

**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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## Eighth Chapter

### 1

When it began to dawn on me that I wasn't born to be head of a smuggling racket, I had in mind something along the lines that I could get going on something else with the money I had. Maybe a cigar shop in Copenhagen. A cigar shop on Vesterbro Street.\* Whenever I'd been in such a store, I'd always been waited on by a nice, well-dressed man, who seemed to be one of the people who had it easiest in this world. I mean, it's just not work to go over to a shelf, take a pack of cigarettes, put it on the counter, and say there you are. And besides, you're your own boss, there's no one who can order you about, no one who can say that you're permitted to do that and not permitted to do that. A nice little store like that with a good trade. Which maybe even brought in so much that I could have someone to look after it and take a walk out in Deer Park,\* if I wanted to, and sit in Studenterkilden\* and nurse a cup of coffee and think about back then when you were a smuggler in Sweden.

Maybe then I'd get married; then my wife could look after the store while my son and I went off to fish in Lake Bagsværd.\* Then I'd sit in the boat and tell him what kind of experiences his father had had—I mean, you don't need to be ashamed of something like that once you've come out on top. Then it's just adventurous and romantic, and people say something about its being good for you to try a little of everything in life while you're young and so on. But when you're sitting in a people's kitchen telling the same story, it looks totally different—then there's no air of romance and adventure, then it just means that you've been a twirp, who hasn't been able to make it in this world.

And so of course I didn't get a wife or a cigar shop, and when I go out in Deer Park, it's to sell shoestrings to the picnicers.

I fled from the whole thing. Totally without any reason. One night. I'd gone down to play a game of billiards; I was supposed to meet Anton at the parlor and there was a terrible bunch of nonsense that had to be taken care of. I hadn't had a moment's rest the last few months—there was always a row, if not about this, then about that. I'd dreamed about going to Abisko\* to ski and hobnob with the upper crust, but it was clear that there could never be time for that. Not for a moment was I able to turn my back on my organization—I was chained to it. Day and night. And there'd never be an end to it. Not until sometime maybe when they put me in the penitentiary.

And now I was going to go down and play billiards and listen to their nonsense. And they expected me to make decisions and have a big mouth. And I was a born petty-bourgeois and wasn't going to be able to keep it up in the long run. It'd be wonderful to say goodbye to all of that, cast off the yoke of slavery. And as I was standing outside the cafe, the thought came to me that in fact I could just as well do it this evening as any other time.

I took the train directly to Copenhagen. I arrived on the train-ferry at the main railway station early one morning and sat down in the restaurant to have coffee and have a look in the newspapers for cigar shops for sale. When the waiter brought the coffee, he turned out to be one of my schoolmates, named Jeppe, a ruddy-cheeked, yellow-haired fellow, who was always kicking me in the shin in order to get me to bawl. Things weren't going well, he said; his father had had a cigar shop on Vesterbro Street, a dog's life, old boy, tied up from morning till evening, no profit, had to close, the times, you understand, the crisis. He kept standing and chit-chatting, till an old lady, who had a little hawk's nose and resembled a turkey, had screamed

*waiter* eight times. Before he went over to her, he kicked me in the shin for old times' sake.

I went right to a travel agency and bought a ticket to Paris. I mean, you have to be some place in the world and one's as good as the next.

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And that's the way it continued; I hardly know whether I care to tell any more and whether you care to hear any more. I mean, my life was just a perpetual repetition of itself. It was the same thing and the same thing and the same thing. Nonstop. A treadmill. I had a sense of being cheated out of life's real experiences; my existence was worthless. And I'd never ever wind up experiencing what was really of value. The whole thing had been a mess and a failure from the start. No matter what I got involved in, nothing ever came of it—not even as a criminal was I able to make it—all I could do was shuffle around in life and pull off little scams.

I blew all my money in Paris and went to the Riviera, to Nice, where I supported myself as a kind of tour guide. If you're going to be able to live on that, you can't be too moral. And I lived on it. But not especially well. And when one day I heard a new consul had arrived in Marseille, I went over and got sent back to Denmark through Berlin. In Berlin for a half a year I was at a private detective agency that specialized in destroying marriages and otherwise got its revenues from blackmail. During that half-year I experienced plenty of what's called material, material for a novel—you see, we procured grounds for divorce. If we weren't able to manage to compromise a man one way, there was always another way that proved successful. If the wife wanted to get divorced and would give a reasonable part of her alimony, we'd certainly arrange things. In a pinch she'd fire her maid and hire a lady we had especially for that. The new maid was out to hook the man of the house and as a rule it's not hard for a shapely girl to seduce a man. When it was time and the

moment had been chosen, the wife unexpectedly came home with a friend and barged into the bedroom, where her tangible grounds for divorce were taking place in bed. Naturally there were husbands who wouldn't walk into the trap; in such cases the girl would lure the poor man under some pretext or other into the bedroom, lock the door and fling the key out the window, take off her dress, rip her underclothes, knock over a couple of chairs, and scream for help, whereupon the wife and the friend, who'd coincidentally come home at that very moment, would open the door with the help of another key and free the poor girl. When the matter came before the court, both the judge and the audience smirked when the husband explained that it was the girl herself who'd taken off her clothes and ripped her chemise. Then, when the wife had won the case and gotten judgment for her alimony, our actual work began by getting her, on every possible pretext, to hand over one sum bigger than the next. Naturally, we didn't threaten her directly with letting everything come to light; we had more effective and less risky methods. Maybe it was the actress we'd engaged to rip her underwear who'd go to the police and confess everything if we didn't help her with a ticket to South America; maybe it was a detective who'd been fired who'd keep his mouth shut only if we bought him a cafe in Wedding.\* In any event, we'd of course be terribly sorry about a possible scandal, but we ourselves didn't have at our disposal the whole amount necessary and were hoping for understanding and support.

The head of the agency was named Haubitz and had formerly been a private detective for a Hohenzollern prince. In any case, that's what was printed on the firm's card, and I've never waded in so much smut as during that half-year. It ended up with my intimidating him into giving me money to travel to Paris.

In a way, a new chapter of my life began with that trip. As

I stood at Gare du Nord,\* all my spirits had abandoned me; it was as if my life were finished, had come to a standstill, and couldn't start up again. According to the plan, now I was just going to see about getting some money to pay for a hotel room and a little food and otherwise let tomorrow take care of tomorrow. And the day after I was going to do the same, and sooner or later an opportunity would turn up, which it was merely a matter of seizing. I'd been in that situation hundreds of times before and virtually had a whole system to go by. It was routine work pure and simple.

But as I was standing there at Gare du Nord and was on the verge of getting started on conquering a kind of existence for myself, I suddenly came to a standstill. I couldn't go on. I put my suitcase in the checkroom and went for a walk through the streets in order to get this little fit of insanity over with.

And I wandered all day and all night up and down the streets, and the more I tried to come to my senses, the worse it became. I was hungry and tried not even to think about how I could get some food. I was dead tired and could probably have found a way to get into a bed, but it was as if I was too tired of this constant struggle to be able to concern myself with that question. The skin between my toes was raw from my having trudged on the cobblestones, my socks were chafing my skin and hurt, my ankles were swollen, and I couldn't even decide to go into a park and sit down on a bench.

And that little fit of insanity still wouldn't let go of me, and when I began pondering how it had come about, it occurred to me that at the train station I'd seen a poster with my birth date and that's how it occurred to me that in a few days I'd be thirty years old. And that was the ridiculous thought that had knocked the sense out of me and wouldn't leave me alone.\*

Because that meant that if my life wasn't going to crumble away like sand through my fingers, I'd have to take stock of my existence and draw up a budget for the remaining half of my life. If in fact it wasn't too late.

And that's why it didn't matter whether I got to bed and whether I got food and whether a woman gave me the glad eye

and whether I was in Paris or any other place.

And the thought about saving my life before it was too late still wouldn't let go of me and not till the sun rose did I fling myself on the bank of the Seine and fall asleep.

And when I woke up, the thought was still there and I was just as afraid of the future as a condemned man.

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If a person's going to tell about his life, he's inclined to tell about the purely external experiences he's had: then he was in an apprenticeship, he says, then he became a soldier and then he was in Magasin du Nord\* for five years and then he broke his leg and then he won a prize for bowling some way or other and got into the newspaper with the ball and prize and looked serious and determined in the picture and then he got married and became a warehouse manager and since then actually nothing's happened that's worth telling about.

Just as world history is just lists of kings and wars. Maybe people should tell their story in a different way: the external experiences don't mean all that damn much—I've had plenty of them and my existence has been aimless and dull. But maybe it would be hard to tell about what's happening inside yourself; I mean, it's there and working inside you, you can't check up on it, but all of a sudden one day the upheaval is accomplished, it breaks out, and overturns everything.

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Human beings presumably have an ideal they're trying ultimately to resemble; when all of a sudden one morning they behave in a different way than usually, maybe that's because they've changed ideals. Some have maybe a whole set of ideals to switch to. Naturally, it's not true of personalities, but incidentally who is a personality. In any case, I'm not and I've

never met any.

A human being has only one life and the fear of being cheated out of what really was of value here in life made me switch ideals. I wanted to be respectable and industrious, I wanted to have a home, wife, and child. I wanted to forget ditches by the side of the road and all that nonsense about freedom, forget that I hated to knuckle under and take orders; I'd be free to live together with other people I liked and who liked me. I never attained freedom, after all, and even if I attained it, I was so constituted that I wasn't able to live in it; I was raised to obedience, and even though I'd rebelled and fled, my upbringing had warped me to such a degree that I wasn't able to act independently.

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Everyone else did their job and lived in a normal and sensible way, sat at home in the evening and listened to the radio, read the weeklies, and played with their children. And when they came home in the evening their kids shouted in the entrance hall: *Daddy's coming*, and when they went into the living room, their wife was standing there with a calm, warm smile that said: *I've missed you so much*.

And I was lying there by the Seine dreaming about living like other people and feeling two soft arms around my neck. Not a whore's arms, not a ticket girl at the movies I seduced, but a wife's arms. Up on the bridge the busses raced off with people who conformed and lived normally and on the river barges glided past with family life and geraniums in the stern and the unemployed who were standing on the bank fishing went home for dinner to their wives with what they'd caught.

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I got a job as a cloakroom attendant at the Danish cafe on

*rue Servandoni*\* and I had a modest room at a little hotel near *Place Nation* and I tried to make the room resemble a home. And I tried to stay at home in my free time, bought a house jacket, a smoker's table, and a little radio. At work I was serious and polite and I didn't use any more money than was absolutely necessary.

But when I sat in my room, I had to make a violent effort to keep sitting in the chair with my book. On the way home on the bus I always used to say to myself: Well, old boy, tonight we'll have a really comfy time; I forced myself to whistle and when I got up to the room, I potted about for a long time, changed jackets, changed shoes, tidied up, and turned on the radio—all of it to create the atmosphere that makes a room into a home. I'd bought a pipe and despite the fact that I liked smoking cigarettes better, I filled my pipe, leaned back in the chair, and forced myself to say: Ah, you're having a comfy time after all, a pipe full of tobacco and a good book.

And I thought it was probably a matter of habit and what pleasure was there actually in tearing up and down the streets. And I got up and went over to the window and hundreds of times I was about to take my hat and leave, but I forced myself to sit down again and keep reading. And I thought that it was that stuff with the wife and all that stuff that was missing.

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And all over the earth that's the way human beings lived—they had a little hole in the wall, a woman, kids, and they had a job. And when they died, there was somebody who cried, somebody who put flowers on their grave, and missed them. And if I died, nobody would miss me and it'd hardly be noticed.

Then I got to know Jeanine and life began to take shape. Jeanine waited tables at an eatery on *rue Vavin* and had a body like a French photograph and a face like an angel.

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