and mentally exhausted. I mean, I don't remember any more what was going on in me back then, what thoughts, what ideas I had, and it seems to me that my flight from Stockholm and northward looks pretty idiotic, but I remember this episode and maybe it can explain a little what I was like in those days. I mean, you often feel that people do foolish or loathsome things, but looked at with their own eyes, they absolutely can't act differently. I mean that's why they do it.

Briefly the incident was as follows: I hailed a small, red sports car and hitched a ride. The driver didn't say a word to me, just stopped the car, opened the car door, and let me get in and sit down. He was a strange little man with a beard several days old, ferrety little eyes, slovenly, and repulsive. One minute I pegged him as being a criminal on the run in a stolen car, the next as insane, and then as a novelist. He sat bent over the steering wheel, didn't look to the left or the right, didn't say a thing, and drove at a speed that was never below 50 m.p.h. The car didn't weigh much and the road was bad, winding, and full of potholes. A woman who was standing on the road with a basket tried to stop us by waving. He stopped and backed up without saying a word, put up the backseat, and let her climb into the car. She asked if she could get a lift to town, but didn't get any

answer; he just stepped on the gas and we raced on.

When we got to town, he stopped. While the woman was getting out, she thanked us effusively, but before she managed to finish speaking, he cut her off by saying she had to pay two crowns for the trip. She was totally overwhelmed and couldn't say a word. When he began to curse her up and down, she hurried up and paid.

A little further down the road we stopped at a gas tank and bought gas. He paid with the lady's two-crown piece after having gotten confirmation that I didn't have any money. A moment later we drove on.

After a while I was certain that the man was crazy, but on the other hand I couldn't have cared less what might happen. Late in the night we came to a ferry. The ferrying took place on a raft of logs that the ferryman hauled across the stream by pulling at an iron wire that was stretched from one shore to the other. There was no light on in the ferry house. The madman drove the car right out onto the raft and put his finger on the electric horn until a light was turned on. A moment later an old man tumbled out the door without having had time to get dressed.

Not a word was uttered while we were ferried across, the motor hummed faintly, the water of the stream lapped across the raft, and the wire creaked every time the old man pulled.

As soon as we reached land, the madman stepped on the gas; the car, as it were, leaped ashore, and the noise of the motor drowned out the ferryman who was shouting at us because he hadn't gotten any money.

After a while I'd gotten into a strangely apathetic state. Mile after mile we raced northward. Once we came to a big hill, which the car for some reason or other couldn't take; almost at the top the car came to a stop and a little bit later began going down backwards; I don't think he used the brakes; in any event, we whizzed backwards down the hill at the same speed that re-

spectable people drive forwards on a level road. When the car had gotten as far up the hill at the bottom as it was going to, he started the motor and floored the gas pedal, shooting forward. We didn't reach the top of the hill this time either and had to go down again backwards, even more recklessly than the first time. He started again and we drove a quarter-mile backwards up the hill at the bottom before he decided to try again. This time we got up.

Far into the night we stopped and lay down to sleep on a grassy slope.

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I woke up in the strangest way I've ever woken up. I woke up walking. I woke up very slowly, and quite gradually it dawned on me that I was walking on a highway. And I was still walking. Only when it completely dawned on me did I become wide awake and I stopped with a jerk.

It was late afternoon and I found myself on the outskirts of a village. I rooted through my pockets and found a cigarette butt, sat down on the side of the road, and tried to get a clear grasp on the situation.

Somewhat later an old man came leading a cow. I asked him where I was. He mentioned a name I wasn't familiar with. After he'd left again, I took out my map and tried to find the name. It was located two and a half miles down a byway.

I walked to the village and found a suitable house and asked for something to eat. I said I was going to Luleå and asked the way. The woman said I was going the wrong way, that I had to go back to the main road, half a Swedish mile* back in the direction I'd come from. I asked whether she'd seen a little red car. She explained that cars never came on this road, which was a dead-end and ended up by the new red houses near the woods.

In the evening I got back to the main road and turned north. After I'd been walking for ten minutes, I came to the place where we'd been lying and sleeping. There were still marks in the

grass where we'd been lying and car tracks on the shoulder where the car had been standing. It was three miles from the place where I'd woken up.